Myths and "Reality" of Central-European Cities during the Formation of Identities

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One of the accompanying features of the modernization of society is its urbanization (HOHENBERG - HOLLEN LEES 1985). Anthony Giddens (1999: 445) characterized it as a global process. Urban ethnography (later also anthropology), developed in Czechoslovakia and Poland at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, paid attention until then to partial problems in the development of cities and the lifestyles of their inhabitants. Numerous microanalyses concerning the city in a certain period also corresponded to it, mainly in the time from the 19th and 20th centuries. Various aspects of material culture (e.g., inhabitants' ways of dressing, eating, and living) were also studied. In the case of spiritual culture, attention concentrated on urban celebrations and entertainment, exhibitions, folklore, urban educational, theatrical, corporative and family systems. Ethnographers and anthropologists, like historians and sociologists, also studied the lifestyles of the inhabitants of the city (e.g., lifestyles of workers, ethnic minorities, women, marginalized groups [prostitutes, beggars], workers' and Jewish families, the middle class). In the last decade research has also begun on meeting places in cities as well as urban non-places, research of functions of individual parts of the city, impact of modernization on the mentality of the people. Current urban anthropology is further characterized by research of individual elements of the identity of a city, the quality of urban dialogues, in Czech anthropology mainly ethnic, research of sacral and profane places in the city, specific natural formations, monuments of individual groups of ethnic and national minorities. One monument can exist at the same time in the discourse of several nations and minorities. Inclination toward the contemporary city prevails. Productivity of the indicator of myths in cultural activities of European cities was demonstrated last year in two conferences: those in Krakow and Prague (Evropské město: obraz, stereotyp, mýtus. Co lze mýtizovat ve městě? [European city: image, stereotype, myth. What can be mythicized in a city?]). Through a flood of articles, studies and books anthropologists in recent times have arrived at a comparative view of the city.

The indicator of myths as a tool for analysis was chosen for its ability to present the city in its entirety and wholeness. (Existing Czech, Slovak and Polish ethnographic and anthropological research tended rather toward clarification of partial, although often very important, problems connected with life in a city.) We understand myth to be a verbalized ideological idea of one or more generations, an idea with whose help are asserted, justified and reproduced majority and minority group interests and values and/or as a verbalized concept with the help of which society compensates for real or imagined injustice, tragedy, etc. Our concept is thus close to the understanding of the British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1936), who characterized myth as a social charter which clarifies the development of the world and concurrently morally shields the interest of the powerful and, in our case, also the powerless. The idea of conflict of interests was later developed by Georges Balandier (2000). As methodologically very inspirational we also assess the semiotic concept of Roland Barthes from the 1950s which defends the thesis that myth is a certain narration (system of communication). Anything could be transformed into myth, while a myth does not need to have an oral character. The most various matters of mythic narration are grasped by myth as a global sign. According to Barthes myth contains a linguistic system (language) and myth by itself (meta?language). Meta?language represents a secondary language. Myth converts meaning to form; it is theft of speech. The main principal of myth is thus complexity, definiteness, a suggestion of entity, elaborated distortion of the thought and feelings of society. Some researchers, however, can also support the classical concept of myth of French ethnologist Claude Lévi?Strauss, who saw in it material leading to the recognition and understanding of the functioning of social laws. Myths are the narration of stories with the help of which we can discover the meaning of our world.

The question of the relation of myths that emerged around and in cities and national and transnational identities is already posed in regard to the fact that (1) complicated processes of formation of national minorities, modern nations and transnational societies are connected primarily to cities, (2) components of national and transnational identities are also auto-stereotypes, stereotypes, myths of various character (e.g., elements of myths bearing fixed images about their own as well as "alien" cities), (3) there exist mutual bonds between urban, national and transnational identities, (4) comparison of evolutionary chains of myths created around and in cities in historically similar and different situations of nations, national minorities, social groups and states provides us with the possibility of analyzing the individual and the general in each society, state, region. At the same time, the results of each distinct socio-political change will be explained.

By the term urban identity we understand (self)categorization and anchoring of a city in the changing social reality of a nation, state, region and/or the reality of a given city, its fiction and the projection of images about it to the subconscious of its inhabitants and the inhabitants of other cities and states. These images are declared primarily by representatives of

the metropolis (city hall), the state (government), and/or other influential organizations and institutions (political parties, press, associations, clubs, institutions) and, further, personalities from the ranks of politicians, artists and intellectuals. It is, however, a question whether, to what extent and for how long a declaration of the "powerful" may become a component part of the general subconscious and/or the subconscious of a certain special-interest group (special-interest groups) in the society.

The subject of our analysis in this and the following English issues of the journal Lidé města / Urban People will thus be:

1. the history of the development of myths concerning cities and in cities,

2. the function of myth concerning cities and in cities connected to (a) the city (ability of myth to change the appearance, character, and atmosphere of a metropolis, its individual neighborhoods and in distinct times) (b) the inhabitants (experience of the metropolis by its inhabitants, structured according to the interest of the ethnic, political, social, etc.), (c) the majority (i.e., the political victors) and the minority (i.e., the politically handicapped) society, (d) transnational societies (state, region, Europe),

3. universality and specificity of metropolitan myths, their formation and function in relation to historic and social contexts,

4. causes and consequences of refusal and/or revitalization of older myths, their involvement in the ideology of contemporary societies,

5. way of reflection of "reality" in myths,

6. position of historical traditions in myths of the metropolis,

7. role of emotions and symbols in individual types of myths,

8. methods and tools for their consolidation (public celebrations, speeches, tangible monuments, art events [exhibitions, concerts, media activities], commercialization of myths [e.g., in Prague, Franz Kafka on souvenirs for tourists], etc.).

Thematically, we will divide myths in the city into myths connected to: (1) modernization and post-modernization of the metropolis (e.g., the positive myth of the airy, clean, transparent, comfortable city, but also the negative myth of the anonymous, alienated, chaotic, dangerous city), (2) situation of its national and ethnic groups and communication between them (e.g., Prague Czech, Slavic, multiethnic and multicultural) (3) its historical fate (e.g., Cinderella Prague [myth created in the last quarter of the 19th century], Prague - the metropolis of the state [myth created after 19l8], Prague suffering and heroic [myth created after the Second World War], socialist Prague, Prague as the center of Christian Europe [after 1989], (4) its declared relation to other cities and regions (e.g., Mother Prague and Prague as a host, Prague as the heart of Europe, (5) its appearance (e.g., Prague of a hundred spires, beautiful Prague, antique Prague), (6) its supposed and real virtues and abilities (e.g., musical Prague, Prague - the conservatory of Europe, multicultural Prague), (7) famous personalities living in the metropolis and its important native sons (e.g., Prague as the city of Franz Kafka, Prague as Masaryk's city), (8) the ambitions of minorities living in the metropolis (e.g., Jewish Prague, German Prague, Prague as a city of the German Reich), (9) ambitions of the metropolis toward other, foreign metropolises and rival cities (e.g., the Czech myth of Vienna as the stepmother from the last quarter of the 19th century, the international myth of Vienna as the cradle of the Austrian social democratic party of the last decade of the 19th century, the Czech myth of friendly Paris of the beginning of the 20th century, the Czechoslovak socialist myth of brotherly Warsaw, Moscow). One of our tasks will be to confirm the temporality of these myths, reasons for the length of their existence - all this combined with their changing of identity. Besides these myths about metropolises we are also going to research mythicized places in metropolises. According to Pierre Nora (1990: 7) it is a matter of the space in which, in some specific way, the memory of a nation is condensed, presented or crystallized. These places can be individual buildings or building complexes (e.g., Vyšehrad in Prague [the fictitious cradle of Czech education], the Castle [symbol of Czech statehood and its restoration], the National Theater [symbol of the exceptional and indestructible Czech cultural character], squares, monuments, statues, cemeteries, exceptional natural formations (rivers, rocks, etc.). One of our goals will therefore be to describe the process of the rise and thematization of these places, their symbols, their placement in the context of other symbols during the construction of the cities, and of national (MACURA 1983: 154-167) and transnational identities.

In our analyses we will start from the fact that myths concerning cities and in cities have never existed individually but, on the contrary, in certain hierarchized "complexes." An analysis of the causes of the changes of their content and the hierarchy of individual myths taken together thus offer an original way of perceiving the impacts of socio-political turns of events in the lives of metropolises as specific organisms and the fates of their inhabitants.

We see the main up-to-datedness of our research, however, in the possibilities of deciphering myths as ways of political mastering the present and future, as means of legitimization of interest groups in various states and national contexts (e.g., merged Czech national and state society 1918-1992). Through an analysis of what from past myths did or did not survive until the present, we will better arrive at possibilities of affecting present national identity, perspectives of their preservation and development, the measure of intensity of their tension towards the past and toward the projected "European" future.

Our future research will be directed toward the following periods: 1. the time between the two world wars, 2. the period of World War II (1939-1945), 3. the period from 1945 to 1989, which we understand as a period with several distinct turning points (polarization of Europe into West and East at the end of the 1940s, social relaxation in the 60s, reverberations of the so-called perestroika in the mid 80s), 4. the period after 1989.

At the moment we intend to deal with these problematics in the next four or five issues of the journal Urban People (Lidé města). The first issue will be on the subject Myths in the formation of identity of interwar metropolises and societies. Paradigm of a metamorphosis of majority and minority cohabitation in cities (2010); the second issue on Metropolitan myths during the Second World War. Collaboration, powerlessness, heroism (2011); the third on the topic Myths and "reality" of socialist metropolises. Conceptualization of cities in the struggle for a new present and a happy future (2012); the fourth issue on the topic Myths in post-socialist Central-European metropolises as components of political memory. On the problematics of the phenomenon of historic revitalization (2013). The final issue will deal with the problem Myths of Central-European metropolises in the processes of formation of ethnic, national and transnational identities. General and specific sources of Europeanness (2014).

According to French researcher Marc Augé (1999: 110), the city is a closed world, a symbolized space with its own symbols, signs, myths. The research starts out from the thesis of Petr Alter (1993: 33) concerning metropolises as creators of myths. It further supports the thesis that actually key myths in themselves - according to Malinowski - concentrate ideological-political justification for basic directing of society. In structured society, then, there also exist counter-myths as emancipating factors of minority identities.

Our magazine will follow myths and their formation in socio-political, ethno-political and national-political contexts of all of our chosen periods and cities. We will consistently bind stimuli of the birth and typology of myths to their hypothetical function, impact and/or to the characteristic and ambitions of their creators, to the correlation with historic change. The research starts out from the necessity of comparative analysis which will enable the determination of the general and specific during the formation of myths (in connection with urban problems there remains in the participating states a method that is hardly used), and/or the general and specific during the creation of urban, ethnic, national and transnational identities. A comparative view will also bring us to an analysis of various traditions - approach to Europe and the cause of occasional difficulties during the building of an umbrella European identity at the present in Central European societies and/or to clarification of rivalries between individual cities within the frame of one nation and one state. The object of comparison will be myths as a component part of the strategy of individual societies (urban, ethnic, national, transnational) during the building of their identities as well as their rejection of social rivalries. The object of comparison will also be the relation between myth and "reality," and/or causes of agreements and differences, conditions of individual regimes and their "national" forms in relation to myths as well as the relation between majority and minority myths. We are interested not only in the process of the rise of myths along time lines, but also in the structure of that phenomenon. To compare myths we will proceed diachronically, but also along horizontally historical times. It is clear that we will not be able to dispose of the same collection of sources for all our cities. The criteria of comparison will be: sources of the rise of myths, characteristics of their creators, typology and hierarchy of myths, the ways (instruments) of their advocacy and functioning (including formation of their tangible monuments, symbolics of celebrations which are revitalized by communication events (ALTHABE 1990: 131), but also of transformations of the city as a whole: changes in the appearance of cities, in their architecture, relations to the urban center and to the periphery, relationship to monuments, generally and also relationship to uniformity and human individuality), the shape of the city in connection with important places, relationships between majority and minority myths (myths of ethnic, social, political, etc. minorities), relationships between governing myths and powerless myths. With the help of myths it is possible to interpret contemporary tangible monuments and the tension between the past and the present. Thus our approach is based on the theory of mythologization of the present as Andreas Langenohl (2000) presented it.

Our aim is thus interdisciplinary analyses of myths, interconnected mainly from the anthropological, historical, ethnomusicological and folkloristic perspective.

The studies we have included in this introductory issue about cities and myths came out of various influential concepts of myths. Our intention was to point out all that can be mythicized in the 20th and 21st centuries. And finally; we wanted to point out various creators of myths (the ideological ruling party, the business elite, inhabitants of a city, management of a city and its culture) and their various intentions (expected meanings of myths). The anthropologist of history Blanka Soukupová analyzed the charter of the beautiful socialist city of the future which the ruling team of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia began to promote after the February Revolution. This myth, according to Malinowski, changed the city as a whole physically and symbolically through various forms and mechanisms - through changing of meanings of memorials. In practice the myth of a large-scale industrial and worker city, however, came into contrast with the reality of the socialist economy and suppressed civil society. The Brno sociologists Lucie Galčanová and Barbora Vacková introduced the topic of the background of the rise of myth of Baťa's Zlín during the First Republic and the concrete phenomenon of family houses in which the Baťa ethos was markedly reflected. Barthes' definition of myth as a deforming message without a lateral plane takes the shape, in the case of Zlín, of elevation of the ethic dimension of strenuous work, capitalistic democracy, the decent worker and the appreciative entrepreneur. The underside of relative prosperity became disciplined and controlled city space. The authors further dealt with the use of the material heritage of the ideal

industrial city by contemporary inhabitants. The Lodz ethnologist Grażyna Ewa Karpińska described the development of the shapes of a central Lodz street which was considered to be the center of the city during the socialist period. The shape and importance of the street were always a reflection of the ruling social regime. During socialism an image of the satisfaction of all the needs of the city's inhabitants was projected onto this street. Malgorzata Karpińska-Krakowiak of the Lodz department of international marketing, using the example of this same city, analyzed contemporary myths (multicultural Lodz equals tolerant Lodz and film Lodz), which are copied and multiplied through city festivals as a favorite form of popularization of cities. The myth of musical Prague, freely connected to the article about festivalization of Lodz, is presented by Zuzana Jurková from the point of view of the myth of Romani music in Prague. The concept of music of the Prague ethnomusicologist is close to the concept of Claude Lévi-Strauss about myth as a cultural expression with the highest potential: with the ability to reveal laws of the human spirit. According to Jurková, music has its cultural and hidden face and, like myth, establishes its own time. In the empirical part of the article, she presents an overview and classification of performances connected with Romani music, and she submits that "Romani" music in Prague is influenced, among other things, by romantic myths about Roma.

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Cf., e.g., KILLIÁNOVÁ 2005.

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