

SMÍCHOV - FROM A VILLAGE TO THE TRANSFORMATION AREA OF PRAGUE

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ABSTRACT: This paper maps the circumstances that enabled the urban transformation of the Prague-Smíchov district in the 1990s. This paper aims to analyze the factors that led to the revitalisation of an area of almost 80 000 m² inside the existing construction. Knowledge and understanding of the context and principles of the development from the 1990s is all the more important because these structures are going to be in close connection with the development project Smíchov City, which is currently under construction. This project is being built in approximately the same area as the construction from the 1990s and has the potential to transform the functioning of the entire area in a significant way.

KEY WORDS: Urbanism, Prague, Smíchov, brownfields, revitalisation, industrial districts

Introduction

A problem of contemporary cities is the dispersion of development into the landscape and suburbanisation. At the same time, there is a significant lack of apartments (Ouredníček and Posová 2006). The agreed solution to this problem is the densification of cities and population concentration in their central parts. The construction of new residential districts in Prague is therefore concentrated in gaps and brownfields (Hurníková 2009). Planning a new part of the city so that it is functional, durable, and

at the same time not closed in on itself is still not an easy task. It is therefore essential to examine previously implemented city districts, from which it is possible to draw positive and negative examples of this type of construction.

In particular, the originally industrial districts in the areas of the inner Prague periphery (Holešovice, Karlín, Smíchov) have experienced significant changes, the analysis of which is gaining importance in connection with the current trend of building entire new districts in urban brownfield areas. Smíchov can be cited as an example of a newly exposed urban district whose development has been completed.

Study area and survey methods

The transformation of an urban district entails not only a change in its physical structure but also affects the functional mix in the area, the price of real estate, and thus the social mix of its inhabitants (Kiss 2002). As a result, a large number of information sources and methodological procedures need to be used.

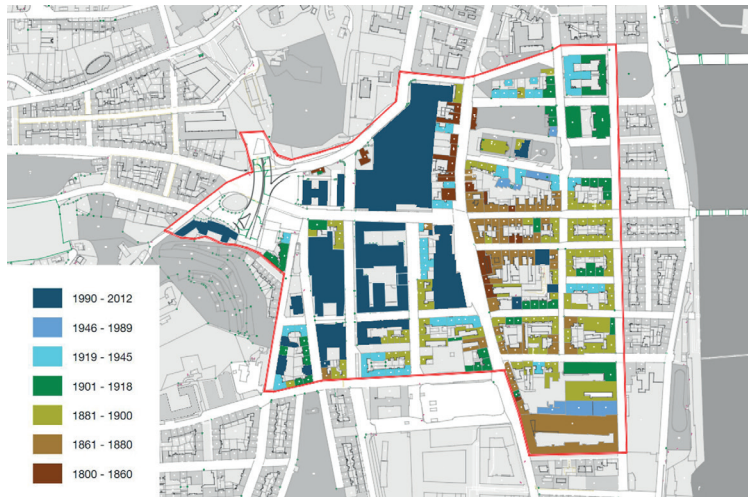


Figure 1 Area of the research and its development stages (Source: Reconstruction map by Michal Novotný, redrawn, modified).

This paper aims to be an inductive, interpretive case study of “central Smíchov” as the area has previously been termed by architects and other researchers (Temelová and Novák 2007). The study is based on qualitative data collected from literature, periodicals, archival materials and historical maps. Visual and narrative analysis, which is closest to these types of material, was used in this paper.

The changes in the location were analysed by the comparison of historical maps from the website *chartae-antiquae.cz*, with archive materials from the archive of IPR, and the personal archives of the architects. Analysis of the literature, including construction magazines, were used. The presented traffic analysis was based on a literature analysis and its comparison with approved regional plans and studies of the given period.

Urbanism of Prague-Smíchov in history

The village of Smíchov has been documented since the 14th century as a prosperous agricultural area located beyond the walls of Prague, which benefited from the proximity of merchant routes (today Štefánikova, Nádražní, Plzeňská streets) leading to Újezd gate. One of the oldest maps, from 1816, shows Smíchov separated from the city by baroque fortifications and its first factories. The construction was concentrated around Arbes Square and along Štefánikova and Nádražní streets. The first situational plan of the area with housing blocks dates from 1838 when Smíchov became a suburb of Prague. This plan proves that Smíchov has been designed as a residential district with block development.



Figure 2 Comparative map of Smíchov's industry in 1900 and 2023. (Source: Smíchov's industry. Reconstruction map by Václava Horčáková, redrawn, modified).

Industrialisation at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries and the subsequent deindustrialisation of the area, which began in the 1880s, was crucial for the area (see figure 2). Over time, the disappearing factories were replaced by residential blocks. The complex of Ringhoffer factories serves as an exception - after its relocation to Zličín in 1989, approx. 80 000 m² of brownfield appeared in the centre of Smíchov. In the 1990s, new development, including offices and commercial buildings, appeared here.

Infrastructure for cars within the city and its changes after the political shift of 1989

The urbanism of Smíchov in the second half of the 20th century was also strongly influenced by transport planning. Although Prague residents used public transport for more than 90% of their journeys in the 1960s, a plan for a grid system was presented in 1968 (Balcar 1996). This plan, with a total length of 241 km, was approved in 1974 and named the Basic Communication System (ZÁKOS) (Sadílek 1998). By 1990, approximately one-third of the system had already been built.

In February 1990 the board of National Committee of the capital city of Prague appointed a commission of independent experts to assess the suitability of ZÁKOS. The council opposed the concept; their recommendations resulted in a traffic plan with an outer city ring for transit and freight transport, modification of the inner ring to a boulevard with level crossings, and a reduction in the number and capacity of radials (Horák 2014). In 1991, the government decided to implement a modified version of ZÁKOS named Main Street Network (later Superior Communication Network). Several urban and traffic studies have been created since 1971 as a reaction.

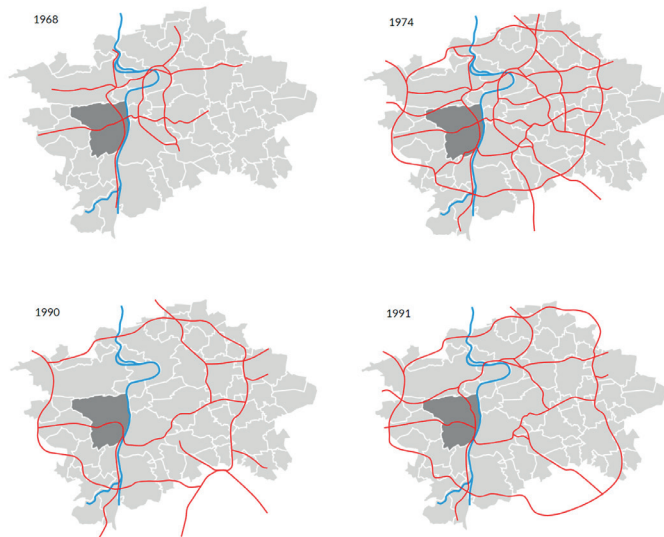


Figure 3 Overview of concepts for managing individual car traffic in Prague (Source: auto-mat.cz, Horák 2014; redrawn, modified).

Urban planning of Smíchov in the 1990s

The reconstruction of central Smíchov was the first large-scale project in Prague after the Velvet Revolution. Karel Prager and the GAMA studio were the last ones to deal with transport solutions in the area before the revolution - their proposal included the demolition of the majority of Smíchov's buildings with a total area corresponding to that of the historic centre of Prague. In 1990, young architects from the group Golden Eagles and the D. A. Studio architectural office (today D3A) criticised the plan. In reaction, countless urban proposals from Czech and foreign authors (including Jean Nouvel) appeared in 1991.

The urbanism of central Smíchov was planned as a political decision based on a study by A+R System and VHE studios from 1996 – a modification of D. A. Studio's proposal from 1991. The original proposal led the high-capacity route from the Strahov tunnel into the tunnel underneath Paví vrch and to the planned Zlíchov bridge over the Vltava River. The work of D. A. Studio represents an atypical approach to the city, which respects existing urban structures.

Results and Discussion

Using the analysis of historical maps and their comparison, it was found that Smíchov's development was historically located along the original merchant routes (today Štefánikovy, Nádražní and Plzeňská streets). This original development was changed into a block development by additional extensions from around 1838 and subsequently expanded along the newly routed streets in 1861. The area was heavily industrialised and reached its peak at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. These factories gradually went bankrupt due to the economic crisis of the 1880s and were converted mainly into residential buildings. The exception was Ringhoffer's factories, which expanded over the years and whose site was cleared only after 1989. It was the area of this plant that became the site of the development of central Smíchov in the 1990s, where commercial and office spaces were created.

The current form of Smíchov and the development from the 1990s were also influenced by traffic planning in the area. For a long time, a high-capacity road connecting the Strahov Tunnel with the route to Zlíchov and further south from the centre of Prague was planned through central Smíchov. These plans provided for the general remediation of the Smích development in the area around today's Radlická and Stroupežnického streets. Thanks to the application of the solution for routing communications through the Mrázovka tunnel according to a modified design by D. A. Studio, the development was saved. Despite this, the area of Smíchov is still heavily frequented today.

For further research, it is also necessary to assess the political influences of the post-revolutionary period in Prague, as the information from the literature and periodicals does not match the information of the interviewed actors regarding how the Golden Eagles and D. A. Studio were approached, nor about the subsequent discussion of the plans proposed by them. It is also not clear who interrupted the collaboration on this project and for what reason, why the A+R System and VHE studios were approached, and who took it over and modified it.

Conclusions

This paper helps clarify the hitherto insufficiently mapped and described transformations of the largest Prague district, Smíchov, which took place in the 1990s. It describes the circumstances that made it possible to redevelop the area inside the existing development, a practice that we are only now seeing again on this scale in the buildings of Prague's largest brownfields.

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