

THE BLENDED NATURE OF CZECH ARCHITECTURE IN THE EIGHTIES

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ABSTRACT

This text explores Czech architecture of the eighties, when its basic nature was shaped by new (mainly foreign) influences. The almost free and more or less internationally oriented sixties, a time of experimentation and cooperation with artists and technology, was followed by the 'normalisation' era in the seventies, along with the oil crisis and a revision of the modernist concept. Nevertheless, Czech architecture and the young generation in particular were still able to benefit from a traditional technicist pragmatism and a respect for the local landscape and historical context, but also from slow infiltration of the new ethos of postmodernism and social or environmental responsibility. The result (of the combination of these impulses) was an often exciting and diverse mix of features and ambitions lying somewhere in between high-tech and romanticism.

KEYWORDS: postmodernism, contextual architecture, technicist architecture, socialist economy

INTRODUCTION

Post-war architecture in state-socialist Czechoslovakia underwent dramatic changes which faithfully reflected the internal political developments and processes going on in the Eastern bloc but also responded to ideas and inspirations that filtered in from the other side of the Iron Curtain.

Architecture was fundamentally impacted by the system of the centrally planned economy, which was controlled by politically motivated interests and rigid five-year economic plans and as the country fell increasingly behind the advanced Western economies quantity became the primary focus. The profession of architect, which originally had for the most part been an independent creative and entrepreneurial occupation, was also subjected to collectivisation after 1948. In the state-run planning institutes architects became ordinary employees, whose work was heavily determined by political priorities and the limitations to what the construction industry could produce. Architecture was increasingly impacted by the strict demands for standardisation and prefabrication that were asserted to ensure lower prices but also greater control over state-funded building development.

The nature of the state's showcase projects also changed over time. Residential complexes were of course a recurring assignment, along with projects aimed at improving the wellbeing of the people and the accessibility and standards of amenities. There was a distinctive progression from the expressively and technologically very simple ensembles of the 1950s put together with city-shaping objectives, to the typologically and visually experimental housing estates of the 1960s with their elaborate parterres, followed by the building development in the early normalisation-era 1970s with its quantitative focus, and eventually by the first attempts to humanise housing estates shortly before the Velvet Revolution. Another major phenomenon, however, was public buildings, which were a faithful reflection of the transformation of shared values. The 1950s were characterised by strictly controlled propaganda and the construction of culture houses, and the 1960s by growing consumerism and the increased importance of the country's international image – represented, for example, through department stores, embassies, hotels, and especially the buildings of the Foreign Trade Enterprise. The entire post-war era was marked by the large-scale construction of hospitals, schools, and sports facilities, and for these structures the regime constantly tried to assert standardisation and prefabrication, succeeding, fortunately, for the most part only in the case of smaller assignments.

In terms of their visual expression, public investment projects went through some generally well-known twists and turns. The 1950s were dominated by forced inspiration from Soviet Socialist Realism, which Czech architects resisted with ethnic-folk and small-town motifs and an emphasis on monumentality, ornamentation, craft, and visual art, or by escaping into typologically or technologically sophisticated, i.e. un-standardisable types of structures or into heritage conservation. With the 1960s came a shift towards the Western take on the International Style, wittily blended with the still vibrant tradition of poetic interwar functionalism and with the interdisciplinary and artistic aspirations and optimism that followed in the wake of the Czechoslovak Pavilion's success at Expo 58 in Brussels. As the 1960s came to a close, the influence of brutalism and a technicist approach also surfaced.

What new challenges were ushered in by normalisation's social flattening in the 1970s and 1980s? Most notably, an emphasis on prefabrication, the favouring of certain producers of building materials, and a great increase in scale. Architects caught up in the tangled labyrinth of the centralised socialist construction industry nevertheless 'learned how to walk' and managed to get past the technical and economic constraints by drawing on interesting impulses from abroad (postmodernism, high-tech, context, ecology etc.) and by means of their own self-reflection. The atmosphere in society was oftentimes reflected in the creation of structures that had no effort put into them and were rightly criticised. To the same degree, however, from the middle of the 1960s there also began to appear extraordinary structures that mixed inventively with the creative applications of politically prioritised building materials and technologies (e.g. ceramic tiles, reinforced-concrete prefabricated parts, uniform glass curtain walls or windows, glass blocks, or Feal Sidalvar aluminium and plastic cladding).

Up until recently the architecture of the 1980s was underrated by the professional community and the general public and was regarded as merely a product of the supreme industrialisation of a centralised construction industry. However, recent and for now still rather groundbreaking studies and interviews with contemporaries have uncovered a world of surprising diversity within that industry, hidden beneath the surface of what the regime officially boasted about and what, conversely, after the Velvet Revolution and the beginning of the years of democracy was sharply criticised.

THE SKELETON-FRAME STRUCTURE AND ITS SURFACE

The standardisation of public buildings in the interest of achieving the economical and rapid provision of public facilities (especially in new urban developments) had been a theme that had been gaining in strength since the 1950s. Initially it was more a matter of unifying projects and construction processes, but in the 1960s there emerged a number of buildings that were built using complex sets of prefabricated construction components. Most of these were panel apartment buildings built together in housing estates. However, efforts to impose a uniform design on the buildings of civic service facilities by employing the same or only slightly modified project for the building and using uniform construction and façade components (fortunately) was for a long time unsuccessful. An exception was formed by structures that 'offered little resistance' to the objective of achieving uniformity – as well as residential apartment buildings this mainly meant schools or small shopping and health centres.

The occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968, however, ushered in a process of strict socio-economic normalisation. In architecture this was directed at strengthening political oversight and centralisation, and especially at accelerating and cementing the turn towards uniform projects and prioritised construction technologies (usually ones that were less demanding in terms of production and costs). A typical example was a sports hall with a pool, sauna, hotel, and snack bar, a standardised 'un-predefined' design on flat terrain, except for minor modifications implemented exactly according to the standard design in Nový Jičín (František Šaman, 1970–1975). This model of socialist, centralised architectural planning (a single type and standard applied in multiple locations) could not however be followed when it came to larger and functionally complex buildings. The construction process and legislative procedure that accompanied them went on so long that in the course of it all the project became outdated and could not be implemented again on a different site. It was smaller structures that tended to be more successful, such as the BIOS standardised sports hall in Kolín (Jan Nováček, 1986), built according to the same design also in Prague, Mělník, Kutná Hora, Poděbrady, Nové Strašecí, Slané.

Ultimately, an alternative that had been around since the 1960s presented itself in the form of unified reinforce-concrete frames, designed in several series according to load-bearing capacity and span lengths and with enough universality that they could be used in almost any public building (steel constituted a strategic material that could only

exceptionally be used in architecture). Architects thus had a starting point for their design, on which there was little they could discuss with their contractor, but which at the same time offered sufficient leeway and the certainty of easy availability and firmly fixed construction parameters.

One of the ways in which it was possible in more ambitious projects to play up the rational essence of a reinforced-concrete frame was, most notably, by amplifying its characteristic features, i.e. its modular-compositional nature. This approach has been described perfectly by architect Jan Bočan: 'My work includes the administrative centre at Družba station. I got a frame, which had 7.2 x 7.2 m spans. That's all. And I had to make the centre of a town based on that. I tried to do that, and the notion of a table-building has stayed with me ever since then. All my life I've been preoccupied with squares – so I made a small square, I divided it into more squares, and so on. This gave rise to a visual motif, and I believed that I had thereby discovered the entire world! And I did the entire town using the table–building principle and the 7.2 m modulus. Today I'm glad that it remained just at the level of a design ... What I mean by that is that everything we have in our catalogue now we came up with also before, but in a primitive way.' (Urlich, P., Vorlík, P., Filsaková, B. et al. 2006) It was just this kind of prosaic approach and straightforward honesty that was behind the design for the façade of Lužiny department store in Prague created by two of Bočan's colleagues (Alena Šrámková, Ladislav Lábus, 1977–1991).

Most architects, however, chose the opposite approach, where the frame was just a hidden structure that offered adequate layout flexibility, and the structure was then wrapped in an autonomously, artistically, and abstractly conceived façade. Typical examples of this are the buildings with a minimum of windows, department stores in particular, whose exteriors are often covered with ceramic reliefs covering large areas of surface or with malleably applied reinforced-concrete prefabricated components and standardised glass façade panels. The interplay of three factors had an important role here: the popular and politically acceptable inspiration provided since the 1960s by Scandinavian architectures; massive political support for the production of ceramic tiles in all variety of shapes, colours, and robustness; and a legislative requirement that architecture organically incorporate works of art. After the negative experience with socialist realism and in resistance to politically acceptable motifs, architects had since the 1960s been experimenting in interiors with the use of relief

and artistic ceramic or stone cladding. Support for the production of ceramic tiles in the 1960s and for making them more robust and available in a wider variety made it possible for it to be used on façades or allowed even the addition of colourful mosaics. The transference onto the façade of interior-scale motifs and motifs from other artistic techniques had a significantly enriching effect on the diversity of public buildings in socialist Czechoslovakia (e.g. department stores Prior in Teplice, Jaromír Liška, 1984, or in Chomutov, Jaromír Liška, Anděla Drašarová, 1982, and in Hradec Králové, Jiří Kučera, 1978–1981) and oftentimes helped to give a new urban centre its own distinct identity (e.g. in Neratovice, Gustav Šindelka et al., from the middle of the 1960s) or complex set of buildings (e.g. the metal, glass, and ceramic tiling in the stations of Prague's underground metro lines). Other architects used the freedom that designing the façade for an assembled skeleton-frame structure offered them to create what almost resembled constructivist or postmodern compositions (e.g. Department Store Uran in Česká Lípa, Emil Příklad, 1975–1984, and Department Store Máj in Kralupy nad Vltavou, Ladislav Stupka, Jaroslav Mach, 1979–1984).

CONTEXTUAL INTEGRATION

In the 1960s there began to be growing pressure for new structures (which were usually very large in scale) to be sensitively integrated into the physically variegated and smaller-scale context of historical towns and cities. Initially there seemed to be no solution to the conflict between the grand ambitions of the time and the modernist ideal of airy solitary structures on the one hand and the limited spatial possibilities of historical centres on the other, and the prevailing options resorted to were demolition, uniting of lots, and dramatic interventions in the existing environment. An important role in this was played also by the demanding and therefore for decades neglected maintenance that historical buildings required but in many cases was simply impossible given the frozen capacity of production firms and centralised economic planning.

A positive shift was brought about by imported inspiration from brutalism and its attempt at achieving a sculptural quality, plasticity, distinctiveness, and emotively visual communication with the user. From the middle of the 1960s brutalism made it possible to introduce into a picturesque historical environment forms that were no less segmented into parts and structured, without the creators having to move away from giving those forms a modernist expression. An important role in asserting the use of richer forms was again played by

the skeleton-frame structure, which allowed for the use of a considerable variety of shapes and scales and, when working on convoluted plots, the possibility to at least to some degree de-concrete the outer sections, i.e. it made it possible to escape the limitations imposed by (having to work with) a fixed construction module and fixed dimensions for the building as a whole. Moreover, in the 1970s there began to be increasingly louder calls in socialist Czechoslovakia for the restoration of historical centres and even of the 'pre-modernist' tenement blocks from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With the increasing drabness of panel housing estates, the historically developed areas offered an enticing alternative. There even began to appear the first projects focused on the rehabilitation of entire neighbourhoods, though these were rarely implemented in practice (e.g. Prague-Vinohrady).

As part of this overall revision a whole number of new structures were built that in their overall mass and their minute detail were adapted to the surrounding context. There thus began to appear buildings that were zigzag in shape (e.g. Hotel Kamyšín in Opava, Jan Kovář, Jiří Horák, 1979–1985), terraced structures (e.g. Building of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party in Děčín, Miroslav Netolička, 1978–1983), buildings with frond layouts and divided into segments (e.g. Building of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party in Trutnov, Vladimír Vokatý, Petr Skála, 1980–1985), not rarely also accompanied by the rich use of different types of cladding and human-scale elements evocative of traditional, finer details (e.g. Czech Insurance Company in Havlíčkův Brod, Lubomír Driml, Miroslav Řepa, 1980–1983).

There arose also a new effort to evoke the pitched roofs and small-scale lots of the surrounding historical buildings. Variations on this theme mostly commonly appeared in smaller towns as part of the construction of civic facilities. Shopping centres, hotels, and restaurants were intended to serve the wider area and in the spirit of the centralised economy were concentrated within one large structural mass, while at the same time they had to be sensitively integrated architecturally into the (usually historical) town square. In most cases the outcome of this was a robust late-modernist mass that was externally articulated with loggia, cornices, and a variety of materials on the façade, culminating in a kind of attic-like shape that was only intended to evoke the traditional pitched roofs and historical gables surrounding it (e.g. Koruna Shopping Centre in Vodňany, František Petrlík, César Grimmich, 1967–1978, and in Dobrouč, Aleš Granát, 1985–1987, and in Třebíč, César Grimmich, Jaromír Liška, 1972–1983, and Hotel U Dvou čápu in Trhové

Sviny, Jaromír Kohout, Marie Blažková, Věra Turková, 1972–1977, or Sports hall in Chomutov, Martin Kubricht, 1981–1988). In the most radical cases, in the place of the allegedly passé lightness of modernism, towns and cities saw the return of 'solid blocks with windows' (e.g. Building of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party in Příbram, Jiří Merger, Jan Nováček, Stanislav Franc, 1980–1984).

The pitched roof was a motif that also resonated in mountain regions, where variations of form and the use of different added structures and terraces helped somewhat in sensitively integrating into the traditionally built up parts of these mountain regions what were genuinely enormous mass structures designed for centralised recreational activity (e.g. Unions' Convalescence Centre Petr Bezruč in Malenovice, Petr Havel, 1974–1981, and in Svatý Petr, Zdeněk Kuna, Ladislav Stupka, Jaroslav Zdražil, Milan Valenta, 1977–1988, and Kraus's Cabins in Špindlerův Mlýn, Karel Schmied, 1978–1983). Unorthodox fusions of modernism and tradition were witnessed also in the construction of large sports facilities in the high mountains, where architects attempted to tie in with what was going on internationally and with the popularity of the technicist style at that time, while they also had to make do with the insufficiencies of the socialist production of buildings materials and a nostalgia for old romantic times. The outcome not rarely is a strange mixture that is part high-tech and part rustic (e.g. Ski flying hill Čerták, Harrachov, Jiří Špikla, Jan Suchánek, Miloslav Bělonožník, Hans-Heini Gasser, 1977–1983).

THE IDEA OF RESPONSIBILITY

Alongside attempts to revitalise historical centres that had been left in a moribund state after years of focusing solely on building housing estates, a striking phenomenon was the surprisingly sharp criticism that emerged towards the mass and prefabricated production of housing estates and the practice of caring for people's welfare in technocratically designed and operated institutions. In addition to official studies aimed at improving the environment of housing estates and widening the variety and diversifying the appearance of panel buildings, informal activities and events also emerged, usually involving a large part of the younger generation of architects and influenced by the imported and therefore only somewhat politically acceptable ideas of postmodernism. Young architects therefore defined themselves in opposition to the work of their predecessors, improvised, and, by means of what was no minor personal effort, furnished the uniform blocks of panel buildings with a

variety of roof extensions, unusual loggia, accentuated entrances, a richer use of colour variety, or more artistically treated, narrative parterres (e.g. the senior citizens homes designed by Jan Líněk and Vlado Milunić in Prague-Malešice, 1979–1987 or in Prague-Bohnice, 1975–1981, and Bubeneč apartments for SSSR administration representatives in Prague, Jan Nováček, Zdeněk Veselý, 1982–1986, and Housing Estate New Barrandov in Prague, Zdeněk Hölzel, Jan Kerel, 1984–1989, or playfully postmodern Dašická apartment building in Pardubice, Pavel Maleř, 1987).

The growing pressure to maintain an economical approach did not necessarily have to express itself only in a negative sense as a preference for prefabricated construction work. Considerable moderation and an engineer's objectivity are a natural part of Czech modern architecture. The experience of the oil crisis, constant shortages in the socialist system (it was literally necessary to go out and search for things), and the enormous amount of pollution inflicted on the environment by heavy industry ultimately crystallised into a direction of work that focused on saving energy. Architects, influenced in part by the first whispers of information and news about environmental movements in the West, were by the 1980s already beginning to look for new forms of public buildings that through their unusual shape, extensive insulation or cladding or by being fitted with (solar) collectors could make better use of solar power (e.g. Cristal, House of Culture in Česká Lípa, Jiří Suchomel, 1974–1990, and Swimming pool, Tachov, Lukáš Liesler, Eduard Schleger, 1983–1992, analogously built also in Břeclav 1983–1991, Hustopeče 1983–1991, Varnsdorf 1989–1994, Hlinsko 1994–1996).

TECHNICIST AND POSTMODERN LEANINGS

In the 1970s, despite the normalisation doctrine, new ideas from the West began to make their way into Czechoslovakia. On one side a movement for total reform emerged in the form of postmodernism, celebrating the diversity and intelligibility of historical architecture and cities, participation, wit, colourfulness, and explosive creativity. On the other side there appeared the first attempts at extreme technicism and high-tech structural architecture, a kind of affirmation of a faith in the power of technology and its ability to solve all of the world's problems, which in architecture specifically was gradually blurring the boundaries between machine and building, design and civil engineering, interior (design) and landscape architecture. Czechoslovak architects enclosed within the Eastern bloc did not usually have an opportunity to take part

in the theoretical discussions that were behind these phenomena and they mainly adopted the external forms they saw in books and periodicals or they formulated the theoretical foundations for them themselves in small groups with tightly shared ideas. The result was a remarkable mix that combined these two essentially contradictory influences with preceding intellectual currents, such as brutalism or intensive cooperation with visual artists.

Characteristic features of this late modern phenomenon in Czechoslovakia included bevelled or rounded corners (e.g. the Czechoslovak embassy in Berlin, Věra Machoninová, Vladimír Machonin, 1970–1978, and Hotel Vladimír in Ústí nad Labem, Rudolf Bergr, Zdeněk Havlík, Miroslav Novák, 1986, or Fire Station in Ústí nad Orlicí, Aleš Granát, 1980–1986) and ‘bonneted’ or double-skin façades (e.g. the telephone exchanges in Prague-Dejvice, Jindřich Malátek, Jiří Eisenreich, Václav Aulický, Jaromíra Eismannová, 1975–1982, and in Hradec Králové, Jindřich Malátek, Jiří Eisenreich, Václav Aulický, Jan Fišer, 1978–1984, and in Prague-Řepy, Václav Aulický, 1979–1984, or the Teplotechna building in Prague, Věra Machoninová, 1975–1984, and Post Office in Prague-Košíře, Jindřich Malátek, Ivo Loos, Jan Fišer, Václav Aulický, 1980–1987). Also popular were ‘mechanically ribbed’ sculptural details, or, conversely, structural details that are suppressed and fused smoothly together (e.g. the head office of Public Transit, Vratislav Růžička, Eva Růžičková, M. Špaček, Boris Rákosník, 1971–1979, versus House of Culture in Liberec, Pavel Vaněček, Michal Brix, Pavel Wieden, Martin Rajniš, 1976–1985); the return of pipe railing and industrial elements, but unlike the interwar avant-garde now in the form of robust and deliberately in some way oversized symbols (e.g. Transgas dispatch building and the building of the Ministry of Fuel and Energy in Prague-Vinohrady, Ivo Loos, Jindřich Malátek, Václav Aulický, Jiří Eisenreich, 1966–1978, or New Check-In Hall of the Main Train Station in Prague, Josef Danda, Alena Šrámek, Jan Šrámek, Jan Bočan, Zdeněk Rothbauer, 1972–1977, or apotheosis of concrete panels on Štvanice tennis courts in Prague, Josef Kales, Jana Novotná, 1982–1986); and of course numerous striking and eloquent giant type and numbering or explicitly rhetorical works of art placed on façades (e.g. artworks with the wooden baskets and balls by sculptor Vladimír Preclík in Folimanka basketball arena).

The lack of genuinely modern construction technologies also led to the improvised use and application of universal cladding across building categories, and the Feal Sidalvar industrial system in particular, commonly used not only in industrial but also transport, administrative,

retail, and sports structures, earned considerable popularity (e.g. Garage in Prague-Malešice, Jaroslav Celý, Antonín Průšek, 1977, versus Sports Hall by Rošický Stadium in Prague, Petr Kutnar, Svatopluk Zeman, 1975–1978, versus Department Store in Děčín, Jaromír Liška, 1984). Equally unexpected borrowings and mixtures of technicist features with the new formal poetics were brought about by using (old)new technologies, most notably glued timber trusses (e.g. Ice rink in Prague-Holešovice, Karel Koutský, Jan Kozel, Vladimíra Leníčková, 1983–1985, versus the new roofing for the Church of St Francis on the grounds of the renovated St Agnes Convent in Prague-Old Town, Karel Fantyš, 1982–1984).

The resulting varied and less straightforward syntheses of modernist technicism with light touches of postmodernism again bore the unmistakable marks of improvisation and the persistent struggle against the insufficiencies of construction output. Looking at these structures, the expression that comes to mind is the phrase Miroslav Masák used to describe the work of SIAL – ‘down-to-earth high-tech’. Or ironically light concept, called Lo-tech (‘low’ representing here the counterpart to ‘high’-tech) by a trio of architects named Tomáš Kulík, Jan Louda, and Zbyšek Stýblo, who employed soft postmodernist features, a multi-coloured modular-compositional style, and emphasis on mobility (e.g. Man-made rowing canal and floating equipment on the site of a former sand pit mine, Račice, Tomáš Kulík, Jan Louda, Zbyšek Stýblo, 1986; Harrachov ski centre, Jan Louda, Tomáš Kulík, Zbyšek Stýblo, Ivo Loos, Václav Mudra, 1989).

The 1980s saw several rare cases in which the use of a steel skeleton-frame was successfully asserted, thereby allowing a freer, more creative, and consciously city-shaping approach to be applied to the façade. A typical example was the need to fill in the vacant spaces that arose with the construction of the underground metro system in Prague. The complicated conditions for building the foundation, the irregular shape of the plots of land, and the delicate historical context made it impossible to use a standardised reinforced-concrete system or façades. The outcome of this could be a postmodernist type of illusory geometric game with city-shaping elements such as an open parterre, the suggestion of a piano nobile or city clock, a style of expression that is robust and suggests the ‘honesty’ of craftsmanship, or tectonic references (e.g. ČKD Administrative Building in Prague, Alena Šrámková, Jan Šrámek, 1974–1983), accented corners and technicistically exposed structures filled in with new ornamentation (e.g. Metrostav Administrative Building in Prague, Aleš Moravec, František

Novotný, 1981–1989), or in some cases an attempt to break down the gigantic mass into smaller ‘houses’ and to mix traditional windows with modernist glass facades (e.g. Ministry of Energy Industry over Hradčanská metro station in Prague, Vladimír Pýcha, Milan Černík, Vít Kándl, 1985–1990).

CONCLUSION

The limited possibilities offered by the socialist construction industry and the socialist system of central planning in Czechoslovakia forced the country’s architects in the post-war years to constantly try to improvise and to engage in experimentation. In many cases, and in the inauspicious political circumstances, the outcome was resignation and a flattening of architectural production. A bright flash of greater freedom and wider opportunities arrived with the sixties. But after the country’s occupation by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968 the political and social situation sharply deteriorated and the distress and shortages also an impact on architecture. However, architects were reluctant to give up their hard-earned space for creative work. Even in the normalisation era they followed developments in architecture and theory abroad and most notably there were still able through great personal commitment and extreme improvisation with limited resources to produce extraordinary architectural works (an important role was played, however, by the rise of a younger, more ambitious generation). These works (public buildings especially) consequently often acquired the hard to grasp features of late modernism, which mixes the rational architectural lexicon of the international style with the structural quality and rawness of brutalism, with the rhetoric and contextual nature of postmodernism, or with enduring intoxication with the rationalism of engineering and technological experimentation.

An interesting feature of the designs described here is that they are not directly tied to the typological structuring of the architecture. Despite the persistent effort to class, catalogue, and find replicable solutions, the methods the late modernism of socialist Czechoslovakia produced are of a freer nature. The criterion of quantity, practical functional analysis, and the selected building technologies favoured by the socialist centrally controlled economy continued of course to play a key role. But architects were increasingly turning their thought towards distinctively individual, more human-oriented, and contextual forms.

The architecture of the eighties in socialist Czechoslovakia is hard to class stylistically in any particular category and is difficult to interpret. We could see this as its weakness and a result of the lack of any central

guiding theory or unifying ethos for that time. Current discussions on the present nature and the future of European cities suggests, however, that broad diversity and layeredness are actually a source of great potential that it would be a shame to overlook and undervalue.

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