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Panel estates and the development of their colour on the example of housing estates in Prague 6 and 8 : Petřiny, Invalidovna, Červený Vrch, Ďáblice, Kobylisy, Bohnice, Čimice

ANNOTATION

The text deals with the development of the colour of modernist panel housing estates from primary grey to the current colour intemperance. The 1960's and 70's form, hidden under the layers of insulation, is pointed out on examples of good and bad practice from the author's work sphere, and potential conceptual solutions are presented. The importance of documenting the disappearing features as well as relatively late buildings and estates is emphasized. The housing estate of Bohnice is the most represented in the illustrations, since it has become a laboratory investigating the effect of various approaches to the façade colour, followed by the Petřiny housing estate, where the implementation of the proposed concept is the most complete. The article is based on the author's long-term scientific interest in the housing estate architecture, and on her practical experience in the position of head of the architect construction department of Prague 8 (1997–2001) and official of the local urban development department of Prague 6 (2002–2007).

SUMMARY

The question of panel housing estates colouring, not only in Prague, seems to be of little relevance within heritage management. For decades, we have been so depressed by the uniformity and greyness of housing estates, that their small colour nuances were almost not perceived. However, the matter of colour gains a different perspective if we realize that panel estates as part of our urban environment, form the view dominants on the near and far horizons of heritage reserves and zones, and are sometimes part of them. Currently this issue reflects serious evolving debate on the urban, architectural, artistic and monumental values of some selected estates, which go beyond ordinary period production and deserve some form of heritage protection. Another, may be surprising aspect, is, that not only historians of architecture but also important contemporary architects are dealing with the panel house estates.

The estates were not all grey; some had cultivated colours from the very beginning. The comparison shows that colour is not a new matter of the current transformation of panel houses, but each construction stage approached it differently. The process of thermal insulation of houses in recent years has revived the housing estate, but at the same time under the application of insulation layers, the original appearance of façades disappeared – the size, pattern and surface of panels or lining of windows, suspended balconies, openings, attics etc. Moreover, the process was not regulated in any way by the construction authorities or the heritage management – in the 1990s the changes were perceived as beneficial for the panel houses. Only the insulation of façades going hand in hand with the disappearance of the pattern, original colour and materiality of the façade made researchers, theorists and architects notice the differences between estates and their development stages (pre-housing/wooden housing, socialist realism, experimental pioneer housing, beautiful or humanist estates, technocratic housing estates, late beautiful and postmodern housing estates).

The demise of unchanged status for decades was - as well as abroad, especially in Great Britain, France, Germany and Poland – accompanied by intensive art-historical research of the estates and even thorough documentation of the last intact objects. In Czech Republic for example, the extensive *Paneláci* project mapped seventy-five Czech and Moravian housing estates, published and presented fifty of them at exhibitions.

The matter of visual aspect regulation of panel housing estates is viewed from the perspective of personal practical experiences. A sober look back to the original form of panel estates in two Prague districts, 6 and 8, is offered in the current unhappy boom of colour cacophony, informing about the relatively successful colour regulation. In Prague 6 this concerns the housing estates of Petřiny and Červený Vrch; and in Prague 8 the estates of Invalidovna, Ďáblice, Kobylisy, Bohnice and Čimice.

Apart from the black and white façades of Invalidovna experimental housing estate by Josef Polák and Vojtěch Šalda, the estates of Červený Vrch, Ďáblice and Kobylisy from the beautiful phase have the most valuable original solution, which should be preserved or restored. Characteristic for them were the strip windows in black frames with coloured window inserts and white façades. The façades of the Červený Vrch tower blocks by architect Milan Jarolím had a white-framed chessboard of alternately grey and white parapet strips and oppositely coloured concrete fronts of balconies, the strip windows were framed by black pillars. Also the tower blocks and houses of the Ďáblice estate by architect Viktor Tuček were white with coloured pillars between windows – blue pillars for the tower blocks with a cascading base and chrome yellow for the smaller houses. The panel houses with a passage way through had dark brown gables and light brown parapet strips and brown window pillars, embellished with red squares of balcony railings made of glass mosaic. The Kobylisy housing estate by architect Jan Krákora with white belt façades and brown gables was characterized by the burgundy colour of the rear balcony walls of all tower blocks and the blue of all balconies of panel houses.

After the presentation of the colour development of these estates, the principles are formulated, which crystallized from the experience with these estates and were embodied in the colour regulation conceived in 1999–2001 for Prague 8 and 2002–2007 for Prague 6. This article provides examples of the regulation.

Since the knowledge of the original panel colour is very poor, the author of this article tried to find the original authors of housing estates to consult the colour concept, with the aim to elaborate regulations to the hitherto unrestrained alterations of façades. She managed to contact the authors of the most valuable ensembles or their descendants and with their help regulations were established for the Invalidovna housing estate (ŠALDA/ŘEPKOVÁ/DOUBNER 2001) and the Ďáblice housing estate (TUČEK 2001); regulations of selected residential complexes in Prague 6 were composed by the author herself reflecting her previous experiences gained from the cooperation with the architect Ladislav Lábus (ŘEPKOVÁ/ŘEPKA 2007). Prof. Ladislav Lábus from FA ČVUT, with his students examined the possibilities of material transformation of the largest panel house in the Bohnice estate. The designs changing the mass of the house following the example of Lucien Kroll were not realistic in our environment, but they were the beginning of cooperation. For housing cooperatives and the Prague 8 City Hall Lábus designed the façade of several large buildings in the Bohnice housing estate. Unlike the then predominant chaotic solutions trying to suppress the essence of prefabricated houses, he brought a solution that gave them size, repeatability, simplicity, modernity and pride.

The basic pillars of the presented method of colour regulations for particular estates are analysis, elaboration of a concept, design of a colouring and consistent implementation. These basic theses must be based on the principles of the regulation: a comprehensive approach, the author's humility, simplicity of solution and colour sobriety. The development during the more than fifteen years since the beginning of colour regulation in Prague 6 and 8 complies with the fact that housing estates benefit from a unifying concept.

The National Heritage Institute plans to publish the methodology of housing estates regeneration in the coming years, which gives a clear signal that the time is coming when these modern architecture estates will be included in the heritage management interest.

Fig. 1. A – Prague 6-Veleslavín, Petřiny housing estate, Na Petřinách Street, view of the blocks of houses from No. 311, Na Petřinách 84 towards the east. The hotel house and civic amenities, which integrate the house front of the estate main axis, are not built yet. **B** – Prague 6-Břevnov, Petřiny housing estate, Brunclíkova Street, view to the south and to the junction with Hiršlová Street, with the civic amenities building No. 1875, Brunclíkova 17 (postcard stamped 1967, private collection).

Fig. 2. Prague 8-Bohnice, Bohnice housing estate, block Nos. 496–513, Zelenohorská 3–37, view from Zhořelecká. One of the two largest blocks with eighteen entrances. The façade is divided by strip windows (photo author, 2012).

Fig. 3. Prague 6-Vokovice, Červený Vrch housing estate, No. 685, Vokovická 14. Negative example of the façade colour scheme. The three Čapek-type tower blocks on the way to Ruzyně Airport behind the Vokovice tram loop were among the first colourful façades of the 1990s. Around 2005, the two returned to a modest colouring of the protruding façade elements, but retained the brown tuning. The third block transferred the colour scheme on the new insulation (photo author, 2020).

Fig. 4. Prague 8-Bohnice, Bohnice housing estate, block Nos. 390–398, Vratislavská 2–18. Left original state, de facto three – coloured: burgundy brown are the elevator shafts and the pillars between windows, which cover the load – bearing panels in the level of the grey parapet panels of the belt type façade. Grey Boletice panels in the windows level cover the partitions. On the right design by a professional decorator from 1998. If all the houses had such a fragmented colour, the original grey would be more acceptable. This unconsulted proposal confirmed the need for regulation (photo author, 2012).

Fig. 5. Prague 8-Čimice, Čimice housing estate, southern part, block Nos. 361–366, Chvatěrubská 18–28. The original design of the façade in Chvatěrubská Street with small, originally white panels ("block panels"), fine black joints, undivided portrait-oriented windows and black frames of fully glazed staircases, is completely hidden in the insulation. Some houses abolished the full glazing of the stairs and replaced it with double wing windows, which had not been present in the estate until then (photo author, 1999).

Fig. 6. Prague 8-Troja, Bohnice housing estate, block Nos. 516–526, Mazurská 1–21, northern façade to Ratibořská 2–12. The process of transformation of the eleven-entrance large block: the left part is in its original state with the façades of the Larsen-Nielsen system – completely expressionless; for economic reasons, only a fraction of the Danish system was then used in Czechoslovakia. From the right, the block is already beginning to change according to the insulation design by Ladislav Lábus (photo author, 1999).

Fig. 7. Prague 8-Bohnice, Bohnice housing estate, block Nos. 428–445, Poznaňská 13–47. Eighteen-entrance large block, northern façade facing Lodžská Street. On the right the original state of the block owned by the Prague 8 authorities with the "belt façade" with continuous window sills, on the left the completion of the insulation of the first separated unit Nos. 428–430 according to the design by Ladislav Lábus (photo author, 2000).

Fig. 8. A, B – Prague 6-Vokovice, Červený Vrch housing estate, houses south of Evropská Street. The façades of the southern part of the complex after the year 2000. The houses of the G 57 type were painted in the mid-1990s, emphasizing some of the façade elements. The colour was often burgundy combined with white, ochre or light yellow. Address unspecified, south of European Avenue (photo author, 2004).

Fig. 9. Prague 6-Veleslavín, Petřiny housing estate, Na Petřinách Street, late 1960s. Housing estate and civic amenities No. 304 on the corner of Na Petřinách 56 and Čílový 9 with a bookstore and florist. The house on the left is No. 254, the southern house of the block in Křenov 2. The hotel house is not standing yet (copied from NOVÝ/VOŽENÍLEK 1971, without pagination).

Fig. 10. Prague 6-Břevnov, Petřiny housing estate, No. 1772, Na Petřinách 37. Façades of panel houses before the last insulation. The panel grid is no longer highlighted, at the end sections it is hidden under a small layer of insulation, which does not yet appear in front of the attic cornice (photo author 2007).

Fig. 11. Prague 6-Vokovice, Červený Vrch housing estate, postcards from the late 1970s. **A** – No. 648, Evropská 1, Egyptská 162, followed by No. 673, Arabská 25, Evropská 158. The seven-storey panel houses are of the same G 57 type as in the Petřiny housing estate. **B** – tower house No. 677, Arabská 17, Evropská 150, view to the west from today's Drancy restaurant No. 689, Evropská 148. Tower houses and restaurants have black window frames (private collection).

Fig. 12. Prague 6-Břevnov, Petřiny housing estate. **A** – Nos. 1831, 1825, Na Klášterním 23, Brunclíkova 1. Blocks Nos. 1831–1834 and 1825–1830, Na Klášterním 17–23 and Brunclíkova 1–11, various designs of neighbouring different types of blocks harmonize together when a reduced colour scale is used, however not much was missing and due to a misunderstanding of property rights and duties, the Na Klášterním block (on the left) could have a lemon-brown-purple facade (photo author 2006). **B** – block No. 1841–1843, Zeyerova Alley 14–18, in the background No. 1844–1848, Volavkova 9–17. One of the first blocks, owned by the Prague 6 authorities, fully insulated before the author of the article became involved at the Municipal Office in Prague 6. Apparent is double insulation of the end section, the colour became the basis of the regulation (photo author, 2007).

Fig. 13. Prague 6-Veleslavín, Petřiny housing estate, Nos. 93, 95 and 100, Na Okraji 60–64, Čílova 24. Block of flats with suitable colour scale and emphasized staircases (photo author, 2019).

Fig. 14. Prague 6-Břevnov, Petřiny housing estate. **A** – No. 1896, Na Petřinách 31. The façades of the tower blocks had hard plaster in a sandy shade, the balcony railings combined wire glass and a metal bars, the position of which alternated on the floors. **B** – No. 1896 (front), 1897 (back), Na Petřinách 31, 29. The last insulated tower blocks approach the original monochrome state. Due to the fact that the regulations determine the maximum permissible colour range, the implementation is successful. **C** – No. 369, Na Petřinách 30, Na Větrníku 1. Here the owners chose a light grey façade with a warm red glass railing of the balcony. **D** – No. 1898, Na Klášterním 6, Brunclíkova 1a. For the first insulated tower block, the owners chose a deep grey façade and a dark red, finely perforated sheet metal railing (photo author, A – 2015; B–D – 2019).

Fig. 15. Prague 8-Karlín, Invalidovna housing estate. View from the Olympik Hotel No. 615, Nekvasilova 30, to the southwest of the entire housing estate (copied from *sine* 1972–1979, year 1973, *Invalidovna* file, without pagination).

Fig. 16. Prague 8-Karlín, Invalidovna housing estate. **A** – block Nos. 587–584, Nekvasilova 11–17. The block has been restored to almost its original colour. The corrugated sheet was replaced by coloured panels. **B** – No. 612, U

Sluncové 21. Tower house. **C** – Nos. 580–581, Molákova 26–28. Example of non-compliance with the colour regulations. The colour is disturbing, but at least it corresponds to the aesthetics of the 1960s. The most important is preservation of the strip windows and the full glazing of the staircase unit. **D** – No. 577, Molákova 34. The hotel house was saved from contact insulation (A, C, D – photo author, 2019; B – photo 2018).

Fig. 17. Prague 6-Vokovice, Červený Vrch housing estate, No. 677, Arabská 17, Evropská 150, view from the Drancy restaurant No. 689, Evropská 148, Arabská 15. The checkerboard façade of the tower block, masterfully working with white, grey and black, is set in a frame consisting of gables and a flat roof. After the year 2000, the houses were already a long way from the elegant, graphically conceived Brussels façades, captured in a picture from the time shortly after completion. Due to the replacement of windows, window sills, walling of window inserts and sides of balconies, the last reconstruction primarily aimed at a cultivated uniform design (copied from NOVÝ/VOŽENÍLEK 1971, without pagination).

Fig. 18. Prague 6-Vokovice, Červený Vrch housing estate, Nos. 673–677, Arabská 17–25, Evropská 150–158. Tower blocks in the Evropská Avenue towards the west, realised design by Hana Řepková from 2005 in a simpler two-colour scheme. Compared to the 1990s state or the inappropriate colour scheme of the nearby three blocks of the same houses, this is a better version; but a step back compared to the original design, then unfortunately washed away and forgotten (photo author, 2020).

Fig. 19. Prague 6-Vokovice, Červený Vrch housing estate, Nos. 603–607, Kamerunská 1–9, Africká 10. The façades are painted. The block in the middle confirms the correct colouring of the material, not just the surface. The nautical windows of the elevator shafts are an important visual element of the estate, they have proven to be displayed at least in colour. Since the first such solution attracted attention before the application of the regulation, it was recommended there after (photo author, 2002).

Fig. 20. Prague 6-Vokovice, Červený Vrch housing estate čp. 611–615, Evropská 77–85. The housing estate is closed from the north by one of the semi-enclosed blocks formed by the G 57 system. The contrast of angled white and dark red was taken over by tower blocks, panel houses have different shades of brick hue. The unity is restored, somewhere including the nautical windows phenomenon (photo author, 2019).

Fig. 21. Prague 8-Kobylisy, Ďáblice housing estate, 1980s. The north-south pedestrian axis – Burešova Street – passes through house No. 1638, Burešova 10 with courtyard balconies; in the centre there is a pharmacy and an insurance company, on the right a post office; at the back, blocks of flats No. 1151, Burešova 12, and the northern part of block 1158–1164, Hlaváčova 2–14 (copied from TUČEK 1984, 44).

Fig. 22. Prague 8-Kobylisy, Ďáblice housing estate, postcard from the early 1970s. The photo in the lower left corner shows the original black window inserts between the strip windows. The same image shows chrome-yellow inter-window columns and atypical windows on the façades of kindergartens and nurseries. The scale of the photographs shows colours, but not the material design detail. The windows of the kindergartens were decorated with glass mosaics (private collection).

Fig. 23. Prague 8-Kobylisy, Ďáblice housing estate, block Nos. 1284–1295, Třebenická 4–26, in the foreground No. 1295. State of buildings that complement the main composition, in 2000 (photo by V. Tuček, 2000; copied from TUČEK 2001, without pagination).

Fig. 24. Prague 8-Kobylisy, Ďáblice housing estate, blocks Nos. 1334–1339, Tanvaldská 1–11 (in the foreground), Nos. 1327–1333, 1321–1326, Chabařovická 1–13, 15–25 (right and back), Nos. 1340–1346, Sřekovská 6–18 (left), view from the south. Insulated houses keep the original colour (photo author, 2015).

Fig. 25. Prague 8-Kobylisy, Ďáblice housing estate. Colour and material design, basic scheme 1 : 5 000; axonometry of colour design was developed by Viktor Tuček Jr. in 2001. Demonstration of the fact, that for the regulation of a large estate, such a simple design is sufficient, together with a table of colours of individual elements of the façade for each block (copied from TUČEK 2001, without pagination).

Fig. 26. Prague 8-Kobylisy, Ďáblice housing estate, Nos. 1956–1958, 1961–1962, Bedřichovská 12–8, 4, 2. Five tower blocks in the period, when the Copilitglassed walls of the staircases begun to be walled. Design by Viktor Tuček Jr. from 2001 restores the crystalline composition of the block by colour highlighting the communication module (copied from TUČEK 2001, without pagination).

Fig. 27. Prague 8-Kobylisy, Ďáblice housing estate, block Nos. 1296–1307, Frýdlantská 2–24. Grey-blue colour variation by V. Tuček Jr. was a welcome revival for the estate in its current white and brown-beige colours. In contrast to the non-systemically applied yellow and orange shades of some façades, in which the typical red squares of the railing disappear, the grey-blue background desirably accentuates them (photo author, 2001).

Fig. 28. Prague 8-Kobylisy, Ďáblice housing estate, block Nos. 1284–1295, Třebenická 4–26, No. 1295 in the foreground. Proposal of colour design by Viktor Tuček Jr. from 2001 was very successfully realised (copied from TUČEK 2001, without pagination).

Fig. 29. Prague 8-Kobylisy, Kobylisy housing estate, axonometry, view from Horňátecká Street, chief designer Jan Krákora (copied from NOVÝ/VOŽENÍLEK 1971, without pagination).

Fig. 30. Prague 8-Kobylisy, Kobylisy housing estate. District Cultural House and Severka House of Services on a postcard, circa late 1970s. The white façades of the tower blocks contrast with the brown gables, emphasizing the verticality. The burgundy coating of the rear balcony walls optically increases their depth. White roof pergolas give elevator engine rooms the appearance of a receding floor (private collection).

Fig. 31. Prague 8-Kobylisy, Kobylisy housing estate, tower blocks Nos. 1107, 1108, 1077, Paláskova 2, 3, 4, view from Trousilova Street. Black and white photo offers a view from the shopping centre to the amphitheatre of the former brickyard, we see the dark rear balcony walls of the tower and panel houses (unknown photographer, 1970s; copied from FB Staré Kobylisy, <<https://www.facebook.com/289088578164545/photos/a.289112161495520/299884930418243/?Type=3&theatre>> [publ. 2017-11-02]).

Fig. 32. Prague 8-Kobylisy, Kobylisy housing estate. **A** – No. 1106, Trousilova 5a (in the foreground), Nos. 1107, 1108, 1077, Paláskova 2, 3, 4, view from the south from Horňátecká street (photo by A. & A. Suk, 2006; copied from *Atlas Čech* <<https://www.atlasceska.cz/fotogalerie/id/13983#thumb-224815>>). **B** – No. 1107, Paláskova 2 (**left**), No. 1077, Paláskova 4, Třeboradická 16 (**right**), view from the north from Horňátecká Street (photo author, 2020).

Fig. 33. Prague 8-Troja, Bohnice housing estate, block Nos. 491–505, Krynická 1–29, view from the south to the eastern part of the block (photo author, 2012).

Fig. 34. Prague 8-Bohnice, Bohnice housing estate, block Nos. 428–445, Poznaňská 13–47. Eighteen-entrance large block lining the busy Lodžská Street. **A** – the southern façade facing Poznaňská in a sober colour scheme with four colours for eighteen entrances was realized according to the design by Ladislav Labus. **B** – detail of colour change at the join of two separated units, houses Nos. 430 and 431, Poznaňská 41 and 43. **C** – northern façade oriented to Lodžská street; the colour scheme divides the block into separated units with mirror-inverted colour (photo author, 2012).

Fig. 35. Prague 8-Bohnice, Bohnice housing estate, Nos. 563–567, Řešovská 20–28. A panel house with thermal insulation designed by Hana Řepková, confirmed by architect Lábus (photo author, 2012).

Fig. 36. Prague 8-Čimice, Čimice housing estate, southern part, block Nos. 361–366, Chvatěrubská 18–28. Original façade with small panels and fine joints; replacing of the black metal frames with grey is the least evil. Some houses replaced the full glazing of the staircases with ordinary windows (photo author, 1999).

Fig. 37. Prague 8-Čimice, Čimice housing estate, southern part, block Nos. 350–356, Chvatěrubská 4–16. The block is an example of the inconsistency of the owner, the designer and the failure or malfunction of the control mechanisms of the building authorities (photo F. Řepka, 2020).

Fig. 38. Prague 8-Čimice, Čimice housing estate, southern part, block Nos. 346–349, Okořská 1–7. Façade of the block according to the colour regulation (design by Hana Řepková) preserving most of the original pattern (photo author, 2000).

Fig. 39. Prague 8-Bohnice, Bohnice housing estate, block Nos. 415–427, Hlivická 2–26. One of the three block of the estate, reviewed personally by the author, a sandwich house with gardens next to the ground floor apartments by architect Zdeněk Jakubec. The overall colour scheme of the panel house weakens its architectural expression, which fully stood out in its original form with the white paint of the façades from the late 1970s, although in detail the colouring may seem meaningful. **A** – view from the south from Lodžská Street; **B** – front gardens (photo author, 2005).

Fig. 40. Prague 6-Břevnov, Petřiny housing estate, Nos. 1863, 1864, Šantrochova 9, 7. As a result of privatization, the blocks had more owners. One of the principles of the method was the identical design of the block, here for example 1862–1865, Šantrochova 5–11 (photo author, 2007).

Fig. 41. Prague 6-Břevnov, Petřiny housing estate, No. 1799, Čílova 8 from block Nos. 1799–1803, Čílova 2–8. The same blocks of the G 57 type stand in Petřiny and Červený Vrch housing estates (only the openings in the balcony railing differ), so the same principles ought to be applied in both estates. Architectural segments only are treated in colour (photo author, 2007).

Fig. 42. Prague 6-Břevnov, Nos. 2060–2063, Bělohorská 217–223. This small set of Bolívarova cooperative houses originally had high-quality Brizolit plasters in a natural grey-beige shade. The brick colour was added to the masonry buildings, on the base of which elegant balconies with solid concrete sides in the original sand colour stand out better (photo author, 2007).

Fig. 43. Prague 6-Břevnov, Nos. 136–138, Radimova 27, 29. Elevated panel houses protrude from the surrounding of mostly four-storey development. **A** - original state (photo F. Řepka, 2007). **B** – an example from the regulation of housing estates of Prague 6. The priority was the optical reduction of the masses of a pair of high-rise panel houses. Height reduction usually doesn't work, slimming does. The large panel mass was optically divided into two tall slender ones, the two-tone colour of a single block is balanced by repeating the same scheme in the positive and negative. The contrasting façade of both parts of the semi-detached house can seem to be slightly shifted in plan (copied from ŘEPKOVÁ/ŘEPKA 2007).

Fig. 44. Prague 8-Bohnice, Bohnice housing estate, block Nos. 402–412, Katovická 2–22, south façade. Large block facing on the south the main road axis of the estate, of identical construction with the eighteen-entrance block in Poznaňská. The block was also owned by Prague 8 authorities. It is separated from the large block in Poznaňská by N–S oriented high-rise panel houses and a two-storey shopping centre (this is the only recognizable "whirligig" from the original concept). With the consent of the author of the design, Ladislav Lábus, the project for the eastern part of the block in Poznaňská was used again, which, apart from being economical, had a visual effect of repeating a proven design and enhancing the expression of the main street of the estate. The design is identical to the eastern part of the block in Poznaňská No. 428-445 (see Fig. 34), which is out of scope due to its length (photo author, 2012).

Fig. 45. Prague 6-Vešlavín, Petřiny housing estate, Na Petřínách Street. Detail of the façade, comparison of old and new. The structure of the panels and the smooth edge around their perimeter, narrow bands around windows and a profiled attic cornice are visible (photo author, 2007).

Translation by Linda Foster