

**BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**

**COMMUNISM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SLOVAK PUBLIC  
SPACE**

**BACHELOR THESIS**

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**BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**

**COMMUNISM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SLOVAK PUBLIC  
SPACE: HOW THE REGIME INFLUENCED SLOVAK  
BEHAVIOR AND PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
COMMUNIST MONUMENTS**

**BACHELOR THESIS**

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**Nicola Grace Orlovská**

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that this bachelor's thesis is my own work and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All used literature and other sources are attributed and cited in References.

In Bratislava, July 15, 2023

Nicola Grace Orlovská

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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Ako režim pôsobil na správanie Slovákov a ich prístup ku komunistickým pamiatkam

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## ABSTRAKT

*Kľúčové slová:* komunizmus, kolektívna pamäť, verejný priestor, pamätník, identita, Slovensko

Táto práca vysvetľuje, ako historická minulosť Slovenska podporila rozvoj parochiálnej či tribálnej politickej kultúry. Dané nastavenie politickej kultúry zabránilo slovenskej spoločnosti prekonať komunistický režim. Ďalej táto práca ukazuje, ako stagnácia a ľahostajnosť k minulosti ovplyvňuje súčasný stav verejného priestoru, ako aj ľuďmi vnímané sociálne role a identitu. Slovenské historické spoločenské štruktúry vyústili do špecifickej politickej kultúry, ktorá je svojou povahou parochiálna. Znamená to, že slovenskí ľudia majú silnú vôľu podriaďiť sa a podporovať autoritatívne osobnosti. Okrem toho a čiastočne aj preto je komunistický režim na Slovensku vnímaný inak ako v susednom Česku, s ambivalenciou a možno aj uznaním. Výsledkom je, že väčšina Slovákov sú považovaní za ľudí ktorí sa prizerali zatiaľ čo režim prevládal, ale aj za beneficentov komunistického útlaku. Tieto sociálne roly sa následne prenášajú na ďalšie generácie. Výsledkom je ľahostajnosť k symbolom totalitnej minulosti vo verejnom priestore a nepravdepodobnosť, že sa tento postoj v dohľadnej dobe zmení. Tieto zistenia podporujú najmä dôkazy z rozhovorov s rôznymi jednotlivcami, ktorí aktívne vzdorovali režimu, písali a hovorili o jeho dôsledkoch pre slovenskú spoločnosť a naďalej sa snažia presadzovať naratív zmien v spoločenskom, kultúrnom a politickom prostredí.

Title: Communism and its Influence on Slovak Public Space; How the Regime Influenced Slovak Behavior and People's Attitudes Towards Communist Monuments

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## ABSTRACT

*Key words: communism, collective memory, public space, monument, identity, Slovakia*

This work explains how Slovakia's historical past promoted the development of a parochial political culture which as a result prevented Slovak society from overcoming the communist regime. Furthermore, this work shows how this stagnation and indifference towards the past influences the present state of public space as well as people's perception of their own social roles and Slovak identity. The Slovak historical social structures resulted in a specific political culture which in nature is parochial. This means that Slovak people have a strong willingness to submit to and support authority figures. In addition to and partly because of that, the communist regime in Slovakia is perceived differently in Slovakia than in neighbouring Czechia, with more ambivalence and perhaps even appreciation. As a result, majority of Slovaks are considered bystanders and beneficiaries of the communist oppression. These social roles are subsequently passed on to the next generations. The outcome is indifference to the symbols of remembrance of the totalitarian past in public space and an unlikeliness of this stance changing in the foreseeable future. These findings are mainly supported through evidence from interviews conducted with various individuals who actively resisted the regime, wrote and spoke about its implications for Slovak society and continue trying to push a narrative of change in a social, cultural and political setting.

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## INTRODUCTION

In Slovakia, people have a tendency to punish those who are resisting the past instead of removing the past from public space. Peter Kalmus is a great example of the backwardness that prevails within Slovak society. For years now he has actively shown a strong dislike for the communist monuments and symbols that are displayed in public space throughout the country. Together with a couple other activists and conceptual artists he has made a statement by destroying these monuments or throwing red paint on them as a sign of protest. He has repeatedly stated that these monuments have no business being displayed in public space as it is firstly illegal and secondly, they reinforce the memory of the past regime in a positive light. However, instead of receiving support he has been reprimanded, fined and even physically beaten for his actions.

He received a two-month suspended sentence together with artist Ľuboš Lorenz for vandalizing a memorial of Vasil' Biľak—a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (TASR, 2020). As Kalmus has mentioned in the past, the Law of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on the Immorality and Illegality of the Communist System 2020, Art.125 s.7 (SVK) stipulates that: "It is prohibited to place texts, images, and symbols glorifying, promoting or defending a regime based on communist ideology or its representatives on monuments, memorials and plaques" (Article 125, s. 7, 2020). This begs the question why instead of showing support for his actions, people criticize Kalmus and label him as a criminal. Why is it that in Slovakia constitutional law is overpowered by public sentiment? One of the plausible answers is that Kalmus' actions remind people of their role within the regime which in many cases was not the role of a victim but of a bystander or beneficiary.

People are not always willing to admit to themselves that they were part of the oppressive regime and carried out actions that benefitted them or their families. The roles of beneficiaries and bystanders prevail in society in the present because they are



passed down from previous generations. Thus, it is important to investigate how these social roles became so prevalent within the society, and how the historical context of the country relates to how communism and before that, fascism transpired in Slovakia. The historical development of the country, the subsequent development of a parochial political culture, the experience of communism and the development of prevalent social roles all contribute to the indifference people feel towards public space today.

In Slovakia, public spaces remain an environment filled with communist symbolism. The memorials and monuments present in open spaces often show important people from the past regime and serve as reminders of the past. Their presence reinforces the idea that communism is a live memory in people's minds and in the current political and social narrative because public space and its use is an extension of narrative building itself. Its unchanging state prevents Slovakia from moving forward and from establishing a new foundation for a functioning democracy. Without a proper sense of agency and empowerment, the Slovak people will never become fully active citizens in the political and social sense of the word.

In order to understand the stagnant present and the lack of responsibility people take for the past, it is important to investigate Slovakia's historical background – the forming of the nation, the people and the Slovak identity. Knowing about the historical background of Slovakia and its historical social structures provides a better understanding for why communism transpired the way it did. It took a different trajectory than in other satellite states. Communism in Slovakia was not enforced by a small group of perpetrators. Instead, communism became a way of life for everybody who wished to remain safe, secure and alive.

Even the discrepancies in experiencing normalization between Czechia and Slovakia were significant. “Despite a common unified normalization strategy, a stricter and wider normalization was believed to be implemented against the Czechs versus a “lighter” normalization against the Slovaks. There exists one basic explanation regarding the stricter character of normalization in the Czech region: the top functionaries in the Communist Party (Husák, Biľak), were Slovak. Insufficient historical evidence cannot support this view, but it remains a source of tension in Czech - Slovak relations” (Žatkuliak, 1998, p.3). There was a stronger reaction of

dissatisfaction and rebellion from the Czechs than from the Slovaks after 1968 which took form in a large network of dissidents who went underground. In Slovakia, the number of dissidents who showed dissatisfaction and actively rebelled against the regime was lower. The feeling of disdain for communism was not as visceral, quite the opposite actually. People felt less inclined to revolt and question the choices made by the Communist Party. This was the main representation of authority and given Slovakia's historical social background and the prevalence of a parochial political culture, the people submitted to the party willingly (Almond & Verba, 1963). They became part of the criminal regime and carried out actions that would benefit them and keep their family and status secure. However, once the regime fell nobody felt the need to point fingers on individuals. Instead, people labeled the regime itself as criminal and removed themselves from the equation making it virtually impossible to understand who is to blame and what the consequences of his or their collective actions are. Avoiding the process of placing blame and retribution then keeps the regime alive in the collective memory of the nation. It halts the process of moving on and keeps public space unchanged. Furthermore, it can even lead to people remembering the regime despite its oppressive nature, as a time of order, certainty and perhaps in a twisted way also security. This phenomenon is the reality today with many elderly and middle-aged people remembering the regime with rosy retrospection.

Some countries that have endured challenging past events such as Apartheid, genocide, or oppressive regimes tend to embark upon an extremely complex process of overcoming the past, recognizing individuals responsible for the atrocities and injustices, and moving on to ensure that such events never occur again. What happened in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989 falls under this category and needs to be dealt with in that manner. The narratives about the past must be changed and consequently, properly taught to the next generations that may still carry the social roles passed down from previous generations.

The importance of these social roles will be a separate subject in one of the chapters since these roles are directly adopted from a classification system which in addition to bystanders and beneficiaries includes victims, perpetrators and resisters (Swartz, 2016). People may adopt these social roles after experiencing an oppressive regime or other traumatic event like genocide. It is paramount to explore these roles as they shape

people's perception of the past and their views in the present. They are also closely tied to their political affiliations and political actions.

This work looks at the importance of social roles in connection to the historical past and political culture through interviews conducted with a certain intellectual elite within Slovak society that formed a part of the communist legacy in Slovakia. This intellectual elite is connected to the formation of a narrative about communism in society. They represent the few in Slovak society who care about how the nation dealt with the past and how it influences our future. They are the ones who established the Institute of Collective Memory, conducted comparative and longitudinal studies about public opinion in the country, produced countless movies that depict the brutal reality of the regime and wrote numerous books on topics of remembrance, collective memory, the regime and everything connected to it. Their opinions hold a certain level of importance in society and they offer an explanation as to why Slovak citizens in general show a high level of ambivalence and indifference towards public space and the past regime.

This work comes to the theory that Slovak historical social structures resulted in a parochial political culture. This means people in Slovakia do not feel they have agency and empowerment over their own nation and decisions made within society so they rather show a strong willingness to submit to and support authority figures. In addition to and partly because of that, the communist regime in Slovakia is perceived differently in Slovakia than in neighbouring Czechia, with more ambivalence and perhaps even appreciation for the amount of prosperity and order the regime brought. As a result, majority of Slovaks are considered bystanders and beneficiaries of the communist oppression. These social roles are subsequently passed on to the next generations. The outcome is indifference to the symbols of remembrance of the totalitarian past in public space and an unlikelihood of this stance changing in the foreseeable future.

## METHODOLOGY

This work explains the reasons behind the unchanging public space in Slovakia through a theoretical point of view which is supported with evidence from the practical section that took form in open, unstructured interviews with the Slovak intellectual elite. The reason for providing an extensive theoretical background about Slovakia's historical development and trajectory is that it explains why the nation still functions under a parochial political culture. As stated in Almond and Verba's *Civic Culture* (1963), the idea of political culture is "the specifically political orientations – attitudes towards the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system" (p.13).

In Slovakia, political culture is parochial in nature meaning the people have little to no knowledge of the role of the central government, there is no proper differentiation of political roles and expectations exist among actors meaning "political specialization is minimal" (Almond & Verba, 1963, p.19). Political culture in Slovakia is very similar to Almond and Verba's definition because of its historical social background and the trajectory of events that occurred in this region. This relationship between history and political culture are the reasons that contributed to the development of bystanders and beneficiaries as the prevalent social roles in society. The idea of social roles was first coined by Raul Hillberg in his book *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders* (1992) where he introduces the three social roles mentioned in the title of his book. Hillberg observed that people adopted certain roles within their society during and after participating or observing a genocide (1992). However, his typology classification was later criticized for its vagueness and overgeneralization which is when other scholars began coming up with new social roles to add to the classification. The roles used in this work are beneficiaries and bystanders first introduced by Sharlene Swartz in *Another Country* (2016) who added these labels to Hillberg's original model. The important part to keep in mind about these social roles is that they are a spectrum. No one person falls under one single social role, it is a spectrum. Therefore, even when this work focuses solely on the beneficiaries and bystanders, it does not necessarily mean that people in Slovakia do not also fall under the category of victims, resisters and perpetrators.

These social roles provide an explanation for why people are indifferent to public space and ambivalent towards the past regime. The public does not wish to take responsibility

for the past and there is not much evidence to suggest this approach will change in the near future. Furthermore, the work draws from Brubaker's, Cooper's and Fukuyama's concepts of identity and the sense of belonging to a nation in order to show how Slovakia is a nation where people's identity is defined fairly vaguely preventing the people from feeling social cohesion and a responsibility towards each other as well as towards the nation itself.

The work draws from literature on the communist regime from a historical point of view. However, the most important part of the work is the excerpts from personal interviews with the Slovak intellectual elite. These people have various backgrounds ranging from sociology experts, philosophers, artists, to producers, former politicians and social activists. The interviews were conducted in an open matter. I did not ask each respondent the same question given that their areas of expertise differed greatly. I rather let them describe their experience of communism as well as their current perspective on Slovak society in connection to public space and the political climate. I chose these experts because they have all contributed to the public narrative about communism and they have collectively been making an effort to overcome the regime, write about it, understand it and move on from it. They have been trying to show the general public the importance of accepting that the Slovak population as a whole was responsible for the regime. They are the people who provide a mirror for society and who wish to educate the nation about its past and the need to advance towards the future.

Because of a lack of resources, the analysis on public space is limited to the capital city of Bratislava and to one monument in particular located in Dúbravka. During the investigation of public attitudes towards public space, the focus was a field observation during which passers-by were asked a series of questions about the monument in question, the monument of Gustáv Husák. This was done in order to develop a general idea of how present the narrative actually is. A large portion of the thesis has a narrative focus because I am talking about monuments which are a narrative tool that communicate history. I only asked a handful of people but it was still enough to recognize a pattern in their answers.

There have been studies conducted in Slovakia specifically connected to the level of ambivalence measured by how important or unimportant the events tied to the fall of

communism were considered to be on a Likert scale (rating scale used to measure opinions, attitudes or behaviors). Most of these studies were conducted by the Institute for Public Affairs. One of the publications is *Slovensko po troch desaťročiach slobody: Demokracia, verejná mienka, občianska spoločnosť* (Slovakia after three decades of freedom: Democracy, public opinion, civil society, 2021) co-written by Zora Bútorová, Grigorij Mesežnikov, and Boris Strečanský. I use some of the results from these studies as a reference point for my own research and for personal understanding as to how communism influenced Slovak identity.

The validity of this work stems from the careful conceptualization of key phenomena including forgetting, collective memory, and identity. Furthermore, the work holds validity given the consulting with experts in the field who were interviewed for a more in depth understanding. I chose to conduct interviews with experts in fields such as sociology, cinematography, art, philosophy and even politics in order to get a better idea of what the regime really represented for the ordinary people and for a more accurate portrayal of the situation in Slovakia, given that the educational system did not provide the general public with an in-depth understanding of the former regime. The interviewees in the other hand have extensive knowledge of the regime itself and they know how to tie it back to the prevalence of social roles in Slovak society because they have experienced communism first-hand and have fought to dismantle its oppressive nature. They have also co-written and published numerous research papers and studies related to this particular topic, so their insight could be extremely informative. Furthermore, they are considered to be individuals who have contributed to narrative formation within Slovak society and have made an effort to push Slovak society forward and come to terms with its past. Once the interviews were conducted, I chose passages that best captured the situation during communism in Slovakia and described people's behavior throughout the time of normalization, the fall of the regime and the period after the regime.

The limitations of this work are numerous. The sample of people questioned for gaining a better understanding about public attitudes towards public space was not representative because it was too small. However, it was completely random allowing for a more varied assortment of people. The focus was only on the capital city which is not an accurate depiction of overall attitudes in the state. The capital is an outlier

compared to other smaller towns and rural areas. It would have been quite useful to do an experiment in which people in the country would have been informed about a monument being removed and then asked to respond to the event. That way it would be possible to analyze how people truly feel about changing public space. Therefore, future research could focus on conducting experiments where the researchers would tell respondents that a certain communist monument is being taken down after which they would ask them a series of questions related to how they feel about the decision and whether they are even aware of the monuments relevance in public space.

Analyzing news articles that reported on communist monuments being taken down or damaged are also a useful tool for understanding how people feel about the regime and how prevalent the sentimentality towards communism still is among the general population. Some of the news reports were indicative of people's behavior and connection to the regime. The article titled "Pozostatky komunizmu v uliciach: Výtvarníka žalujú za poškodenie sochy" (Remnants of communism in the streets: they are suing the artist for damages done) published by Topky.sk had a whole comment section filled with hateful comments about Peter Kalmus' actions when he took down the hammers and sickles on a communist monument in Košice (Topky.sk, 2017). Another article published by Denník N mentions the red paint poured on the statue of Vasil' Biľak (Mikušovič, 2015) and another where the Slovak National Gallery reprimanded vandals for pouring red paint on a statue of Stalin positioned right outside the gallery (SITA, 2012).

These news reports bring light to the number of monuments still present in public space which represent an oppressive regime and this way formulate a certain narrative about that regime. These monuments communicate to the public that communism is still a live part of the present as its symbols are displayed in public space for everybody to see. However, people do not tend to notice these monuments until they are mentioned in the media which shows exactly how disinterested they are in processing their past, overcoming the memory of the oppressive regime and moving on towards new political and social paths.

## CHAPTER 1: Historical context of Slovakia and development of parochial political culture

### 1.1 A nation without agency or empowerment

Slovakia's historical development says a lot about its current political culture and status among other satellite states that were stricken by communism after WWII. The reason why communism took a different, less aggressive path in Slovakia stems from historical path dependence of the nation. From a political and geographical perspective, Slovakia was often considered the little guy within the Central European context. The nation was always under the reign of other empires and regimes which influenced the consequent process of liberation and becoming an independent state as well as the people's level of empowerment. Due to the historical context, the forced submission to other larger empires, the Slovak people did not have much of an opportunity to gain power over their own legacy and thus became a nation where parochial political culture was a dominant force.

What the historical narratives predominantly focus on is Slovakia's position in the region and its relations with other nations which between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries all belonged to larger empires. However, the interpretations about the nation are a matter of contemporary times. Before the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Slovakia as a concept did not exist and an identity of the Slovak people, at least not among the general public. There was no idea of ethnicity or nationness in terms of a unified language, cultural norms, and laws. The idea of agency, representation, and language was still in the very early stages of development. Only later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did the idea of nationality and independence start gaining some recognition. At first the idea of nationalism was heavily avoided in older literature and when speaking about nationalism it was closely connected to an idea of "nationality, national emancipation, and a national liberation movement" (Kováč, 2003, p. 263) rather than on gaining recognition for a community of people through language, culture and social norms. Nevertheless, the term nationalism itself led to perceiving the Slovak national movement as something "isolated, strange and typically Slovak (Kováč, 2003, p. 263).



The struggle for recognition as an independent state was one of the key reasons behind Slovakia's lack of empowerment in the later formative years of the nation. During the reign of the Habsburg monarchy, Slovakia endured forced Magyarization. This period marked the elimination of the Slovak language, together with any other form of national expression, like Slovak schooling (Emmert, 2018). Thus, the idea of being Slovak was once again forced into the background.

After the fall of the Habsburg Empire, Slovakia, and Czechia merged into one nation (Kováč, 1998). Czechoslovakia was a strong concept that enriched Slovak culture, its political standing, and its recognition on a global scale. The Czechs and Slovaks had a good foundation for a functional state which quickly disintegrated once Adolf Hitler came to power and forced thousands of Czechs and Slovaks out of their territory for the purpose of creating more land for the Germans (Emmert, 2018). During the Second World War, Hitler gave Jozef Tiso, the president of Slovakia during the interwar period, an ultimatum that would decide the fate of the nation (Kováč, 1998). Tiso chose to create a Slovak Republic, which, however, would be subdued by Hitler's Germany completely. Slovakia thus became a fascist state which supported the mass deportation of Slovak Jews and Roma people. This was yet another formative moment for Slovakia, one where the nation could embark upon the journey to democracy but unfortunately, the power of submission took over.

Towards the end of WWII, Slovakia could not pursue the vision of independence because the USSR emerged as a superpower and expanded its sphere of influence across Central and Eastern Europe. Although a power struggle between two ideologies emerged – “the democratic ideology represented by the Democratic Party and the totalitarian ideology represented by the Slovak communists” (Sokolovič et al, 2015, p. 6), in the end, the communists showed greater strength. The Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ) won a majority in the 1946 elections and became a dictatorship by 1948 (Lukeš, 2009, p.13).

This marked a significant moment in history because it meant that Czechoslovakia would not have a free election for the next forty years. Due to the manipulative nature of the communist takeover, it was obvious for Czechoslovakia that taking responsibility for the nation's own historical trajectory would become a problem. The lack of proper

agency or sense of empowerment in the political and social sphere shows why Czechoslovakia, but mainly Slovakia stagnates in its political culture and remains susceptible to manipulation and submission.

As former member of the Slovak Parliament František Mikloško stated in a personal interview that, “Slovakia allows itself to be ruled by the same power-hungry people because it’s the mentality of the state which hasn’t learned how to rule and its rather submissive. A submissive state that just wants to survive somehow, it only thinks of itself and its family. At the moment, there’s a strong wave of pragmatism hanging over the state and preventing people from finding personal ideals and values” (personal interview, 2023). Furthermore, he mentioned in another interview that Slovakia is missing people in the political sphere, as well as other spheres who would represent a new vision for the country. “They [the people] are missing everywhere, in Christian circles, in the civic sphere, and even on academic grounds. We have plenty of specialists but not many integral personalities” (TASR, 2022).

CHAPTER 2: Communism, its trajectory and legacy for Slovak society

2.1 Communism

When it comes to the definition of the communist regime, perhaps the most accurate for this work is the one given by Václav Havel in his *The power of the powerless*: “Our system is most often characterized as a dictatorship, namely the dictatorship of a political bureaucracy over a leveled society. I am afraid that this label itself - however understandable otherwise - rather obscures the true nature of power in this [Soviet] system, than illuminates it” (Havel, 1979, p.12). Havel realizes that the notion of communism in the Eastern and Central European context carries a different definition than an oppressive regime. He argues that the regime is “not locally limited, but instead reigns throughout the vast power bloc...even if it naturally has its diverse period and local peculiarities, their scope is fundamentally limited by the framework of what unites it on the entire surface of the power block: not only is it everywhere based on the same principles and structured in the same...it is permeated through and through with the network of manipulative tools of the superpower center and totally subordinated to its interests” (p.12). Within the Czechoslovak context, Havel gives an analogy of what the regime represents by describing the actions of a local greengrocer.

“I, the greengrocer XY, am here and I know what I should do; I behave as is expected of me; I can be relied upon and I cannot be blamed; I am obedient and therefore I have the right for a peaceful life. This message naturally has its addressee: it is directed ‘upwards’, to the greengrocer's superiors, and it is also a shield with which the greengrocer covers himself from possible denunciators” (Havel, 1979, p.16).

This serves as a prelude to the vastly complex time period that swept across the Eastern Bloc between 1948 and 1989 and yet, The nuanced situation that ordinary citizens experienced during communism in many cases remains a memory that people wish to relive.

## 2.2 Communism experienced by the people

The time of communism is remembered quite differently in Slovakia than it is in other satellite states especially because in Slovakia, communism marked the time of rapid economic, industrial, and social development. The “modernization processes in Slovakia accelerated in the second half of the twentieth century, characterized by a rapid drain of people out of the agricultural sector and rapid industrialization” (Marušiak, 2021). People felt a sense of agency because they had jobs and were more equal in their community. Some individuals from the field observation conducted for this thesis perceive the era of communism as something unfinished, perhaps an era that should come back as many remember those times fondly, referring to it as:

“A magical time. There was security in everything. People knew exactly what was going to happen the next day, the next month and even next year. People were even nicer to each other because they didn’t perceive each other as competition. We didn’t have a bad life then” (Excerpt from field observation, female 64).

Others said that:

“We were equals in society. There weren’t any fancy brands that people would fight over. Salaries were almost the same among all. People were more open towards each other” (Excerpt from field observation, male 58).

The state ensured that the people would be taken care of, and people felt a certain stability despite not having personal freedom. It almost seems like the sense of security overpowered the need for freedom. Naturally, there was still heavy influence coming from the Czech Republic as many people traveled to Slovakia for work. Thus, Slovakia as a nation was still struggling to maintain its own idea of identity. Nevertheless, the way communism was being embedded in the minds of the Slovak people was more positive compared to the rest of the Eastern Bloc because the people were far more ambivalent towards the events happening under their noses.

The difference between Slovakia and the Czech Republic were possibly the most prominent since “the darkest years for the Czechs (1938-45 and post-1968) were the

two occasions during which the Slovaks underwent periods of rapid nation-building and experienced moments of national optimism” (Lukeš, Cultural Survival, 2010). Although the two nations were considered one, their experiences made their relationship quite fragile in the upcoming years as the Soviet Union fell apart.

During the time of normalization, the communist regimes in the Soviet satellite states all followed the same pattern of political rule based on “absolute power of the communist party and the secret police” (Šimečka, 2017, p.9). They even utilized the same ideological language which included terms such as “the proletarian dictatorship, democratic centralism, social realism and real socialism” (p.9). Nevertheless, these regimes differed from each other because individual states had their own histories and behavioral characteristics based on the past experiences. Given that Slovakia endured decades of being the underdog and staying in line with what bigger states and more powerful authorities said, the experience of communism bared a very similar trajectory despite the country being part of Czechoslovakia. It all comes back to the historical context which shows that Slovakia was a young and small agrarian state. Firstly, Slovaks obeyed the instructions of the communists because unlike the Czechs, they were more thankful for communism bringing significant modernization to the country. Secondly, the Slovak communists knew that the only way they could protect the small state was to protect the small elite which in turn had to promise the communist regime obedience (Šimečka, 2017, p. 11).

This was not so difficult for the Slovak population because their obedience granted them many benefits, of which the most important was safety. Obedience granted the people access to employment, their children were guaranteed a good education, and those who represented the regime were granted a high status in society. Zora Bútorová gave an example of how the system worked when she said:

The benefit was that people could carry on doing their jobs. My mother and aunt were translators, who translated amazing Russian literature into Slovak. My mother didn't hand in her legitimization which took form in a Communist Party ID; she did what most of the others did. The committee did a background check, and my mother could continue to translate quality literature. My aunt, on the other hand, was banned from translating when she refused to comply to the rules

of the Communists and when they imprisoned her husband. And then the only thing she could do was translate under my mother's name and the names of other translators. (Zora Bútorová, personal interview, 2022)

It seems that those who wanted to survive had to perceive the regime as a grey area. If they wanted to be well off, do what they love, and remain safe, they conformed with the communist dictate. Naturally, the decision to go along with the regime was difficult, but not impossible to respect as it secured people's lives. Even today, many people remember the regime with rosy retrospection. They remember the past more positively than the present because they think they were happier then and this brings them together. It is a collective memory for them, the time they knew they would be taken care of. Communism had a strong influence over people then and it still has an influence over how people remember their past today.

The communists were able to legitimize their power through dominant discourse. Because of how the system was set out, what was said publicly by those in power was universal. Prior to 1989, the history of totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia stressed "coercion at the cost of consent as the foundation of dictatorial regimes" (Kolář & Kopeček 2007, p. 220). All the historical reports focused on describing the people of the regime as victims and the victims themselves perceived themselves as such. The Czechs' use of the word *totalita* "is understood as implying that Communist Party members and Secret Police collaborators were all guilty, and the rest of us were all innocent victims" (Blaive, 2013, p.77). It is important to distinguish the word totalitarianism from the word "totalita" as the latter is used by those who existed under the communist regime, not any other tyrannical or totalitarian political system. However, in contemporary history, the two words are used interchangeably even though *totalita* "has little in common with Hannah Arendt's theory...especially as regards the population's participation in the domination scheme" (Blaive, 2013, 78). This goes to show that using the word *totalita* is in support of people under the rule of communism not taking responsibility for their own actions and blaming the regime itself. It was easier to blame the communist regime for interjecting in the Czech efforts to pursue a "national democratic identity" than to claim that communism was a very concrete part of Czech and Slovak history (Kolář & Kopeček 2007, p. 176). However, this is a gross simplification of the problem as a division of people into perpetrators and victims is

inaccurate in all periods of communism whether that was the Stalinist, post-Stalinist era, the Prague Spring or normalization.

## CHAPTER 3: Identity formation and communism's influence on identity development

### 3.1 Identity

The current state of research related to identity formation as a sub-category of memory formation as well as its connection to the use of public space focuses on how past events are communicated throughout history and formed into common narratives which are then reflected in objects such as monuments, symbols, and literature (Assman, 1995). Most of the literature focused on collective memory shows that identity is emphasized by the importance of shared memories and unified images of the past. For the sake of this thesis, the focus is primarily on the relationship between identity and memory formation and the subsequent influence they have on each other. The concept of identity bears the following definition: “groups who conceive their unity and peculiarity through a common image of their past” (Assman, 1995, p.127).

By sharing certain knowledge through cultural memory, people create unity and identify with each other while also being able to differentiate from those who do not share the same experiences (Assman, 1995, p.127). This allows them to create close ties and develop a shared history, and subsequently a common identity. However, the important thing that the literature shows is that constructing or reconstructing memory can only occur if it is related to knowledge of “an actual and contemporary situation” (Assman, 1995, p.130). What people go through in actual time can be related or compared to past events that resemble the present. The research conducted up to this point makes many claims about how collective memory is communicated through public space. Furthermore, the prominent theme within the literature also shows that public space can be misused and abused by politicians for their own agenda and for the purpose of changing historical and social narrative in their favor. However, all of these perceptions of individual narratives, past events and memories all depend on the people who live and remember them, as they are the ones for whom the public space was intended, thus the dependence stems from the question of national identity.

### 3.2 Perception of the Past as Extension of Identity

The perception of the past and the responsibility people hold for its reality seems to relate very closely to people's identity and culture. For some, the past is a concept that



should be deviated from, as it serves to teach people lessons and learn from them in order to avoid mistakes in the future. For others, the past serves as a memory fondly kept and cherished. Of course, these two options also depend on what the past memory is. In some cases, the memory is a tragic event and people simply wish to move on from it. In other cases, the memory might bring back the idea of glory days or a time when people felt they had what they needed thus, they desire to relive it. Nevertheless, the amount and detail people remember directly relates to the narrative of the memory. As many psycho-analysts and psychotherapists have shown in the past, traumatic events often lead individuals to forgetting the event or at least forcefully keeping it away from resurfacing in their minds (Kolk, 2015). Because of this phenomenon, it is difficult to plot the exact timelines and series of events of trauma which can be anything from personal loss, to abusive relationships or manipulation.

However here the question lies more in the idea of the collective. Collective trauma is “the psychological reactions to a traumatic event that affect an entire society. It suggests that the tragedy is represented in the collective memory of the group, and like all forms of memory it comprises not only a reproduction of the events, but also an ongoing reconstruction of the trauma in an attempt to make sense of it” (Hirschberger, 2018, p.1). This trauma then transforms into a collective memory reported as a collective narrative. It is quite important for a democratic nation to create this narrative of trauma, acknowledge its presence in that particular society and understand how it influences its people in order to achieve stronger social cohesion and a more powerful societal bond (Hirschberger, 2018). In Slovakia this narrative of collective trauma did not come to fruition ultimately causing problems in the development of democratic ideals and strong social cohesion.

### 3.3 Communism’s Influence on Identity Development

The former Eastern bloc was not as convinced about the end of communism or the post-communist ideology for that matter. “The development of sites, institutions and processes devoted to remembering, commemorating and working through the Communist past, such as Institutes of National Memory, History Commissions, lustration bureaus, museums and commemorative memorials, were regarded by some elites as fundamental to the democratic re-education of post-communist societies”

(Mark, 2010, p. xii). Central-Eastern European countries which have overcome the communist regime and celebrated its downfall in the years 1989-1991 cannot all say they have come to terms with the collapse. The fascinating phenomenon behind this is precisely that the inability to overcome the legacy of communism prohibits these nations from developing into liberal democracy. This shows that Central and Eastern European countries that have not yet overcome communist nostalgia and sentimentality are de facto not legitimate liberal democracies. This also indicates a lot about the countries' identities.

Slovakia is taking some steps towards becoming a liberal democracy but is still leaning more towards a concept of hyperdemocracy – “a phenomenon caused both by the cultural backlash against globalization, as well as the local historical legacy of *uncare* and exclusivism that forms part of Central European national identities” (Kusá, 2021). Slovakia is quite a diverse country in its differentiation of political and social groups thus; this may be another valid reason for the people's inability to define their identity while also leaning more towards bonding over a shared past. There is a certain cognitive dissonance because those people who felt they had a great life during the regime were victims of totalitarianism. Nevertheless, they claimed that times were easier and more stable. However, as Zuzana Mistríková points out in her interview, the regime led to a “continuous dumbing down of the public and the public space which is preventing us from changing” (personal interview, 2023). Instead of realizing what was really going on, it was easier to just let others handle a situation.

On the other hand, people knew what to expect and had a lot more security in their job, housing, and support from the state. As sociologist Zora Bútorová claims, people were taken care of as the state owned everything. Thus, nobody felt they had to compete with their friends or neighbors. Essentially, people felt more equal to each other (Bútorová, 2019).

Additionally, the fact that the regime allowed for some people to rise through the ranks and gain higher status led them to gain a certain level of dignity. As Francis Fukuyama emphasizes in his work on identity, the idea of dignity is closely tied to the role of the state towards the people and making them feel recognized and appreciated.

In the first place, identity so understood grows out of a distinction between one's true inner self and an outer world of social rules and norms that does not adequately recognize that inner self's worth or dignity. Individuals throughout human history have found themselves at odds with their societies. But only in modern times has the view taken hold that the authentic inner self is intrinsically valuable, and the outer society is systematically wrong and unfair in its valuation of the former. It is not the inner self that has to be made to conform to society's rules, but society itself that needs to change (Fukuyama, 2018, p.18).

Furthermore, Fukuyama stipulates that "because human beings naturally crave recognition, the modern sense of identity evolves quickly into identity politics, in which individuals demand public recognition of their worth" (Fukuyama, 2018, p.18). Not only is recognition a key aspect, but so is collective or national dignity. On one side it is tied to the idea of human rights while on the other it connects to the concept of nationalism. In Slovakia, nationalism ties more closely in with collective dignity while the idea of human rights came as an external factor which the nation did not fight for as an entity, but more-so adopted from other models.

In addition to dignity, the communist regime emphasized identity through the concept of "groups" or collective action (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). This is understood as "commonality, connectedness and groupness" of one community in which people share similar characteristics and partake in the same behavior or actions (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Slovakia during the communist regime fits quite well into this definition as the majority of the population partook in the same behavior and shared similar attributes related to their attitude towards the regime, their education and employment. However, another characteristic that bonded them was in fact the experience of the regime itself. Naturally, the citizens did differentiate in their behavior depending on how much they wished to gain from the regime. There were people who took direct part in reinforcing the regime and others who wished to survive without losing their job, family members, or status in society. The unfortunate aspect of communism was that all of these activities made people an active participator in the regime. The former Minister of Culture of Slovakia, Ladislav Snopko defined life during communism as more of a position of "unofficial culture, a grey zone or an alternative" ...The unofficial could be something

free. Here, people who didn't agree with the regime functioned in spite of totalitarianism" (Slovensky Disent, 2022, 1:27).

### 3.4 Identity Development Based on a Typology of Social Roles

Since the communist regime in Slovakia was and still is perceived differently compared to other satellite states, with more ambivalence and perhaps even appreciation, it is important to identify the social roles that emerged because of this approach to the past. The majority of Slovaks are considered bystanders and beneficiaries of the communist oppression. However, what these social roles entail and how they are developed needs to be explained more in depth.

Any group that endures a totalitarian regime is bound to develop their identity based on said experience, which in this case could be interpreted for some individuals as traumatic. Raul Hilberg first proposed in 1992 three typologies for classifying participants and observers of genocide. There were the perpetrators, the victims, and the bystanders (Hilberg, 1992). However, the typology was met with some criticism mainly due to its vagueness and lack of precise classification as people's behaviors and participatory behaviors during genocide varied, so they likely belonged under more than one of the social roles. That is why two other classifications were added—helpers and beneficiaries. Later Sharlene Swartz proposed another two categories to broaden the classification. According to her typology, there are perpetrators, victims, bystanders, resisters, and beneficiaries. This classification is based on the South African context as Swartz did her research with survivors of the regime but it's a concept of social roles that can be adopted by anybody, even those who did not experience an oppressive regime firsthand. In those cases, the legacy of the regime carries on through family heritage and spoken experiences. In other words, the memory transfers from one generation onto another.

The first category, the perpetrators are those who directly committed an "illegal, criminal, violent, or evil act" (Swartz, 2016, p.152). In the context of Slovakia, these would be individuals who directly participated in the enforcing of communist policies, agendas, and who gave orders to authorities that surveilled citizens. These would be mainly the members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party between 1948 and 1989.

Then there were the indirect perpetrators, which Swartz refers to as the implementers of injustice. These were the people taking orders from direct perpetrators to carry out illegal, criminal and violent actions, but also individuals who chose to collaborate with the police, and inform on their fellow citizens. Including soldiers, the police and members of the secret police, Štátna Bezpečnosť, this group would also include ordinary citizens who did not want to fall to the regime, so they became the regime.

The victim category is complicated in the sense that the word itself carries a heavy and negative connotation. Nobody likes to be called a victim, so, in some cases “the term survivor is preferred to the term victim, in order to remove this [blame the victim] association” (Swartz, 2016, p. 153). These group members are further categorized as leaders, resisters, survivors, and collaborators who went along with the actions of the communist perpetrators. This is why it is important to keep in mind that this typology is a range and the categories overlap. The most accurate definition for this group seems to be the dishonored, because these are people who were treated unjustly, their dignity was violated, and they did not receive respect or equal treatment from the regime (Swartz, 2016, p. 154). Understanding these classifications is paramount for people who are trying to come to terms with a traumatic past and who want to understand their familial and cultural heritage. It is not just an academic exercise but in fact a very effective tool used to work with memory and identity formation.

In Slovakia, those who would be referred to as the dishonored were people who were fired from their employment, their children were thrown out of schools and their reputation in society suffered because they were Christians or non-communist sympathizers. They allowed the regime to rule them and did not fight back. “This dishonor extends across generations as children inherit the physical impoverishment of their parents, missed opportunities due to poor quality education, and low levels of social and cultural capital” (p. 154). The interesting aspect of this category is that most of these people could also be considered as harmed or damaged but the same goes for the perpetrators in cases where their involvement was forced.

Those labeled as bystanders, according to Hilberg, are the people who often feel too powerless or insignificant to say something when they witnessed a crime or violent act being committed thus, they say nothing instead. They are silent or avoid the conflict at

all. Swartz refers to these people as ostriches because it is as if they are burying their heads in the sand “to avoid what is going on around them” (p. 154).

Unlike the victims, the resisters are those who implicated an active participation in going against the regime. They made the effort to show that they are more than the regime and that they want to see change. In Czechoslovakia, these would be the dissidents, vocal critics of the regime and those who followed them, like students who organized protests explicitly disagreed with how they were taught in schools. These people became the faces of the 1989 Velvet Revolution, those who took part in the protests of 1969 after the Prague Spring, and the Candle Demonstration in Bratislava in 1988. These were people who wanted to show that communism was actively going against human rights and democratic values.

Lastly, there are the beneficiaries who often arise late during the time of struggle or after an oppressive regime or genocide has occurred. These are the people who received undeserved wealth in the form of high status, property, good education and strategic employment. They also receive “unearned privilege and a baseless sense of superiority” (p. 156). Beneficiaries during communism did not have to lift a finger to get where they or their children are today, because they literally benefited from doing nothing. They did not get imprisoned, they did not perpetrate crimes, and most importantly, they remained “ignorant or did not care to know from where your property, wealth, job and education came” (p. 156). In many cases, the beneficiaries are more present today than active resisters, victims or perpetrators because they tend to be the children of the other categories already mentioned. They may enjoy the riches that the previous generations were able to accumulate by being part of the regime and gaining more for themselves. These people may have nice apartments and other property that they otherwise would not be able to afford today. They may have also received a high level of education which in turn allowed them to reach high ranking positions in their employment.

In the case of Slovakia, sociologist Zora Bútorová claims that many people fall into the category of bystanders or beneficiaries of the regime. The bystander’s category was a curious phenomenon as she stated:

“In the sense that they often saw and realized the unfairness and illegality of the regime. This could be tied to the work environment. It was publicly known that people who had communist party affiliations or were part of the party, and those who didn’t disparage the top representatives had better professional careers. Others would just stand by when the head of a company would choose an unskilled engineer over somebody who really had the qualifications only because they didn’t fulfill the criteria I mentioned. So, the bystanders just observed from the side-lines” (Zora Bútorová, personal interview, 2022)

She further delved into the definition of the beneficiaries:

“But the bystanders and beneficiaries often go hand in hand because when you keep your mouth shut and follow along, you don’t have problems. If you choose to exist peacefully in the system then you get the profit from the fact that you can lead an ordinary, predictable life without making a lot of noise. The benefit is that you won’t get into trouble. If you work for a socialist company, you will get the vacation, your children will go to good schools and so on. You reap the benefits from the fact that you don’t complicate your life, thus you’re a bystander as well as a beneficiary” (Zora Bútorová, personal interview, 2022).

Furthermore, she spoke about the idea of taking responsibility for the course of the regime, or in other words, she specified why responsibility was a grey area and the perpetrators were not eager to admit to their wrongdoings:

“But these people didn’t have a tendency to disclaim that they are the perpetrators and think they are doing evil things. Rather, they felt as people who also didn’t have much of a choice and in a way felt like victims because they could say: “if I were a doctor in Austria or Western Germany, I wouldn’t have to carry out these bad things”. So, if we were to apply this behavior to the political sphere, the typical thing was for political functionaries to claim, “It’s not us, but we have to do it”. It was more about the level of responsibility people were willing to take. Of course, the moment a person would choose to say “I am the perpetrator”, they would have to move away from the belief that they were coerced into doing something bad” (Zora Bútorová, personal interview, 2022).

Knowing how these social roles are defined and how people adopt them in the context of experiencing an oppressive regime leads to a much clearer understanding of why a population with prevalent bystander and beneficiary roles like Slovakia is stagnating in the present and is unable to overcome the past. These roles are not very easy to shed especially when many people do not even realize they are labeled as beneficiaries or bystanders. The trend in Slovakia unfortunately shows that precisely because people adopted these social roles, they are ashamed to claim that they actively participated in the regime and thus, should take responsibility for it in order to put the past behind them and move on. Of course, this phenomenon extends to public space – due to the public's unchanging attitude about their responsibility for the regime, there is no reason for them to change their attitudes towards public place vis-à-vis changing it.



## CHAPTER 4: Transferring Memories and Social Roles onto Future Generations

### 4.1 Transferring Formed Identities onto Future Generations

At the breaking point or generational divide, it becomes difficult to define the correct means of dealing with the past. As James Booth (1999) states in his article, “sameness of the country across time is grounded in its institutional and constitutional-normative continuity. Regime forms that break with that continuity also thereby cease to be “ours.” They are not part of what “we” were and so are not the objects of public remembrance, of our collective memory of ourselves as we were... Most fundamentally, because we are not one with the perpetrators, because we do not share with them a political identity, we are not accountable for their injustices” (p. 250). Thus, when scholars speak about collective identity, we have to keep in mind that even the authoritarian regimes which had control are part of a state’s continuous political identity, so the memory of their actions cannot simply be thrown onto them but remembered as a part of a state’s past and its identity.

Naturally, states move on from one political regime to another, and such political regime also carry their own political identity. However, this political identity spans over other dimensions including one that is territorial, ethnic, and one that is constitutional. While all three have an influence over the level or responsibility a new regime has for the past, in the case of Slovakia, the focus can be shifted more towards the constitutional dimension. The Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic stipulates under article 125, section 7 that any symbol or representation of communism which celebrates or further propagates the regime and is displayed in public spaces is illegal:

"It is prohibited to place texts, images and symbols glorifying, promoting or defending a regime based on communist ideology or its representatives on monuments, memorials and plaques" (Act no. 125, s. 7, 2020).

In addition, the 2005 Criminal Code penalizes the support of parties and movements aimed at supporting fundamental rights and freedoms (Blaščák, 2017). The legislature in Slovakia suggests that the current regime has taken responsibility for actions which transpired during the past. Some would argue that staying in the same “territorial and

ethnic range indicates that a political identity is still the same even when a new regime ensues, thus making that regime responsible for the past that has occurred in the region” (Booth, 1999). However, others would argue that once a regime adopts a “new constitutional framework and the people who previously adopted one political identity now have a new political framework are not responsible for the past” (Booth, 1999).

Here is where Slovakia becomes a unique case, because it seems to follow both premises. On the one hand, the legislative framework indicates that the state feels responsible for the past deeds of the communist regime. However, on the other hand, it seems that people who still identify with the past regime disregard past events, forget the crimes that have been committed, and go as far as wishing for the regime’s return. Zuzana Mistríková pointed out in her interview that. “We have never come to terms with our past. The people who and still are in power are dragging Slovakia back to the Middle Ages. They [those who held power] made sure to get rid of the Czechs, the Jews, and the Hungarians and claimed it was for the good of the Slovak people. And when the new generations came around with a drive to change the social and political state of the country, they were prevented from doing so by the old generation of power-hungry individuals” (Zuzana Mistríková, personal interview 2023).

This suggests she believes that the memory of the past regime has heavily influenced the general view on politics within Slovakia. People believe they have no say in what goes on with their lives and thus lose agency. They do not have the motivation to change the political state and thus, they do not have the drive to change public space either.

Perhaps the ideal situation would be one where the political community a country is centered in is treated as a continuous phenomenon which goes through various stages, but is still the “subject of attribution, responsible for the past, which belongs to it, and accountable for a future that is also its” (Booth, 1999, p. 249). For Slovakia the questions remains whether the feeling of responsibility for the past will be introduced to the people and in the end, how it will be reflected in the use of public space.

For that to happen, it is important to understand that people behave and say certain things depending on what group of people they are surrounded by (i.e., superiors, equals, subordinates). Therefore, it is crucial to understand certain hidden and public

transcripts that decode and analyze the reason behind public defiance and resistance to domination. It is important to mention that even though the communist regime was authoritarian in nature and often threatened people with force or resorting to force, the representatives of the regime “maintained social peace over several decades” (Blaive, 2013, 75). People were, in a sense, willing to collaborate or accommodate the regime (Blaive, 2013).

Nevertheless, people were collaborating on a daily basis with the secret police (ŠtB) and denouncing their own neighbors in order to keep themselves safe and gain more by secretly surveilling those around them (Blaive, 2013). They adapted to what James Scott coined public transcript and negotiated with the authorities to get what they wanted if they conformed to the regime. In a sense, these people were no longer a mere part of the system because they had become pillars on which the system could function. They were simply becoming the regime (Scott, 1990). This made existence for regular people all the more complicated, because it was no longer about oppression from above like from the police or militia. Oppression became a practice among the people themselves as they spied and denounced each other for the sake of saving themselves and their family interests. These ordinary people were simply policing each other (Blaive, 2013). This likely had a strong impact on people’s psychology as they were stuck between existing as a collaborator and a resistor at the same time.

It doesn’t only apply to the older generation which has the past rooted inside them due to the lived experiences, but also the following generations which to a certain extent also received a mark from socialism—whether that was through intentional passing of information in the family and community or even as a result of avoiding this topic and leaving an open space for people interpreting or better yet misinterpreting the myths about socialism. (Bútorová, 2019)

## CHAPTER 5: Social Response to Public Space

### 5.1 Identity Shaping Through Public Space

Many scholars have delved into the topic of public space, its underlying meaning for history, culture and politics, and its implications for memory building. Public space can be utilized for political interest and manipulation of public narrative as is the case in many authoritarian and illiberal states. Political leaders will utilize public space to alter and manipulate public memory in order to further their own agenda (Forest & Johnson, 2011). By building monuments and memorials which represent their own ideologies, they are able to plant that same ideology in the public eye. It is a way for them to “gain symbolic capital—the prestige, legitimacy, and influence derived from being associated with status-bearing ideas and figures” (Forest & Johnson, 2011). It is firmly established that political figures will use the idea of forming monuments in order to gain control over the political and cultural narrative and subsequently shape national identity. However, it is also important to examine this phenomenon from the other side of the coin – national identity can also be the driving force of monument building and remembrance through the use of public space. As Jeffrey Alexander (2004) has stated, “monuments, museums and memorials are attempts to make statements and affirmations [to create] a materiality with a political, collective, public meaning [and] a physical reminder of a conflictive political past” (p. 5-7). Thus, bringing up the notion of monument removal could be seen as an effort of erasing the past.

Erasing history by forceful removal is like trying to create a different history simultaneously. It is best “exemplified by the Soviet practice of airbrushing figures out of photographs when they fell from the Party’s favor. It is a top-down, imposed forgetting that serves the interests of the state or a narrow group. This type of forgetting can never be acknowledged – it relies on and enforces silence and conformity” (Forest & Johnson, 2018). There is a clear correlation drawn from these examples and that is that authoritative states are far more susceptible to such forced erasure and change of narrative. On the other hand, states functioning as a partial democracy or actual democracy are more transparent in regard to the use of public space. “The more democratic the state, the more private as opposed to official activity takes place. But second, these differences among regime types appear to be driven almost completely

by differences in material action (monument creation and alteration) rather than discursive action (proposals to build monuments or threats to change or remove them)” (Forest & Johnson, 2011). This means that proper functioning democracies are more likely to utilize public space for remembrance through building up monuments, whereas, hybrid regimes often remain in the discursive sphere, merely speaking about the possibility of building up monuments. It seems that in Slovakia there is another angle which does not receive much attention. The discursive actions often are kept to a minimum. In other words, people do not tend to talk about monuments until it comes to a point where a monument might be taken down. In addition, this conversation tends to take a turn towards negative feedback and reluctance from the side of the people who are not familiarized with the idea of taking down monuments from the communist era.

Today we see that conceptual artists are being sentenced for vandalizing monuments that represented communist individuals but in other cases, the public does not pay much attention to how public space is changed and whether monuments are removed or moved to other places.

The work of Peter Kalmus contrasts well with the ambivalence and ignorance towards public space expresses throughout Slovak society. His work is considered highly controversial in the Slovak context. He has been charged with several crimes and accused of vandalism of public space. In one case against him which took place in Košice, Kalmus was sentenced to four months in jail. The judge in charge of his case was basing the verdict on the statement of a member of the Communist Party as Kalmus stated (Kern, 2017). According to Kalmus, the statements were false, but in a second case where he was sentenced to two month in jail he did admit to throwing red paint on the statue of Vasil' Biľak. He argued that displaying communist symbols in public space sends a message to the public that people want to keep the memory of the past regime alive, even though it should not be.

His destruction of communist symbolism in public space is not very well received by the public itself. Many people dismiss his protesting against the regime, because they label it as vandalism which is in fact the interesting aspect. A regime that has been labeled as criminal is more excusable than the actions of an individual who is trying to comment on how society has excused the criminal actions of that precise regime.

The lack of response in favor of Kalmus and the dismissive comments about his critique of the regime are both clear indicators of how misled the Slovak public has been. It shows that people are not prepared to face the reality of what communism meant for the country's societal and political development. There is no real social cohesion in society that would force Slovak people to admit that the majority of them benefited from the regime. Not admitting to and not taking responsibility for the regime means people are actively reinforcing its power over society. Furthermore, lacking an environment in which the discourse would lead to constructive solutions about Slovakia's past is yet another reason why prominent artists and activists like Kalmus are trying to get their message across.

Kalmus has spent decades trying to change the public discourse through public space. In August of 1968 when the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia, Kalmus and his father put up a gibbet with a dead chicken. Under it his father wrote: 'Radšej som si život vzala, ako by som Rusom vajcia srala...' which loosely translates to: 'I would rather take my own life, than lay eggs for the Russians' (Karáč, n.d.). Kalmus' life of activism represented a certain attitude towards the past regime. Through his active removal or destruction of communist monuments and symbolism in public space, Kalmus was trying to show the problematic nature of keeping the sentiment of communism alive through public space.

He has stated numerous times that these monuments need to be placed in a museum together with other memorabilia of communism. These monuments should be utilized for educational purposes which show that this was a period of history that should be kept in the past like any other oppressive regime. Public space is not a proper environment for remembrance of a dictatorial regime and its perpetrators because to the public it signals the idea that this regime was accepted and may even return. Most importantly, public space is then used for political purposes. As soon as something is discussed publicly, it becomes a concern for the politicians and the judiciary, even though it should not.

For Kalmus enduring communism instead of actively fighting it is the same as enforcing it. He claims that regimes like "communism with a human face or fascism with a human

face don't exist, those are all nonsense. There is either a free regime with all its complications and hardships, or there's dictatorship" (Peter Kalmus, 2023).

His continuing outspokenness about the need for removal of communist symbolism does not often go unnoticed. He in turn often shows how unfair the system is towards him and people like him. There are still many locations with communist symbolism displayed in public despite the State Constitution's article specifically banning such displays. When Kalmus and his friend reported this to the prosecutor's office, they did nothing.

"What else is one supposed to do? State institutions which are supposed to act under the law are ignoring state legislation. And we're supposed to call on them over and over again in order to avoid hurting somebody's feelings? Nonsense. We need to act, not cry to the media and social platforms" (Kalmus, interview for Dennik N, 2017).

The main result of our incapability to take responsibility for the past and process it properly has led to a permanent stagnation. "Any innovative idea is only enforced once it is no longer innovative". In general people "ride the wave of success of others and expect that change will be delivered by somebody else, not them because they lived without the need to take responsibility for anything that happened for forty years" (Zuzana Mistríková, personal interview 2023). The past regime has left people with a syndrome of irresponsibility. They began believing their actions do not carry consequences and that their agency is irrelevant to the political and social standing of Slovakia.

When asked what this says about what people have learned about the past regime, Mistríkova ties it back to the unchanging public space and political situation. She mentioned that till this day, the representatives from the secret police (ŠTB) still have their pensions and those who should have been removed a long time ago, like the current head of the SMER party, Robert Fico remain in position of power. She tied it well to the situation in the public space as well. She claimed "the monuments in public space are still a part of misinterpretation of Slovak history" (Zuzana Mistríková, personal interview 2023).

So, how should we understand it?

According to Ms. Mistríkova, we will never be able to overcome our past or even interpret it correctly if the public space stays the same because it keeps the old narrative alive and there are no new narratives being born. Because of this lack of reflection, Slovak society does not have an opportunity to process its history, move on and propose a better future (Zuzana Mistríková, personal interview 2023).

What do you think should change about the perception of public space?

She claims our public space currently serves the political parties that want to take Slovakia back in time, the parties that are enveloped by rosy retrospection and want to wake up the old sentiment in the generations that remember socialism. There are only a select few individuals who are trying to formulate a new narrative and be proactive about changing public space by physically bringing in something to contrast the communist monuments. Mistríkova claims it is not enough to complain about the unchanging nature of public space. People must bring in as much material and symbols that represent individuals who fought against communism into public space in order to balance out the controversial past. If we label communist monuments as ‘wrong’, we need to balance them out with the ‘right’ monuments and drive state institutions to carry on the discourse of change. Otherwise, there will never be a proper Slovak history and identity to adopt (Zuzana Mistríková, personal interview 2023).



## INTERVIEWS

All of the following people listed below are individuals who were chosen to speak on behalf of this topic as they have extensive knowledge within their field and provide an in-depth understanding of the regime as well as how it influenced the people. The excerpts here are only few since most of the answers given by the respondents are present throughout the work. This section serves just as a reminder about who these people are and what their qualifications say about their level of expertise.

### **Zora Bútorová CSc., sociologist and co-founder of the Institute for Public Affairs (Inštitút pre verejné otázky, IVO)**

As one of the main respondents to the topic at hand, Mrs. Bútorová had a lot to say in regards to the relationship people had with the past regime. Mainly she spoke a lot about the manipulative nature of the regime and how it forced people to comply even if they did not want to as it would result in a loss of their livelihood and career.

### **Zuzana Mistríková, film producer and founder of the Association of Independent Producers**

Zuzana Mistríkova was a young university student at the time of the 1989 Velvet Revolution. She was on the board of representatives of the student movement for democracy and after the revolution she became a member of parliament. Currently she is working as a film producer and creating movies about Slovak history and remembrance of the past.

### **František Mikloško, dissident, activist and politician, former member of Slovak National Council**

The former member of the Slovak National Council and member of the Christian Democratic Movement, František Mikloško spoke about many parallels he sees with the current political situation in Slovakia compared to the political situation before 1989. He stated, “I haven’t yet experienced the kind of political situation we have here today. I feel like Slovakia has hit rock bottom in this moment and time. It reminds me of 89’ when we were starting off in a green meadow because communism had just fell and there were new political parties emerging. Nobody knew anything about them. It’s very similar today, because everything fell apart. I’m convinced that if SMER with Robert Fico as the head of the party takes over power, it will mark a time of depression”

(František Mikloško, 2023). His statement only goes to show that the unchanging ambivalence the Slovak community feels towards the past has resulted in a cyclical trajectory of events in which the elected officials are the same power-hungry individuals who seized control once it was first possible in 1989. Now, thirty years later, the situation has not changed significantly.

**Fedor Blaščák, philosopher and Director of the Open Society Foundation in Slovakia**

In regards to politicization of public space, Fedor Blaščák has numerously emphasized the relationship between public space and politics. The two concepts are very difficult to separate. He puts it in a philosophical perspective:

“Just as urbanism is failing in development of spaces, the social engineer is failing to interfere in public space. He is failing because he will never be able to like the neutrality of public space to the extent that he will be able to overcome it. What does neutrality truly lie in? In the absence of outside authority which would decide what people should or rather could do together and what they should avoid” (Fedor Blaščák, 2023).

## PUBLIC OPINION

The literature suggests that in Slovakia the generations that have experienced communism firsthand perceive it as something unfinished, perhaps an era that should come back as many remember those times fondly. Referring to this time as:

“A magical time. There was security in everything. People knew exactly what was going to happen the next day, the next month and even next year. People were even nicer to each other because they didn’t perceive each other as competition. We didn’t have a bad life then” (Excerpt from field observation, female 64).

Others stated that:

“We were equals in society. There weren’t any fancy brands that people would fight over. Salaries were almost the same among all. People were more open towards each other” (Excerpt from field observation, male 58).

The outcry of positive memories and rosy retrospection on the time of the past regime shows that the narrative of cultural trauma was not properly acknowledged or even created. Because of the social roles that people adopted during the regimes as beneficiaries and bystanders, their outlook on what happened during the time was heavily influenced by how well they lived and by what the regime actually gave them. As was stated in the theoretical section of this thesis, for Slovakia the regime introduced significant changes and modernization processes that otherwise would not have occurred.

This positive outlook on the regime, the lack of recognition of what the regime caused within society and the adoption of social roles which dictated people’s future behavior all explain how Slovakia stagnates and has difficulty overcoming the past. People have not overcome it and therefore have a lacking desire to change public space in response. The responses from the public show that the narrative regarding monument removal is simply not significant enough. People do not have the drive to change public space because the emotional remnants of communism carry on inside of people to the extent where some wish to bring it back. Their ambivalence is prominent, they do not quite know how to deal with the regime or get over it because the memory of it is hard-wired.

As with any memory that has not been overcome, especially one regarding an oppressive regime. Some even wish to go back to the times of communism. The political climate has been steering towards totalitarian directions over the past three decades as a result, and people are gradually more dissatisfied with the social, political and economic climate within the state. All of this just goes to show that Slovakia is stagnating in the past.

There were some interesting trends that rose from the data including the difference in answers people gave based on their age. People who were 40 and older almost always answered correctly that the plaque depicts Gustáv Husák. Naturally, these generations are aware of the name of the most notorious instigators of communism in the state because they lived through the regime. The younger generations were not as certain as to who was displayed on the plaque saying things like, “no, I’ve never really noticed the monument before” (Field observation, male, 35), or “I am really not sure who the man is” (Field observation, female, 28). It could be argued that it is because of lacking education in the field as well as varying information on the individual.

However, the most interesting aspect of the field observation was that people often did not even notice what memorial I was talking about. The most frequent answer being “I didn’t even notice there was such a plaque here”. This suggests a lot about the engagement with the narrative regarding public space. People are not as engaged because they are simply ambivalent towards the topic. It seems all of these trends are a result of the historical developments that took place on Slovak territory. Because of Slovakia’s past as a region connected to other empires and other states, the people never developed a proper identity. Furthermore, the historical narrative in the way it is taught in schools and celebrated among society is misleading and inexact thus, preventing the people from avoiding ignorance. “If society and especially the media do not create a basis for viewing November ’89 as a special historical event which significantly influences present life, history lessons will never have the chance to break the barrier of ignorance about this event among the young generation” (Bútorá et al, 2010, p.18). Furthermore, if society does not work with its past behavior and peoples’ status as beneficiaries and bystanders, the moment of accepting responsibility will never come.

## CONCLUSION

The approach society takes towards public space is crucial because it provides a channel for political, social and cultural communication within that society. What is present in public space is what society communicates about itself to the outside world. Indeed, public space is a form of narrative that tells a story about the identity of a state, of its people and especially of the people's past. It is a form of speech act thus when it is changed or remains the same, it sends a message to the outside world that the political or social climate is shifting.

With Slovakia, the curious trend was the lack of change within public space which all ties back to the historical background of the country and the subsequent prevalence of social roles adopted due to the communist regime. Slovakia's historical past promoted the development of a parochial political culture which prevented Slovak society from overcoming its fear of overpowering figures of control and authority. Since this was the exact case of the communist regime, the Slovaks never truly came to terms with that regime either. This stagnation and indifference towards the past influenced the present state of public space as well as people's perception of their own social roles and Slovak identity. The Slovak historical social structures simply resulted in a political culture which hindered real change and advancement forward. The Slovak people still have a strong willingness to submit to and support authority figures. In addition to and partly because of that, the communist regime in Slovakia is perceived differently in this country than in neighbouring Czechia, with more ambivalence and perhaps even appreciation. As a result, majority of Slovaks are still considered bystanders and beneficiaries of the communist oppression and as is apparent from past literature as well as education in the region, these social roles are subsequently passed on to the next generations. The outcome is indifference to the symbols of remembrance of the totalitarian past in public space and a very small chance that this stance will change in the foreseeable future.

Nevertheless, it was important to delve into the reasons why people were so reluctant to change what the space around them said about their country. It turns out the answer in theory is simple but the emotions and cognitive processes behind it are far more complicated. Deeper underneath the surface, the research shows that people have an

extremely complex relationship with their past. They feel reluctant to talk about the time they all carried out immoral or even wrong actions for the good of their family and for the sake of their own safety.

People had to let go of the bigger picture, of achieving a democratic society, a free community because they did not have a choice. Thus, instead of achieving a greater good, people were looking out for themselves which made it even more difficult for them to overcome the regime. Experiencing a trauma as intense as an oppressive regime leaves people wondering because even during the time the regime was in place, the ways in which people behaved were somewhat of a gray area.

People were more comfortable taking action in the gray because they knew they could benefit from it. Since most of the population did this, it was far more difficult to decide which people were responsible for the regime, in other words, who were the perpetrators of the reprimandable actions. This additionally led to people forgiving and forgetting actions they would otherwise punish people for and it became all the more difficult to deal with what the regime caused because there was nobody to put the blame on. Even in the present day, people approach the past as something that they either feel strongly connected to and want to return to or they deny anything that happened thus, making it impossible to come to a conclusive approach to overcoming the past.

As the experts have made clear in their statements, Slovakia struggles with actually starting the conversation about putting the past in the past and looking out towards a better future. The complicated relationship that citizens hold towards communism and their lack of drive to develop a unified narrative drags Slovakia further away from the opportunity for change and advancement. These experts that represent values of representativeness and democracy understand that most Slovak citizens lived through communism as beneficiaries or bystanders, not active protesters and dissidents. They understand that the problem with overcoming the past in this nation stems from the nature of Slovak identity. There is a certain façade put in front of the citizens which makes them believe things are one way when in reality, they are not.

As Kalmus pointed out, the Slovak Constitution which clearly states that displaying communist symbols is prohibited still does not mean the country abides by this rule.

Instead, it reprimands those who try and uphold it which is yet another great indicator of the backwardness presented in Slovak values and norms. The Constitution stipulates what kind of nation Slovakia should be and what values it should represent. However, its citizens and even the political representatives do not fulfill these responsibilities as they should because there is not enough motivation to do so.

Such a destiny has proven to hold Slovakia back from upholding the standards of a liberal democracy. Because the state is settled in the past, the narrative unfortunately cannot move forward. There is no real platform for change and that is keeping Slovakia from proper state development. Furthermore, it empowers those who have been in power for decades to remain powerful and manipulate the narrative as well as the social situation in their favor. Despite the number of movements and organizations that have focused precisely on processing the past and working with people to see themselves as more than victims of the regime, the ordinary people have not been able to acknowledge their role within the regime. They actively participated as beneficiaries and bystanders as observed from the interviews with experts as well as reports from regular people who claimed their lives were better during the regime. There is a huge amount of guilt connected to people's behavior today and their stance towards the past. They have been traumatized by the regime, they do not have enough empowerment and they do not believe they have the agency to change their future and process the past.

According to the experts interviewed for this thesis one of the steps Slovakia could take in order to improve its people's social standing and the overall functioning of the state is to begin a dialogue about the use of public space and its deeper meaning for the social and political setting in the state. Once people have a better idea of what the public space represents, especially the monuments placed in it, they will understand the implications public space has for the trajectory of history and why it is important to register public space as a narrative tool. Removing monuments which represent the injustices carried out between 1948 to 1989 from public space and placing them in a museum designated for educating and enlightening society about the historical background of Slovakia would advance the country greatly. It is understandable that Slovaks feed their nostalgia and remain connected to what happened in the past. However, it would be conducive to Slovakia's future to work with this nostalgia and even ambivalence, create a unified

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narrative, take responsibility for the past and thus, limit people's unwillingness to move forward and instead catalyze change.



## RESUMÉ

Táto bakalárska práca sa zaoberá vzťahom medzi priebehom komunizmu v Slovenskej Republike a jeho dopadom na verejný priestor. Zameriava sa na postoje ľudí voči verejnému priestoru, konkrétne voči komunistickým pamiatkam. Totižto na Slovensku sa o verejnom priestore rozpráva sporadicky ale zároveň sa vie, že ten verejný priestor spĺňa nejakú konkrétnu rolu. Tá rola je často politická ale aj sociálna lebo verejný priestor je miesto kde sa spoločnosť stretáva, rozpráva, a prezentuje isté názory. Zároveň je ten priestor využívaný aj na politické zámery, ako sú protesty, pochody, a zobrazovanie pamiatok, či symbolov, ktoré pre spoločnosť niečo znamenajú. Na základe týchto poznatkov sa aj táto práca odvíjala a zisťuje sa v nej ako bola Slovenská spoločnosť ovplyvnená bývalým režimom a ako výsledok sa postavila k verejnému priestoru celkom ambivalentne.

V prvej kapitole je rozpísaná definícia komunizmu a ako mu rozumieme v Slovenskom kontexte. Opisuje ako vznikol a ako sa odvíjal od teórie policajného štátu, ktorý bol prv nastavený v Sovietskom zväze. Ďalej sa píše o tom ako na Slovensku funguje historický naratív, a aký má dopad na kolektívnu pamäť. Keďže dejiny Slovenska sú hlboko zamerané na proces akým bolo Slovensko oslobodené, veľa sa v historickom naratíve rozpráva o krajine bez identity a vyššieho kolektívneho cieľu. Ďalej sa preto prepája podkapitola Slovenského historického naratívu s podkapitolou o komunizme a jeho dopade na kolektívnu pamäť, respektíve aj to ako si spoločnosť bývalý režim pamätá. Je to dôležitá súčasť toho ako si Slovensko nastavilo svoje kolektívne hodnoty, názory a v konečnom dôsledku aj politický systém.

V druhej kapitole je rozsiahlo opísaný proces akým sa definuje identita, a primárne identita štátu. To ako definujeme identitu sa ďalej vzťahuje na vzťah spoločnosti ku verejnému priestoru. V podkapitolách druhej kapitoly sa rieši to ako komunizmus ovplyvnil Slovenskú identitu a ďalej ako ľudí definoval vrámci jednej typológie osobností, ktorá jednotlivcov rozdeľuje na obeť, páchatel'ov, odporcov, príjemcov a tých čo sa počas režimu prizerali. Podľa tejto typológie je omnoho jednoduchšie pochopiť ako sa Slovenská identita vyvíjala a prečo jednotlivé skupiny ľudí, ktoré spadajú pod tieto klasifikácie pristupovali k režimu a následne aj k verejnému priestoru inak. Najdôležitejšie na tejto typológii je pochopiť, že ľudia nespádajú len pod jednu kategóriu. Tento typ klasifikácie funguje na báze spektra, na ktorom sa ľudia pohybujú.

Ani jeden človek nespadá len pod jednu kategóriu o čo viac zaujímavé je analyzovať ako sa ľudia vrámci toho spektra klasifikovali, ako vnímali a prežívali režim a ako sa stavajú k spoločnosti dnes.

Prirodzene, to ako dopadal režim na jednotlivcov, ktorí si ho prežili, mal dopad aj na nadväzujúce generácie. Generácie ktoré nasledovali po komunizme sa o režime učili v škole, počúvali príbehy od rodičov a starých rodičov a prirodzene cítili istú úroveň spolupatričnosti s ich rodinami a známymi, keďže sa na Slovensku pokladal veľký dôraz na rodinné vzťahy. Samozrejme aj kvôli tomu ako sa Slovenská spoločnosť postavila k režimu po jeho páde hralo veľkú rolu v tom ako sa ďalej rozvíjal politický a sociálny systém. Ľudia sa viac sústredili na to aké boli staré časy a prechovávali v sebe silný spomienkový optimizmus. Ich túžba vrátiť sa do čias komunizmu im bránila a stále bráni v tom aby sa posunuli v rovinách politiky a sociálneho diania a teda aj v rovine verejného priestoru, ktorý sa ako výsledok túžby návratu komunizmu nemení.

Posledná kapitola sa zaoberá rolou verejného priestoru. Opis verejného priestoru sa spája s tým ako jeho zmena dopadá na spoločnosť v ktorej sú zmeny vnímané ako narušenie istého poriadku. Spoločnosť v ktorej sa dejiny neukončili alebo nespracovali je veľmi istým spôsobom komplikované prijať to že by sa vo verejnom priestore diali zmeny. Ale čo je možno na tomto procese ešte viac neobvyklé je úplný nezáujem o verejný priestor a o zmeny v ňom. Z toho čo je v literatúre známe vieme vyhodnotiť, že verejný priestor sa dá veľmi jednoducho manipulovať v prospech jednotlivých skupín, zaujatých organizácii, či politikov čo ovplyvňuje prístup k nemu. V kontexte Slovenska je toto tiež aktuálna téma ale je zaujímavé pozorovať aký je na Slovensku ten trend odlišný v porovnaní s ostatnými satelitnými štátmi bývalého Sovietskeho zväzu.

V závere a diskusnej porcii tejto práce prichádzame k uvedomeniu, že Slovenská spoločnosť je hlboko ovplyvnená svojou minulosťou, konkrétne predošlým režimom takže nie je pripravená túto minulosť spracovať a posunúť sa ďalej. Kvôli tomuto trendu sa na Slovensku málokedy rozpráva o zmene verejného priestoru v pozitívnej, či vôbec v nejakej rovine. Ľudia tak ako k vysporiadaniu sa s režimom sa k verejnému priestoru

stavajú ľahostajne. Cítia sa previnilo, nahnevane, majú túžbu v návrat starých dobrých čias a ako výsledok týchto pocitov, stagnujú.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1: Questions for interviewees

1. Why do you think people don't care about public space in Slovakia?
2. What does it say about what we have learned about the past regime?
3. How should we understand it?
4. What do you think should change about the perception of public space?

### Appendix 2: List of interviewees

1. Zora Bútorová – SCs., sociologist
2. Zuzana Mistríková – film producer
3. Fedor Blaščák – ÚPN (Ústav pamäti národa) and director of the Open Society Foundation in Slovakia
4. František Mikloško – former Slovak politician and member of the Slovak National Council
5. Peter Kalmus – Slovak artist, activist and dissident

### Appendix 3: Excerpt from interview with Zora Bútorová

N: You say the bystander's classification of people is the interesting category?

Z: In the sense that they often saw and realized the unfairness and illegality of the regime. This could be tied to the work environment. It was publicly known that people who had communist party affiliations or were part of the party, and those who didn't disparage the top representatives had better professional careers. Others would just stand by when the head of a company would choose an unskilled engineer over somebody who really had the qualifications only because they didn't fulfill the criteria I mentioned. So the bystanders just observed from the side-lines. But the bystanders and beneficiaries often go hand in hand because when you keep your mouth shut and follow along, you don't have problems. If you choose to exist peacefully in the system then you get the profit from the fact that you can lead an ordinary, predictable life without making a lot of noise. The benefit is that you won't get into trouble. If you work for a socialist company, you will get the vacation, your children will go to good school and so on. You reap the benefits from the fact that you don't complicate your life, thus you're a bystander as well as a beneficiary.

N: That's right, the categories are more of a spectrum. We can't say that each person belongs in one single category because often those who felt like victims could also be considered perpetrators. They needed to protect themselves so they would denounce somebody else.

Z: Here we should imagine the day to day of state-owned socialist companies because it's a clear depiction of what was happening. Let's imagine the people in leadership positions who are politically aware. One of them could even be an expert in the field. Since membership in the party was so common in Slovakia, a large percentage of the people were members of the party. We can't say that leadership positions were thus, always filled by idiots and outcasts. But these people didn't have a tendency to disclaim that they are the perpetrators and think they are doing evil things. Rather, they felt as people who also didn't have much of a choice and in a way felt like victims because they could say: "if I were a doctor in Austria or Western Germany, I wouldn't have to carry out these bad things". So, if we were to apply this behavior to the political sphere, the typical thing was for political functionaries to claim, "It's not us, but we have to do it". It was more about the level of responsibility people were willing to take. Of course, the moment a person would choose to say "I am the perpetrator", they would have to move away from the belief that they were coerced into doing something bad.

It was different in the 1950' when communism was only in the beginning stages and many people believed in it. They believed they were carrying out bad things but they felt it served a bigger purpose in the name of which they had to sacrifice something. Or they would claim they didn't know the context so they would sentence some and hang others and so on, so they didn't feel what they did was wrong. However, after the Soviet invasion in 1968, in the period of normalization, it was more obvious who could and should ask themselves whether they were a perpetrator of the regime. At least if that person was intelligent enough, they would know without a shadow of a doubt that the idea of a Realist Socialism is a negative or totalitarian one. Nevertheless, people then would probably answer with internal cynicism and say: "Well if I weren't here, maybe there would be someone worse so maybe I'm actually saving something". In the end, this was the attitude of Gustav Husák who claimed he was saving the Slovak nation despite the will of the people because he knew there were worse individuals around who belonged to the absolutely dogmatic communists. He was convinced they would be even worse for the state so he would save the people from this. This made him an



even stronger perpetrator. Or let's take Alexander Dubček as an example. He signed the law which took violent measures against demonstrators who were against the regime. By doing so, he clearly showed support for the regime and its maintenance of power.

N: I guess it depends on the individual's conviction. But after the 1968 invasion, the classification of people wasn't so black and white.

Z: Right, plus a new mechanism was installed where people had to approve the idea that the invasion of 1968 wasn't an invasion but friendly help from the Soviets. This was the act where that schizophrenia really latched on to people and became the regular approach in political discourse. To use an example: In public I will give the priest everything that is proper but in private I'll know that it's all fake. The important part is that I don't lose my job. In this way, the categories and their distinguishing features are important but it seems that each person had a conflict within themselves when adopting a role in the regime. Some cases were quite interesting. When the Russians came, one of their dreams was crushed too. The dream of a regime after 1948 which they helped build but didn't want to be connected to anymore, so they left the party. They defined it precisely for themselves and said they weren't going to have anything to do with it anymore. They knew they weren't going to be beneficiaries because right after came political sanctions, but they also didn't want to be bystanders. Unfortunately, there weren't that many people of this kind. The more common thing was for people to be sent to a committee for background checks. If the committee was made up of normal people, they wouldn't even ask point blank what his intentions are and just did an extensive check on him. But the categorization of people alone was the phenomenon that made people continue behaving the way they did and tolerate the regime in the form it was in at that time. The benefit again was that people could carry on doing their jobs. My mother and aunt were translators, who translated amazing Russian literature to Slovak. My mother didn't hand in her legitimization, she did what most of the others did. The committee did a background check and my mother could continue to translate quality literature. My aunt on the other hand was banned from translating when she handed in her legitimization and when they imprisoned her husband. And then the only thing she could do was translate under my mother's name and the names of other translators. And now, how should we categorize and analyze all of this? In many cases

the system was set up so that people contributed somehow to the regime even though they didn't speak out about politics, they were just doing their jobs. By helping out my aunt, my mother was in a sense fighting against the regime but not significantly. She wasn't a resistor but she also wasn't playing by communist rules. Many people did it this way. Many even believed the regime wasn't okay and this is the way they came to terms with it.

But we're veering off topic a little bit. During this time, each street had some sort of communist monument, or plaque in it. It was a necessary part of the everyday visual that people didn't particularly put much emphasis on or even notice. They weren't angered or even bothered by it. What people in Slovakia did have more of compared to other countries was a fairly positive connection to Russian symbols. This positive inclination is even present today, perhaps less so because of Putin's actions in Ukraine. However, there are still prominent and strong sounding narratives claiming that Russians were our liberators, that we're a proper Slavic state which is heavily supported by alternative media. There wasn't that strong of a disdain or protest like in the Czech Republic. Here, even when people disparaged communists, they didn't use the label 'Bolshevik' very often like they did in the Czech Republic. There people viewed communism as a Soviet product while in Slovakia, people domesticated it in a sense. And this plays an important role. Slovakia has a much more difficult time overcoming the stories that these monuments and symbols represent because it still hasn't broken from the past two totalitarian systems. The first system being the fascist state which was also the first symbol of Slovak nationness. The second being the communist state. The Czechs didn't have this burden on them. Since we weren't able to overcome fascism, the less energy we have now to overcome the second totalitarian system. However, since normalization was less oppressive, less people were influenced by it and they were somehow able to live in it, all the less desire to abruptly break from it. Although people here claim communism was politically oppressive, on the other hand, they label it as the time when Slovakia gained more economic and social prosperity. The Czechs went through this modernization period before the introduction of communism, so they did not feel the same. The pace was slower in the Czech Republic and by the end of normalization they had a feeling the regime wasn't going anywhere economically or politically thus Czechoslovakia declined. Whereas Slovakia wanted a perestroika and believed the regime could last longer. The sentiment remained intact

until today which is supported by our research studies. When we asked respondents whether Slovakia needs a radical political change or just minor tweaks or no change at all, majority of the people claimed major change isn't necessary.

This is also visible in public space. So far, nothing much happened in it. The symbols in public space which weren't immediately removed after the fall of communism, like the statue of Klement Gottwald, will probably never be subject of significant discussion or change. The drive to change these monuments isn't present enough in the narrative. I can't imagine the country deciding to remove the five-pointed star from the hand of the soldier at the Slavin memorial. I can't imagine people making a huge change especially because I don't know who would represent the narrative, the movement and who would be the political actors pursuing change in the public space. I mean, the most extravagant monuments are gone. The heads of Lenin, the big ones are gone. Then there are those symbols which are less prominent. Until not long ago, Bratislava was the city of peace, a typical slogan from communism, but today it doesn't carry the same connotation, it's not quite about communism anymore. I can even imagine that if Bratislava the city of peace was broadcasted today, we would assure each other that: "Thank god we at least don't have a war going on here". The narrative would be completely reframed. So, I would stick to the claim that only the most extravagant monuments are important to discuss. Just like the swastika became the symbol of murdering millions of people and the Jewish star became the symbol of those who suffered. Similarly in Slovakia, the five-point star didn't only become the symbol of suffering, torture and murder but also a symbol of growing prosperity. We have to consider the idea that the star doesn't have a unified symbolization or narrative around it. It was different in Prague where they presented the tank and painted it pink. The tank belonged to the Soviets who freed the Czechs from fascism not to the Soviets who invaded in 1968, but they painted it pink anyway, because the Soviets in became occupiers, not liberators. I mean we have many symbols here. In Eastern Slovakia you still have Soviet tanks around. These were the liberators who freed us from fascism. So, what to do with these? It's not so easy. I can't imagine just erasing these symbols because there was a time when these people were part of an anti-Hitler coalition and that was the label given to them and written into national history and narrative.

N: As liberators, right...

Z: I think this is one of the reasons Slovak politicians don't want to invest their time or enthusiasm into this topic. Even people with a certain amount of political feeling sensed that the period of normalization was experienced through a blurry lens, so they won't only moralize about it. You can't put specific labels on people. In cases of Stalin exhibited in front the of the Slovak National Gallery, or Vasil Bilak, it should be clear that those monuments don't belong there. However, when these types of monuments stand in specific regions, there isn't all that much push from above to change the public space.

N: And what about the paragraph in the State Constitution which stipulates that depicting and placing communist symbols in public space is illegal? How come it is not enforced?

Z: This is a wider problem. Firstly, the Constitution together with many other important documents that we have in Slovakia were written so strongly and definitively because they were created quite quickly after the fall of communism. Many of these documents were influenced by the overall Czechoslovak narrative or climate and by the fact that we signed many international decrees and promised to protect human rights. However, that doesn't even slightly mean that our Constitution is a key document and that we abide by it. I often reference Jean-Jacques Rousseau in my lectures because he knew how to define this properly. He said that in order for people to abide by a certain set of rules, they have to believe in them, have them in their hearts and be a part of their presence in society. This didn't happen here. I think it is something we should eventually come to, but I don't think we will because this generation is facing a whole new set of obstacles. What is written is not enforced and nobody can expect it either. It's nice that Kalmus uses this line of argument, and he's right. However, expecting a huge wave of approval for it is highly unlikely.

Another problem is that the period in the 1950 when people were dragged to the gulags, and died...when these horrendous events took place, people in Slovakia didn't talk about it as much. It settled in dust during history lessons, but even our cultural production didn't pay much attention to it. Less movies were produced; less books were written about how terrible the regime actually was especially during the first decades.

There are family stories that exist in this region but they never became shared to the extent that people would be able to evaluate what the period was really like. This way, those events were never properly imbedded in our collective memory. That short period at the end of the 1960's when there was freedom of expression wasn't enough to set up the society differently.

#### Appendix 4: Excerpts from responses of the public

##### **Do you know who this monument represents?**

“No, I've never really noticed the monument before” (male, 35).

##### **Do you know who this monument represents?**

“Yes, Gustav Husak, he led the communist movement in Czechoslovakia and was one of the people responsible for normalization” (male, 38).

##### **Do you think it should be displayed in public space?**

“Personally, I think he was one of the more controversial representatives of the regime so perhaps it's not really good to have him displayed in public space” (male, 38).

##### **Why do you think there is such nostalgia towards the past regime?**

“The 80's were a magical time. There was security in everything. People knew exactly what was going to happen the next day, the next month and even next year. People were even nicer to each other because they didn't perceive each other as competition. We didn't have a bad life then” (female, 64).

“Young people received an apartment; they got a loan after getting married. Young people today have nothing. They have to get a loan which they then pay off for thirty years. Everything was cheaper and everybody had to work. Nobody was mooching off those who worked” (female 61).

“We were equals in society. There weren't any fancy brands that people would fight over. Salaries were almost the same among all. People were more open towards each other” (male, 58).

“I don’t know that much about it because I didn’t live through it but I heard about it from others. I heard that back then people had a better life. Life was calmer and more predictable. Today it’s different. People keep chasing money and success because that’s what life is all about now” (female, 33).

“My grandfather kept telling me that everything was cheap but it was only like that so that people would not protest against the system. The regime made people blind to what was actually happening because it gave them the feeling that they could count on the state. In reality, people didn’t have much freedom but that wasn’t something they felt they needed” (male, 28).