

## **Opening the city: cultural armature of city of Brno**

### **Introduction**

In my paper I will present a case study of city of Brno and its responses to immigration. Scholars who are methodologically embedded in cultural sociology point out there is not enough attention paid to culture in urban and migration studies. Study by Jaworsky, Levitt, Cadge, Hejtmanek and Curran *New Perspectives on Immigrant Contexts of Reception* (2012) is an attempt to bring question of culture (culture understood as a field with analytical autonomy) into the realm which predominantly prefers the economical, political and social aspects of migration. They present the concept of cultural armature of city which is a set of cultural factors which influences the reception of immigrants. The concept is regarding migration “as a cultural act” (Levitt, Lamba-Nieves, 2011: 2). Cultural armature of city is “a combination of each city’s 1) history and cultural geography, 2) urban self-presentation, 3) cultural responses to demography, and 4) prevailing ethos towards immigrants, which is particularly evident in municipal responses” (Jaworsky et al., 2012: 78).

Due to scope of this paper I will not be able to use the same data to analyze the latter of the four. Instead of interviews with the municipal representatives, social workers and immigrants themselves, I will use the internet presentation of city of Brno, interviews with immigrants by Brno Expat centre as a source of data and analyze the city documents concerning the immigrants. Analyzed data are sometimes regarding only the city of Brno, some documents are about whole South Moravian Region as it was impossible to distinguish them in some cases.

The authors used the concept as a comparative tool, despite this fact I would like to sketch the case study of only one city - city of Brno, because I think it used on its own.

### **1) History and cultural geography**

As the study by Jaworsky et al. showed similar cities with long immigration history can differ in reactions towards immigrants due to its specific histories and cultural geographies (Jaworsky et al., 2012: 82). Brno is the second largest city of Czech Republic and centre of South Moravian Region. According to Czech Statistical Office in 2012 city of Brno with population of 380 000 was hosting about 24 500 foreigners<sup>1</sup>. The South Moravian region has the third highest population of foreigners in the country (after Prague and Central Bohemian Region).

The most numerous immigrant groups are from Ukraine, followed by Vietnam, Moldova, Russia, Mongolia, India and Belarus. According to municipality of Brno 70 % of foreigners are from non-EU countries, finding work in manufacturing, building, service and trade. There is a growing number of high-skilled immigrants finding work in research, IT and shared service business and international students at Brno universities. Apart from that there are two Centres for Refugees (Receiving Centre and Integrating Centre) in Brno region.

Brno, as the whole of Czech Republic, is not an immigrant country from historical point of view. But it can be said it has a long history of cosmopolitanism and national diversity. Former Czechoslovakia, until the end of Second World War used to be a multicultural space with several nationalities sharing the same space. This originated from the earlier history of

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<sup>1</sup> [www.czso.cz](http://www.czso.cz)

Czechoslovakia, respectively Czech Republic, being part of multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire. As Census held by Czech statistical Office shows Czech nationality was claimed by 67.6 % of population in 1921, 68.4 % in 1930, with German as second highest claimed nationality. After the Second World War the country became one-national with number of population claiming Czech nationality rising up to 93.8 % in 1950 and this number being about the same for the rest of 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>.

Brno, being a Czech-German city with strong Jewish population has an experience of Otherness, which according to Jaworsky et al. (2012) plays a crucial role to the way of incorporation immigrants. In the city of Brno until the 1945 there was a symbolic cultural struggle going on between the Czech and German citizens over the character of the city. The struggle (as meaning making) mirrored in for example proclaimed different architecture styles of Czech and German architects, two universities, building of two national representative houses and it ended by expulsion of about 20 000 German citizens in 1945 and the demolition of German Representative House (Deutsches Haus) which can be seen as a complement of struggle over meaning making of the city.

We can say that historically there has been an experience with Otherness, which though has disappeared during and after Second World War with the holocaust, expulsion of Germans from the country in 1945 and closure of country borders during the Cold War and was replaced by almost 50 years of ethnical and national homogeneity.

In this era the diversity and cosmopolitan character of city has changed to one-national. During the period 1945-1989 Czech lands became a one-national state with few exceptions of immigration waves. Brno was a target of Greek immigration in 1948 and then later in 50's in the secondary inner migration of Greeks already settled down in Czechoslovakia who migrated from northmoravian regions to big cities (Tsivos, 2012). There was an immigration wave from Vietnam during the years 1979 a 1985<sup>3</sup>. The other nationalities present in the city during the communist era were mainly Soviet Bloc citizens. During the years of communism the Otherness was thus represented by small number of immigrants and mainly by non-Czech Czechoslovakian citizens - Slovaks and Roma. Slovaks have very similar language and lifestyle to Czechs. This is shown in the public narrative where Slovaks are considered to be "brothers". The second biggest group of Others which Brno has an experience with is Roma.

After 1989 with opening the borders Czech Republic, including Brno, is facing the growing number of immigrants. According to Czech Statistical Office the number of foreigners in Brno is constantly growing – from 7000 foreigners in 1996 to 24 500 in 2012<sup>4</sup>, with the number doubled between 1996 and 2006 when the country joined the EU and Schengen Area. According to Czech Statistical Office the South Moravian Region has a population of 8.4 % foreigners<sup>5</sup> from non-EU as from EU states.

Especially in last few years Brno is facing increasing flow of high-skilled workers and students as universities are trying to attract the foreign students and global companies opening their branches in Brno. In an interview done by Brno Expat Centre a manager from IBM,

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<sup>2</sup> [www.czso.cz](http://www.czso.cz) (available at [http://www.czso.cz/csu/2013edicniplan.nsf/t/8E001797ED/\\$File/4032130116.pdf](http://www.czso.cz/csu/2013edicniplan.nsf/t/8E001797ED/$File/4032130116.pdf))

<sup>3</sup> Kocourek, J. 2005: Vietnamci v ČR. Socioweb. (available at <http://www.socioweb.cz/index.php?disp=temata&shw=199&lst=108>)

<sup>4</sup> [www.czso.cz](http://www.czso.cz) (available at [http://www.czso.cz/csu/2013edicniplan.nsf/t/2E003D9631/\\$File/141413\\_t1-02.pdf](http://www.czso.cz/csu/2013edicniplan.nsf/t/2E003D9631/$File/141413_t1-02.pdf))

<sup>5</sup> [www.czso.cz](http://www.czso.cz) (available at [http://www.czso.cz/csu/2013edicniplan.nsf/t/2E003C73A9/\\$File/141413\\_k1CJ.pdf](http://www.czso.cz/csu/2013edicniplan.nsf/t/2E003C73A9/$File/141413_k1CJ.pdf))

which has its shared services centre located in Brno, mentioned there is 87 nationalities working in his company.

## **2) Urban self-presentation**

The main development of Brno and its industries took place in 19<sup>th</sup> century with machinery and textile industry as the strongest branches. The number and importance of textile factories gave Brno a nickname “the Austrian Manchester” which is still occasionally used in public discourse – although with the nationalized adaptation to “Moravian Manchester”. Even though this nickname is still running, the industry itself started declining after 1989 until its complete extinction. The city as a post-industrial city (Bell, 1974) had to re-invent itself. Glick Schiller and Caglar present it under the concept of rescaling which „has emerged as a way to address the repositioning of the status and significance of cities, both in relationship to states and within global hierarchies of urban-based institutional power.“ (Glick and Caglar, 2009: 179) and argue that „the intensified pressure on local authorities to seek competitive advantages, noting that these authorities are increasingly exposed to capital markets and forced to compete for the investments necessary to transform their post-industrial cities into bases for the ‘new economy’“ (Glick and Caglar., 2009: 187). City of Brno with its density of universities and history of biological and technological research and industry took a path to re-invent itself as a city of knowledge economy. This transformation includes the symbolic meaning-making, i.e. positioning, branding and marketing of the city. Materials about Brno – whether strategic documents or marketing ones – present Brno as a city of science and research.

The symbolic and economic support from public figures and municipality, investment stimulus from the state government, regional government and Brno municipality started attracting foreign companies from IT, shared services (such as IBM or Monster) and technology to come and open their branches in Brno, while some companies brought even their research here (FEI microscopes for example). Universities of Brno established the science centres and science projects. This process started bringing high-skilled foreigners who are finding their jobs in specialized positions. According to these given facts and using the positioning scale presented by Glick and Caglar (2009) Brno could be identified as low-scale up to up-scale city which is trying to gain or maintain the up-scale position.

Glick and Caglar point out “migrants, whose locations in urban economies, culture and politics are shaped by the trajectories of neoliberal restructuring of each particular city, are themselves constitutive of the repositioning struggles of these cities.“ City of Brno in its promotional material (for example website information dedicated to business and economical facts such as Brno Business Facts brochure) though does not present itself as a multicultural city – whether focusing on high-skilled immigrants or low-skilled ones. Unfortunately we did not manage to find out how many nationalities live in Brno at all. Brno municipality website does not communicate this fact, nor do the websites of institution dedicated to helping immigrants. From cultural sociology point of view, the missing information also carries a meaning. While communicating different benefits of living in Brno, the multiculturalism is left aside, although “cultural diversity is an important factor in the competitive struggle between cities. Immigrants can be marketable assets in the places where they settle, even enabling some cities to reposition themselves within geopolitical hierarchy” (Glick Schiller and Calgar in Jaworsky, 2012).

Brno rather presents itself as a place with high quality of life, desirable for families due to closeness of nature and its suburban areas. It sees itself as a good location for business as it is

“strategically located in Central Europe with good transport connections, including the international airport”<sup>6</sup> and for its good business environment and educated workforce. It sees itself as a “fast developing centre of industry, business, science, IT, research and innovation”<sup>7</sup>.

The only material communicating the growing diversity are the strategic development documents published by Brno municipality (such as KERM: Conception of economic development of the city<sup>8</sup> or Regional innovational strategy) which emphasize the need to attract more international investments and high-skilled workers and researchers. The officer of Brno Expat Centre, the city institution supporting those workers, defines them as: “Well educated, qualified workers of international companies. Their main characteristic is English as the primary language of communication”<sup>9</sup>. As one of the problems identified on KERM is “unreadiness of processes and supportive mechanisms for highly qualified elites arrival, i.e. Czech and foreign scientists, managers” (KERM, 2012: 11). According to the same material it is highly desirable to use the managers of global companies for further promotion of Brno.

The national diversity is not the only aspect missing in Brno self-presentation. The religious diversity is also not mentioned, although Brno has the first mosque in the whole country, there is a Christian orthodox church, synagogue or Buddhist temple.

### **3) The cultural consequences of demography**

Cultural armature of city is formed not only with number and origins of migrants but also by the presence of identifiable “other around which anti-immigrant sentiment and fear can coalesce” (Jaworsky et al., 2012: 83). As described earlier, Brno as the whole Czech Republic is rather homogenous from ethnical point of view. The most visible group representing otherness used to be and probably still is Roma. While concept of nationality in Central European countries is based on ethnic belonging rather than civil belonging, Roma are considered to be foreigners, the others, non-Czechs.

As we do not have the data representative for Brno region, we analyze the research representative for the whole Czech population held in March 2012 by CVVM (The Public Opinion Research Centre) regarding the Opinion towards national minorities. It shows the symbolic distance towards Roma is biggest out of 16 studied nationalities with 78% respondents marking Roma dislikeable<sup>10</sup>. The nationalities which obtained higher score for sympathy than antipathy were Czechs themselves, Slovaks, Poles, Jews, Germans, Hungarians, Bulgarian. The nationalities which obtained higher score for antipathy than sympathy were Russians, Serbians, Vietnamese, Chinese, Romanian, Albanian and Roma. The message of relationship to foreigners is quite clear – the public attitude towards foreigners shows Czechs tend to dislike otherness – considering the nationalities with high sympathy rates are, with exception of Bulgaria and Jews, all of surrounding countries. Another research by CVVM shows that almost half of respondents think there are too many foreigners in the country<sup>11</sup>. The acceptable reasons to live in the country are study and work experience (86 %), family gathering (85 %), natural disasters in country of origin (77 %),

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<sup>6</sup> Brno Business Facts 2013

<sup>7</sup> Brno Business Facto 2013

<sup>8</sup> Available at <http://www.brno.cz/podnikatel-investor/koncepce-ekonomickeho-rozvoje-mesta/>

<sup>9</sup> CIZINCI: Brno Expat Centre in Brněnský Metropolitan, 17.9.2012, č.9, str.12

<sup>10</sup> The five-point scale varies from „very likeable“ to „very dislikeable“. Research available at [http://www.migraceonline.cz/doc/brezen\\_13.pdf](http://www.migraceonline.cz/doc/brezen_13.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Research available at [http://www.migraceonline.cz/doc/nazory\\_usaz.pdf](http://www.migraceonline.cz/doc/nazory_usaz.pdf)

racial, political or religious repression in country of origin (71 %). Business and work reasons are considered to be acceptable for 56 %, respectively 48%. The pure willingness to live in the Czech Republic is acceptable only for 46 %.

Another research by CVVM<sup>12</sup> studied attitudes towards the foreigners who recently moved to the country. While 58 % of respondents claim these foreigners are problem for the country, the number shortens to 49 % when question is put if the foreigners are problem at respondents' place of residence. It would be interesting to have this research held only for Brno or South Moravian Region. The main problems are considered to be raising the unemployment rate (68 %), raising the crime rate (67 %) and health risks (54 %). The benefits of foreigners for the country are not seen as important – development of economy (19 % positive answer), enrichment of Czech culture (25 %), solution of population ageing (26 %).

Considering the cultural consequences of demography it seems the public attitude towards immigrants and foreigners is not very keen on. Czechs tend to like the nationalities which are known and culturally close. Having no or little experience with otherness in recent history, excepts the Roma who are seen as undeserving poor, immigrants are today seen to be more threatening than enriching element in the country.

One of the cultural consequences of demography which was not included in the original concept of cultural armature is the language and experience of communicating with non-native speakers. As it showed in the interviews done by Brno Expat Centre (BEC) many interviewees stressed disability to communicate with the offices and authorities in different language than Czech. Although the immigrant programs and also private companies offer the courses of Czech language it is however considered to be difficult to master even on basic communication level. One interviewee said: “The main problem is not only language barrier but also Czech's attitude towards speaking with foreigners. I'm staying here in a dormitory for foreign students and I can say that not only receptionist here knows at least basic English. And it's similar in shops, banks and other places where a foreigner can find himself during his stay in Brno. I don't expect any fluent English but sometimes a bit of good communication will be better than yelling at people that they don't speak Czech when they come to Czech Republic“. The aspect of unwillingness and inability to communicate in everyday life and at the offices is mentioned as one the most outputting things about Brno in many BEC interviews with foreigners. The language barrier and willingness to overcome it – whether in English or Russian (as the most numerous immigrant group in Brno are Ukrainians) – could be added to the concept of cultural armature, at least for analyzing the culture armature of cities in minor language countries.

With the increasing number of immigrants there is a growing number of ethnical businesses, such as reastaurants, bars, corner shops run mainly by Vietnamese or ex-Yugoslavian immigrants, exchange offices or groceries with ethnic food. These place serve as the contact zone which is “the space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories now intersect” (Pratt, 1992: 8) and which could be marketed as examples of growing national diversity of the city. Another natural contact zone between majority and minorities which the educational system could serve as is quite limited in Brno, at least if we are talking about primary and secondary schools. There is only one school, Základní škola Staňkova, dedicated to intercultural

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<sup>12</sup> Research available at <http://www.migraceonline.cz/doc/nazory.pdf>

education and support to non-native pupils<sup>13</sup>.

#### **4) Municipal strategies**

Until 2009 the services for immigrants were provided mainly by NGO, state or private institutions and municipal strategies were quite shattered. In last few years the municipality of Brno is making an effort to provide and broaden the services for the immigrants. The official municipality materials distinguish between high-skilled immigrants and low-skilled immigrants and use the different labeling – “expats” for high-skilled and creative professionals and “immigrants” for low-skilled non-EU immigrants. Avoiding the ethnical lenses by which the immigrants are classified on base of ethnicity, it uses the “socio-cultural and economic lenses” of education, profession and labour market position.

Municipality of Brno founded the advisory board for the integration of immigrants and elaborated the strategic document concerning the immigration and related issues. At the moment there are two strategic/development documents concerning the immigrants, one dealing with high-skilled “professionals” (Conception of economic development of the city – KERM) and second with the immigrants from “the third world” (Program of targeted and long-term Integration of foreigners from the Third World at South Moravian Region for 2011-2015<sup>14</sup>) which motto is: We are the region which communicates with third world foreigners and supports their effective integration to the society. The main goal is to develop specific policy towards immigrants and take the immigrants need into account on institutional level.

Each target group of immigrants has an institution specialized in providing services. For high-skilled professionals there is Brno Expat Centre (BEC) with English as its main operating language and SoMoPro program supporting the arrival of foreign scientists and repatriation of Czech ones. For the low-skilled non-EU immigrants there is South Moravian Regional Centre to Support the Integration of Foreigners (JRCnPIC) which beside its own services is covering and managing the services provided by various NGOs and other institutions.

The services of JRCnPIC are provided in five languages (English, Russian, Ukrainian, Mongolian and Vietnamese) and as in case of BEC vary from counseling, introducing to Czech bureaucracy and coping with different offices and life situations and organizing the cultural events. The JRCnPIC is also offering the Czech language and sociocultural courses as well as multicultural events and programs targeted to Czech citizens such as educational events about immigration at public schools. For example last year the JRCnPIC issues a multicultural calendar including feasts of different religion (although this calendar is not aimed for public, but rather for partners of the institution itself). Just to name few events organized by JRCnPIC there was Babylonfest – Days of Brno ethnic minorities or establishing of The House of ethnic minorities.

The KERM strategic document recommends establishing of The International House which should offer the services for easier coming, settling down and integration of foreigners, although it is not clear whether this institution would be dealing the high-skilled workers exclusively or with all immigrants.

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<sup>13</sup> Another international school International School of Brno is private and attended mostly by children of foreigners with good job positions and few wealthy czech families.

<sup>14</sup> Available at <http://www.cizincijmk.cz/Articles/3188-2-Jihomoravsky+kraj.aspx>

Analysis of those two Brno strategic documents shows another thing – KERM concerning the high-skilled professionals takes the transnational optic into account. KERM speaks about the social remittances (Levitt, Lamba-Nieves, 2011) of migrating professionals whose positive attitude towards Brno can influence its reputation in their countries of origin and as consequence wishfully bring more investments. Program concerning low-skilled non-EU immigrants does not give an account to transnational practices and takes into account only physical transnationalism (Boccagni, 2012: 4) and local ties of immigrants, leaving migrants' transnational ties aside or even denies it: “The immigrants in South Moravian region have strong connections with the countries of origins (...) which makes the process of integration more difficult (...)”<sup>15</sup>. As McEwan points out „migrants' transnational relations may give cities the global connections that they seek (in Glick and Caglar, 2009:189).

## **Conclusion**

City of Brno on its re-scaling path from post-industrial economy to knowledge economy is facing the growth of immigrants, both high-skilled and low-skilled ones. The analysis of cultural armature helps us to understand the way how the city is responding to it. The city with cosmopolitan history, its citizens and municipalities has not only to re-invent itself but also to learn how to cope with the foreigners after fifty years of isolation. The public opinion research (data representative for the whole Czech population, not only for Brno) advices the attitude towards immigrants is not very positive. The municipality of Brno is though developing strategic documents concerning immigrants, while treating high-skilled and low-skilled immigrants separately. It does so by asserting and supporting various migrant assistance services, as well as multicultural programs targeted to majority. Despite the municipalities of Brno are aware of the importance of immigration to growth of the city, according to the studied promotional materials the city does not seem to be marketing the growing national and ethnical diversity at all. According to scholars such an effort would help to reposition and rebrand the city image which Brno is trying to achieve.

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<sup>15</sup> Program cílené a dlouhodobé podpory integrace cizinců třetích zemí na území Jihomoravského kraje 2011-2015: 77.



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