

MARTIN JEMELKA

Masaryk Institute and Archive of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Public Research Institute

‘The Miracle of Slušovice’. The Municipality and the United Cooperative Farm — Slušovice Agrocombine as the Pilgrimage Site of the Czechoslovak Consumerism at the Dawn of the Socialist State Era*

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INSTEAD OF INTRODUCTION: THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNITED COOPERATIVE FARMS ON THE LAST YEAR OF SOCIALIST AGRICULTURE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

On 1 January 1989 the so-called ‘perestroika’ (from the Russian for or ‘reconstruction’) of the economic mechanism in farming and food sector’ was launched in Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. This was supposed to be a state programme of quality and quantity growth of farming production, aiming at a higher diversity and use of applied research.¹ Five months later, a two-day international conference on the 40th anniversary of establishment of the first united cooperative farm was held on 23–24 May 1989 in Zádveřice, near Gottwaldov (now again Zlín), eastern Moravia. One could not ask for a better location of the conference — no Czechoslovak cooperative farm was more frequently spoken about than the Unified Cooperative Farm — Slušovice Agrocombine (‘Jednotné zemědělské družstvo — Agrokombinát Slušovice’), which also owned the conference facilities in Zádveřice. While in 1948 a single worker in the agricultural sector provided food for 4.5 Czechoslovak citizens, forty years later, thanks to industrialisation of agriculture, it was 18. And over the same time the produce of milk grew twice, slaughter animals four times, and poultry even 15 times, as the presenters from the Ministry for Agriculture and Food and faculties for operational economy from all Czechoslovak agricultural universities boasted in front of five hundred participants, including the delegates

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¹ Družstva a přestavba 1989, p. 1. The critique of the new economic system, which industrial companies were supposed to accede as of 1 January 1990 following the example of agricultural companies, written by the chairman of JZD AK Slušovice František Čuba, was reprinted in TRNKA 1998, pp. 113–120.

of the Permanent UN Committee for Agriculture and Food and experts from Eastern Bloc and West (Finland, Holland, Austria and the USA).

The key topics of the professional convention were supposed to be the quality, intensity and effectiveness of agricultural production with respect to scientific, technical and especially environmental aspects of production, but also the financial incentive of farming staff similar to a share in their company's profits.² According to official presenters, the socialist cooperative agriculture proved to be economically and politically viable in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in 1949–1989. The influx of quotes repeatedly praised one which was said by 'the first workers' president' Klement Gottwald (1896–1953, president in 1948–1953) who, after the 9th Convention of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 25–29 May 1949, launched the process of turning agricultural production into socialist cooperatives: 'There won't be socialism here without the transition of a village into socialism.'³ There wasn't a Czechoslovak village where Gottwald's words would sound more paradoxical than Slušovice. As early as at the end of the 1970s, JZD AK Slušovice ultimately abandoned the boundaries of agricultural production, and implemented production programmes and organisational methods which contradicted the very substance of centrally planned economy.⁴ Neither the normalisation establishment nor ordinary Czechoslovak citizens could ignore it. Slušovice and their 'miraculous methods' were spoken of everywhere, and both adored and cursed. One thing was not possible: to neglect them.

FROM THE JZD TO JZD SLUŠOVICE AGROCOMBINE

The earliest JZDs (a well-known abbreviation for Jednotné zemědělské družstvo — United Cooperative Farm), temporarily combining individual and collective forms of plant production without abandoning private animal farming, began to be established in Czechoslovakia in spring 1949, at first mostly in the Czech and Moravian border regions determined by the withdrawal of the German population. The 'mainland' farmers' resistance to the collectivisation of rural areas temporarily halted the mass establishment of JZDs, and the process continued with two or three exemplary cooperatives set up in every district. But even this stage did not last long, and at the beginning of 1950, at the decision of the ÚV KSČ (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia), it was superseded by a new and violent wave of collectivisation which led to the establishment of cooperatives with collec-

² TRNKA 1998, pp. 120–122 reprinted the major part of a critical paper by the chairman of JZD AK Slušovice František Čuba, who called for introducing a joint stock system in the business of cooperative farms.

³ *Zkušenosti a perspektivy* 1989, p. 1.

⁴ For the history of the village and the JZD AK Slušovice in a comprehensive way, see HURT 1985; *40 Let* 1989.

tive plant and animal production. The hostile campaign, accompanied by the forced buyout of livestock and machinery, the reorganisation of land plots into large units and the creation of large cooperative tracts, incited resistance both among farmers and landowners as well as among small farmers — members of the Communist Party for whom the establishment of cooperatives was nothing more than an implementation of the Soviet kolkhoz system and the final elimination of traditional private farming. By the end of January 1951 there were 7110 cooperatives of four types in Czechoslovakia, and one year later there were 8636 cooperatives in one half of the boroughs in Bohemia and Moravia, whose existence was often merely a formality or which faced serious existential problems.⁵

It was in 1952 when JZD Slušovice was established in Slušovice, located in eastern Moravia, some 10 km as the crow flies from Gottwaldov (now Zlín again), a regional centre with a industrial tradition in the areas of shoes, heavy machinery and development. The harsh geomorphology, limited soil quality and the fact that much of the workforce had left for nearby Gottwaldov, which offered enough better-paid and less demanding jobs, doomed the cooperative to an early demise. In 1963, ing. František Čuba (b. 23/01/1936), then 27, was appointed as the cooperative's sixth chairman: he was a graduate of Prague's Agricultural University and, after his two-year compulsory military service in 1961–1963, worked briefly as the district agronomist and the deputy head of the Agricultural Department of the District Council of Gottwaldov.⁶

Čuba becoming the leader of the stagnating cooperative was a turning point in its history, with the first major milestone probably being Christmas 1963, when most of the staff left the enterprise after the first shows of authority by the young chairman. Čuba was determined not only to motivate the future staff but also to force them to work, to ensure that come what may, the cooperative would be profitable irrespective of its production portfolio. The rationalisation and specialisation of farming production reached its production peak before the end of the 1960s. If cooperative production were to continue growing, in the early 1970s the final decision had to be taken to expand production to include ancillary production, taking account of the seasonal nature of farming work. The production of work gloves, rubber animal dummies, lumber, wooden pallets, tiles and dunging yard grids was soon accompanied by the production of mineral feed admixtures and supplements. The sharp surge in agricultural and other production at the end of the 1970s was the result of the systematic introduction of state-of-the-art technologies and scientific advancements in production.

Over the first twenty years under Čuba's leadership (1963–1983), JZD Slušovice went from being an almost bankrupt cooperative farm to an enterprise with

⁵ PRŮCHA, 2009, pp. 423–440.

⁶ On the personality of doc. Ing. František Čuba, CSc., in 1963–1990 the chairman of JZD (JZD AK) Slušovice, briefly and objectively, see TOMEŠ 1999, p. 218.

a complex agricultural production programme, i.e. plant and animal production, as well as non-agricultural production that utilised the company's human resources and materials as efficiently as possible, including the energy and raw material potential of waste management. This happened from the 1970s, despite the objections raised by the state authorities, which banned agricultural enterprises from engaging in anything other than agricultural production on principle. It could only be promoted in the face of opposition from the state authorities at the regional and national level by constantly arguing the unsuitable geomorphology of Slušovice's poor soil, searching out legislative loopholes and overcoming the growing antagonism of party and state officials at the regional and national level, often through personal links to the highest-ranking party politicians with experience with working in the Zlín (Gottwaldov) region. Unlike the conservative president Gustáv Husák (1913–1991, in the office in 1975–1989), they also included Milouš Jakeš (b. 12/08/1922), in 1937–1947 an assembly worker at the Baťa concern in Zlín, in 1950–1952 the chairman of the Municipal Council in Gottwaldov and in 1987–1989 General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The only things that could legitimise the unsystematic nature of Slušovice's production programme and its unrivalled economic effectiveness were ideologically neutral numeric rationale of its unprecedented and continuously improving economic indicators and large-scale investments into the company's social policy, which also included former staff.⁷ What played an important part in the legitimisation of Slušovice's business methods, more than their success in capitalist countries, were the strengthening relationships with the Soviet Union during the perestroika era: the contribution that the JZD Slušovice Agrocombine made to the genetic breeding of cattle was praised in the debate at the 27th convention of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.⁸

At the beginning of collectivisation the grain crop yields in Slušovice and the surrounding area were 1.8 tons per hectare and the average cow milk yield was some 1700 litres per year. In 1987, when the JZD Slušovice Agrocombine was fully converted into an industrial and agricultural enterprise specialising primarily in non-agricultural production, the average grain crop yields were 6.72 tons while the Czechoslovak average was 4.86 tons, and in cooperatives in potato growing areas such as those around Slušovice the figure was a mere 4.41 tons. The average milk yield rose to 6004 litres while the state average was 3787 litres per year. With these crop yields, the JZD Slušovice Agrocombine was now approaching the levels in the United Kingdom (6.08 tons) and Holland (6.92 tons). The amount of farming land also grew in proportion with this: in 1952 the cooperative used 106 hectares of land, while the figure rose to almost 6000 hectares in 1965–1976 after the integra-

⁷ TRNKA 1998, pp. 19–30.

⁸ ČUBA, DIVILA 1989, p. 17.

tion of 15 agricultural enterprises in 16 surrounding villages. From the initial staff of 23, the enterprise grew to employ approximately 1500 people in 1976.⁹

The continuous growth of productivity, employment and individual performance should primarily be attributed to the enterprise’s non-agricultural production, which made up 94.4% of its programme in 1986. If ancillary production began with farming tools and simple wood and metal products, by the 1980s it had peaked with a consistent focus on the production of biotechnologies and microelectronics. Most Czechoslovak JZDs were equipped with Slušovice’s TNS computers before the end of the 1980s.¹⁰ And if there were Czechoslovak enterprises where the environmental impacts and consequences of mass agricultural production were discussed in the 1980s, they certainly did include Slušovice, whose progressive strategy of combining primary agricultural production with ancillary non-agricultural production contributed to the adoption of the new act on agricultural cooperatives, which deregulated the proportion between agricultural and ancillary production in administrative terms.¹¹

While, despite all rationalisation measures and technological interventions, primary agricultural production was continuously falling in the 1980s in favour of ancillary production which had apparent innovation potential, JZD AK Slušovice became involved in another field of business in the 1980s which made the flourishing cooperative enterprise the Mecca of Czechoslovak consumer society in the latter half of the 1980s.¹² This involved investments into the systematic development of the tertiary economic segment, at first in Slušovice and the surrounding region and later throughout the entire country. In searching for new economic strategies, the management of JZD AK Slušovice easily found the golden mine — the field of services and consumer goods, overshadowed in the centrally planned economy. The inspiration openly drawn from western marketing strategies blurred the difference between capitalist western countries and the Soviet bloc countries in Slušovice’s tertiary sphere, which was probably most remarkably manifested in investments into the licensed production of western consumer goods, led by Pepsi drinks.¹³

But it did not end with the mere transfer of western products produced under licence. JZD AK Slušovice began investing in gastronomy in the mid-1980s, involving both the establishment of a country-wide network of roadhouses and taking control of the ice-cream stalls on the iconic Wenceslas Square in Prague.¹⁴ Mass

⁹ ČUBA, DIVILA 1989, pp. 7–18.

¹⁰ On the creation and production of the first Czechoslovak computer of the TNS brand (an abbreviation for *Ten náš systém*, i.e. This System of Ours) in detail, see e.g. PROCHÁZKOVÁ 2009 and TRNKA 1998, pp. 64–70.

¹¹ ČUBA, DIVILA 1989, pp. 7–8.

¹² The term ‘Mecca’ was in use for Slušovice even in the period media, see e.g. “Naše cesta” 1989a.

¹³ TRNKA 1998, p. 122: The contract for the construction of a Pepsi licensed plant was signed in December 1988 and the production was launched six months later in June 1989.

¹⁴ Czech TV, ČT24 Archives, online, accessed on 27 July 2018, available at: <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10116288585-archiv-ct24/>.

catering, which was unified in terms of production, was exactly the industry where the tradition of agricultural and industrial production could go hand in hand with a strong enterprise involvement in services. Whatever the case, in the 1980s the sphere of the enterprise's social policy crossed village and regional boundaries when Slušovice's sports grounds and shops opened up for the public also on Sundays. This blurred the boundaries between the cooperative's staff and visitors to Slušovice who came to this miraculous haven of Czechoslovak consumerism on Sundays to enjoy horseracing (1981), a stay in the enterprise's luxurious hotel in Všemina, near Slušovice dam (1986) or fine dining in a restaurant located in a disused aeroplane (1982). There was none of the strict foreign currency policy of the normalised Czechoslovakia and no prudish bourgeois morals which condemned the prostitution covertly tolerated in Slušovice. Erotic was anyway strongly featured in the promotional graphic design of Slušovice's consumer goods¹⁵ and in untamed Slušovice's discos at the end of the 1980s, visited by teenagers even from afar.¹⁶

FROM PRODUCTION TO CONSUMERISM

At the beginning of 1988 the editors of the official party daily, "Rudé právo" [The Red Truth], were looking for a topical theme for a survey that readers would have their say on. They chose Slušovice and the editorial board was flooded with a wave of controversial response. 'Slušovice seems to be something supernatural only because many worksites are ruled by a completely different spirit, different relationships, other forms of work, and many adverse phenomena which we have almost come to overlook over the years', one reader wrote. Other readers suspected the management of JZD AK Slušovice of corruption and others called for an in-depth check, especially when primary agricultural production only made up one-tenth of its production, contrary to ordinary cooperative terms.¹⁷ Most readers, however, enthusiastically welcomed the cooperative's involvement in the consumer economy, as the home market often lacked products available as standard in neighbouring countries, such as long-life milk in cardboard boxes. 'No one could possibly reproach the cooperative for trying to make a profit', was one opinion voiced in the discussion in defence of Slušovice's methods.¹⁸

¹⁵ The author of the iconic photographs of JZD AK Slušovice, its employees and products was a promotion and theatre photographer Jan Regal of Gottwaldov (Zlín). His photographs are being prepared for publication in 2018 by the art historian and photographer Tomáš Pospěch.

¹⁶ On the phenomenon of Slušovice's discos in detail, see FIALKA 2017, pp. 220–222: The author notes both the Austrian examples to Slušovice's 'Derby Centrum', also called Sud [the Barrel] (1982–1983), designed by the architect Šebestián Zelina, where the discos were held, as well as the growing attention from the state administration and repressive forces to the 'obscene excesses' of a growing number of teenager visitors of the discos who demolished also the equipment of the Derby Centrum.

¹⁷ *Nejde jen o Slušovice* 1988, p. 2

¹⁸ *Čekání na Slušovice?* 1988, p. 2.

While the annual reports of the enterprise and the growing number of professional as well as popularising publications on JZD AK Slušovice emphasized 'doing socialist business' in the biotechnologies and microelectronics segment,¹⁹ the public was still more interested in Slušovice's rapidly expanding activities in services and the production of consumer goods. Their roots must be sought in the synergies of the company's social policy, horizontal concentration of production with many ancillary production programmes and the demand of the consumer economy. During the two decades from the end of the 1960s the enterprise's social policy had become so extensive that it began to self-confidently compete with the state monopoly in social care. Healthcare, pre-school and after-school education and catering and recreation of existing and former employees, including their families, reached point where the achievements of the enterprise's social policy became services and goods in great demand, extending far beyond the boundaries of Slušovice.²⁰ The ancillary production of unified construction cells facilitated the export of Slušovice's tertiary sphere in the form of small businesses, mostly in catering. And Czechoslovak society's voracious appetite for services and consumer goods quickly paved the way for Slušovice's products to expand into lucrative tourist destinations and economic segments in which the centrally planned economy had long been unsuccessful.²¹

As a natural outcome of Slušovice's expansion throughout the whole of Czechoslovakia, involving, for instance, the construction of unified motels and refreshment stalls,²² there were competence conflicts affecting the highest echelons of the establishment, distrust on the part of some of the managerial staff of the competing cooperatives concerning the dynamics and methods of Slušovice's expansion and the chronic suspicion of bribery.²³ The consumer was not as much interested in Slušovice's methods as in its products, for which people began to travel across the country every Sunday at the end of the 1980s. A Sunday in Slušovice became the phenomenon of a consumer society of late-normalisation Czechoslovakia, a pilgrimage to witness a miracle and the achievements of socialist consumerism with many obligatory rituals. These included a visit to the Slušovice hippodrome, car races and, most

¹⁹ TRNKA 1998, pp. 62–73.

²⁰ *Trochu z jiné strany* 1988, p. 3.

²¹ PRŮCHA 2009, pp. 920–929.

²² *Trochu z jiné strany* 1988, p. 3: In 1988 only, JZD AK Slušovice realised 125 construction jobs in the whole Czechoslovakia, worth a total of 516 mil. CZK. 'Why not,' "Rude právo" judged, 'but only if that does not go against the agricultural production and actual mission of JZD.' This is how it followed up on the bitter critical attack in an older article published in 1986 which, in the sense of Husák's rejection of capitalist methods in Czechoslovak agriculture, pointed out that ancillary production, on which the economic success of JZD AK Slušovice was mostly based, was not allowed or supposed to abuse the considerably lower taxation rate compared to industrial production (*Povinnost* 1986, p. 4).

²³ ŠTROUGAL 2009, pp. 91–93: Lubomír Štrougal (* 1924), in 1970–1988 the Prime Minister of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, was a supporter of Slušovice's management, certainly unlike President Gustáv Husák (1913–1991, in office in 1975–1989).

importantly, a supermarket with modern counters, offering non-monetary payments through the enterprise's payment cards. On Sundays, on which all Czechoslovak shops were otherwise closed, there were endless queues at the counters of the shops in Slušovice, similar to those at the last refreshments stand. Licensed Pepsi and fast food specialties were an unforgettable gastronomic experience making up a Slušovice Sunday; western brands of clothing and electronic products were the craved-for trophy of a pilgrimage to Slušovice. It was nothing unusual for people to travel a distance of over one hundred kilometres to Slušovice at the end of the 1980s, all the more when JZD AK Slušovice began organising consumer tours²⁴ and for Slušovice's inhabitants the sale of refreshments was a lucrative source of extra income for the weekend.²⁵

The influx of pilgrims to Slušovice's haven of Czechoslovak consumerism²⁶ placed a great strain on municipal and regional infrastructure and was also reflected in the quick and often chaotic architectural and urban transformation of the still prevalently countryside borough and landscape. A quarter of a century after the Slušovice frenzy had died down, many abandoned worksites and structures give an almost lunatic impression. This, in the opinion of the author, includes, for instance, a 4.5 km-long stretch of a four-lane regional road marked II/491 between Lípa and Lukov, which connects the outskirts of Slušovice with the main road I/49 in the direction of Otrokovice — Valašská Polanka. The 'Slušovice motorway', leading to nowhere, was built in 1986–1987 for 100 mil. CZK from the budget of the Agrocombine to mark the visit of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. Today's rate of traffic, only a fifth of that at the end of the 1980s, has turned some parts of the road into a car park.²⁷

However, the whole of Slušovice was one big car park before 1989, a borough whose population continuously grew during the 1980s but at weekends was flooded by thousands of tourists and visitors.²⁸ The Slušovice horse races at the hippodrome were dominated by a huge grandstand with a big barrel,²⁹ and attracted up to 55 thousand visitors (1986).³⁰ Kilometres of queues tested the patience of locals, visitors and the traffic police, of course unless the VIPs used the enterprise's airport to visit the borough. It was abandoned after 1991, just like the plans to turn Slušovice into

²⁴ "Naše cesta" 1989b: 'The great boom of JZD AK Slušovice made this village and its surroundings a destination for so many tours and excursions that visitor figures may dare to rival those of many historical and national sites.'

²⁵ FIALKA 2017, p. 219.

²⁶ It wasn't unusual at the end of the 1980s for pilgrims to stop in Slušovice with its consumer appeal at the weekend on their way back from Štípa or Hostýn .

²⁷ Slušovická dálnice, online, accessed on 27 July 2018, available at http://zeleznicni.wbs.cz/Slusovicka-dalnice_.html.

²⁸ In 1970–1990 the population of Slušovice more than doubled, from 1369 (1970) to 2760 (1990).

²⁹ FIALKA 2017, p. 220.

³⁰ "Naše cesta" 1986.

a garden city with villa quarters. However, it maintained its administrative status of a town, to which it was belatedly promoted in 1996. At that time, it was more reminiscent of a hybrid village rather than the so-called governing borough (1976), with the infrastructure and ambitions of a medium-sized town.³¹

A job in Slušovice was highly sought-after at the end of the normalisation period. Everyone wanted to know someone among Slušovice's employees with their business and social benefits. On the one hand, employment in JZD AK Slušovice gave access to an above-standard and stratified system of financial and non-monetary remuneration, savings in the enterprise's bank or shopping in the Kvatro enterprise shops, whose range of goods could easily compete with the nationwide network of Tuzex shops, where western goods were available for foreign currency or Tuzex vouchers, called 'bon'.³² The downside of the cooperative membership in Slušovice was the authoritative management of staff at strictly hierarchised de-concentrated worksites, headed by the charismatic chairman Čuba. Prohibition, transparent management and the 'once only!' principle went without saying, as did the heroic image of the founder generation of employees who stayed with the enterprise from the first years of Čuba's management. Unlimited access to the chairman and to a wide array of rewards and benefits confirmed their status as fellow cooperative members — pioneers,³³ the key bearers of the collective identity, who faced deep disillusionment after 1991 from the break-up of JZD AK Slušovice and the deindustrialisation of the borough.

It was especially for these primary employees, with priority given to long-term employees, for whom the growing investments into the enterprise's social policy were designed. They were used as the most easily accessible way of saving capital. On the one hand, they cried out to be imitated by other Czechoslovak enterprises, while on the other they attracted commercialisation in the shape of a network of the enterprise's recreational facilities, led by hotels in Všemina and Prague. The hotel in Prague was to be built in 1988–1991 to cater to an anticipated 18 thousand guests a year, mostly fellow cooperative members.³⁴ The investment was part of the enterprise's strategy to publicly legitimise the unprecedented entrepreneurial success of Slušovice's cooperative. Dynamic medialisation was at the same time supposed to detract attention from another issue, discussed in the nationwide media as well as by the enterprise's bodies of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The enterprise's autonomous culture, focused on the ideologically neutral performance in the 1980s,

³¹ FIALKA 2017, pp. 216–217.

³² On Tuzex, the Czech alternative to the Polish Pevex or East German Intershop, see GALLO 2003.

³³ In 1980–1989 the average gross nominal wage in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic rose from 2656 to 3170 Kčs, and in the mid-1980s it averaged some 2900 Kčs. In 1988, when the average gross wage in JZD AK Slušovice was 3288 Kčs, the average national gross nominal wage rose to 3095 Kčs, i.e. to 94.1% of Slušovice's average.

³⁴ *Postaví hotel* 1988, p. 2.

the perestroika era, eliminated the influence of the Communist Party on the operations of the cooperative. Of a staff of 4000 in 1988, merely 650 (16.3%) were party members, the same figure as university graduates. Other employees showed minimum interest in party topics, especially at public party conferences. Slušovice's party circumstances were seen as problematic by the regional Communist Party committee as well as by its national bodies, who suggested that regional party conventions should be held actually in Slušovice.³⁵ But they were articulated by the enterprise itself, as its management became aware of the danger inherent in constantly underestimating party activities. The scarce numbers of Slušovice's party members were to be increased with what were mostly young workers and technicians, and new job applicants in general. This wasn't a low number — in 1988 alone, 700 new staff were hired out of 7500 applicants. After a six-month trial period, they received an average monthly pay of 3288 Kčs, or double that sum for elite cattle feeders, remuneration which far exceeded the Czechoslovak average in the late 1980s.³⁶

THE (UN)OFFICIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE BETWEEN THE CRITIQUE, GLORIFICATION AND PERSIFLAGE

JZD AK Slušovice began to frequently appear in the pages of the national press, headed by the "Rudé právo" daily, in the latter half of the 1970s. As the 1980s drew to a close, there was probably not a month when the name of JZD AK Slušovice did not pop up in "Rudé právo",³⁷ most often in connection with the state agricultural policy, the implementation of modern technologies in plant and animal production and, most importantly, in connection with the increasing everyday consumer demands of the Czechoslovak population, which was not easily saturated under the centrally planned economy scheme. Slušovice was most often used as a good example of a 'socialist entrepreneurial activity' and an economic unit which, besides its primary plant and animal production, also successfully focused on entire segments of consumer goods of which there was a shortage. The media image of Slušovice, on the one hand, was used as the example for other Czechoslovak cooperative farms.³⁸ On the other hand, newspaper articles began to appear more and more in the 1980s criticising the non-standard economic practice and the discrepancy between Slušovice's market-economy methods and the proclaimed principles of the Czechoslovak state economy.³⁹ This continued even after 1987 when, in the era of the upcoming

³⁵ *Řídící činnost společně* 1988, p. 2.

³⁶ *Řídící činnost společně* 1988, p. 2; *Když nestačí* 1989, p. 3; *Trochu z jiné strany* 1988, p. 3.

³⁷ In the latter half of the 1980s, besides short news articles, there were some ten extensive articles per year in "Rudé právo", which dealt with some of Slušovice's more common topics.

³⁸ ŠTROUGAL 2009, pp. 91–93.

³⁹ *Povinnost* 1986, p. 4 ff.

Czechoslovak perestroika, Slušovice began to be mentioned more often also by some of the highest-ranking representatives of the normalisation establishment.

Therefore when a critical article was published in “Rudé právo” in February 1982, ascribing the increasing injury rate in agriculture to the recently completed mechanisation of farming, “Rudé právo” gave the good example of a solution to the healthcare issue of a cooperative in Třinec, North Moravia, located near the Czech-Polish border, which had its own public healthcare office and spa, but it would not be “Rudé právo” if it did not also mention a similarly exemplary situation in JZD Slušovice.⁴⁰ Just four years later, JZD Slušovice was denounced for circumventing the homologation process in the production of farming machinery that was marketed in contravention of the production standards.⁴¹ The shift in the official media discourse towards more consistent criticism of the circumstances in Slušovice was apparently linked with the address by President Gustáv Husák who, at the 15th convention of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in September 1985, decidedly rejected any forms of economic liberalisation through the implementation of pro-market mechanisms. The road to a stronger economy was apparently supposed to involve improving the centrally planned national economy scheme,⁴² which was contradictory to the actual situation in Slušovice, whose official media discourse oscillated between critique of economic methods and the glorification of the results achieved. The media discourse at the national level obviously involved the cooperative itself, which was used by the mass media to present the achieved results and as an apology for the organisational and production strategies. A separate topic was the publication of a prestigious enterprise magazine entitled “Naše cesta” [Our Way], blurring the boundaries between enterprise and local periodical and a sought-after regional social journal.

In the 1980s the phenomenon of JZD Slušovice obviously found its way into mass culture,⁴³ including Czechoslovak cinematography, which oscillated between critique on the one hand and persiflage on the other. When the bawdy comedy *Slunce, seno, jahody* [Sun, Hay and Strawberries], scripted by Zdeněk Troška (*1953) and Petr Markov (*1945), opened in Czechoslovak cinemas on 1 September 1984 after the censors had insisted on at least 15 minutes being cut and had banned an official premiere screening, the public immediately understood that the setting of the South Bohemian village of Hoštice, near Bavorov, and the story of the movie was remarkably similar to the media image of Slušovice as spread by the official media. The movie was in fact shot in the summer of 1982 based on Troška’s older school-time screenplay entitled *Ta naše vesnička česká* [This Little Czech Village of Ours]; however, it became topical for viewers only through comparison with the ubiquity of Slušovice in the media and people’s idea of what it was really like in Slušovice.

⁴⁰ *Proti úrazům* 1982, p. 5.

⁴¹ *Co se stroji* 1986, p. 3.

⁴² *Soustavně zdokonalovat* 1985, p. 3.

⁴³ Systematically for the first time FIALKA 2017, pp. 211–230.

The South-Bohemian movie village scenery, paradoxically blurring the boundaries between the traditional countryside world and contemporary consumer society, provided a setting in which the story unfolds of Plánička, a young university student who comes to a remote cooperative to do the practical part of his graduation paper at an agricultural university, depicted as an experiment entitled *Dojivost krav v závislosti na kultuře prostředí* [*Milk Yield in Relation to the Culture of Environment*]. Although in Troška's comedy, still the number one box office Czechoslovak hit of the 1980s, there is no explicit mention of Slušovice, the 'miracle experiment' carried out by the son of the chairman of the Regional Agricultural Office and the unconventional methods used on the dairy cattle to improve efficiency, involving listening to various genres of recorded music, only underline the Slušovice connotations, for instance the use of electronic devices in connection with animal production. This is all the more true when the miraculous side of Plánička's method is accentuated by the fact that due to the cooperative's farmers' lack of faith, it was not a cooperative cow that became the primary subject of the experiment but a parochial cow. Five years later, on 1 July 1989, the sequel to the successful comedy entitled *Slunce, seno a pár facek* [*Sun, Hay and a Few Slaps*] was premiered, in which JZD AK Slušovice is actually referred to in the dialogues of the acting characters, who were authentic rural non-actors. By the end of 1989 the movie had been seen by 3 791 000 people, beating box office hits such as *Out of Africa*, *Dirty Dancing* and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*.⁴⁴ Evaluation of Troška's trilogy, completed in 1991 with the last part entitled *Slunce, seno a erotika* [*Sun, Hay and Erotica*], which parodied the transformation-period ambivalence of the Czechoslovak situation in the early 1990s, also seems to reflect the ambivalent approach of Czech society to the peak of the normalisation period and its symbols, dominated by the 'Slušovice miracle'.

While the Slušovice topos was only implicitly present in Troška's successful comedies, the feature movie *Hauři* [*The Reckless*] by the Slovak director Július Matula (*1943) expressed it in an explicit way, for instance by the eventually unfulfilled intention to shoot a film about a young structural designer who moves from Prague to find a more meaningful job in a renowned rural cooperative, using Slušovice itself as the actual setting. Following objections by the management of the Slušovice cooperative, who were unhappy with the critical impression of the screenplay, the setting was replaced by the South Moravia wine cooperative in Blatnice pod Svatým Antonínkem, some 40 km from Slušovice. While in Troška's comedy, JZD AK Slušovice played a supporting role as a mocked miraculous example, in Matula's *Hauři* the modern technological setting gave the opportunity to develop the generational conflict which the functioning of JZD AK Slušovice brought about at the local, regional and nationwide level. In the movie, this conflict is expressed by the bond between the young designer and the old chairman, one of the generation of cooperative founders, who are faced by the technocratic middle generation working dogmati-

⁴⁴ FIALA 1991, pp. 10–11.

cally within the bounds of the law and oscillating between cynicism and conjunctural opportunism.

Acceptance of Matula's movie was controversial both by the Barrandov studio censors and by viewers, who eventually praised the acting of the young stars, led by the actor Marek Vašut, and the erotic scenes reflecting the looser sexual morals of the 1980s. The critical view of the phenomenon of JZD Slušovice was thus abandoned. The filmmakers used Slušovice's setting rather to present people's contrasting fates on the screen. It is all the more paradoxical that the movie, which premiered in January 1988, was planned as Czechoslovak cinematography's contribution to the 40th anniversary of the seizure of power by the Communists in February 1948.⁴⁵

However, the phenomenon of Slušovice kept the unofficial discourse occupied most of all. As an example, a popular 1980s folk duo, Miroslav Paleček and Michael Janík, composed a song⁴⁶ entitled *Slušovická romance* [*Slušovice Romance*] and premiered it most probably at Prague's A-klub students' club at the Podolí dormitory on 14 May 1984. A very popular folk song in its time, there are at least two versions of its lyrics as a result of the censors. Both versions use the ironising fable of the admirable JZD Slušovice, the bastion of western consumerism, which is barely rivalled by the casinos of Monte Carlo, Liverpool racetrack and the renowned slivovice drink from Vizovice, which pales in comparison with the introduction of Slušovice whiskey.⁴⁷ While the original version of the lyrics was stripped by the censors to get rid of any mention of western espionage agents crawling around Slušovice and free-to-buy foreign currencies, the younger official version mentions, without actually naming, the entrepreneur Tomáš Baťa (1876–1932) and concludes with an apotheosis of Slušovice's entrepreneurial plans with eugenic and cosmic ambition. The last verse, however, is dedicated to Moscow and the dissemination of *Burda*, the German fashion magazine, to Soviet readers.⁴⁸ Whatever was mentioned indirectly and with caution in the official discourse, be it the daily press or cinematography, is expressed in this song under the openness of a normalisation subculture: the foreign currency black market, a developed sense for self-presentation, shadowing even the official

⁴⁵ SLINTÁK 2012, pp. 42–54.

⁴⁶ MLÁDEK 1977: Perhaps the first time JZD AK Slušovice was indirectly mentioned in a song was in one of the most popular Czechoslovak hits of the 1970s, a dixieland song called *Jožin z bažin* [*Joey, the Swamp Monster*] (1977) by the Czech hitmaker Ivan Mládek (*1946).

⁴⁷ SLADKOWSKI 2014, pp. 9–28, 149–182: Besides the national enterprise Svit (Baťa until 1948) in Gottwaldov (now again Zlín), the Czechoslovak shoemaking metropolis, and JZD AK Slušovice, undoubtedly the most well-known industrial enterprise in the district of Gottwaldov at the end of the state socialism era was the state enterprise Rudolf Jelínek, following the tradition of the Jewish company Jelínek (1894), nationalised in 1948, which produced high quality distillates from the end of the 19th century, with the most prominent being a (kosher) plum brandy (slivovice) from plums grown in the Valašsko region. The tradition of producing fruit distillates in Vizovice dates back to at least 1585.

⁴⁸ PALEČEK, JANÍK 1984.

governmental and party circles, the clientelism and nepotism were an integral part of Slušovice's reality in the unofficial discourse.

While unofficial media discourse was rife with speculation over the roots of the 'Slušovice miracle' and the official media more and more often criticised the controversy of Slušovice's method of 'socialist entrepreneurial activity', Slušovice itself was given a chance to present itself almost live, in the popular TV contest entitled *Jedeme dál* [*Rolling On*] in 1988, where pop stars challenged the team of selected Slušovice staff. In what was prevalently a western movie setting, Slušovice was presented as a village with modern architecture, infrastructure, agricultural and industrial production, as an exemplary socialist cooperative unit in which the traditional differences between the town and village blur in favour of the hybrid socialist consumerism culture. The TV show brought people to Slušovice through the screen, including those who had never been there. This was in fact the first time the show was shot in the countryside, not in a town.⁴⁹

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In the first half of 1991 the mass media was again full of Slušovice, including the foreign media. At the end of June, the investigating detective of the Zlín police, captain Alexej Žák (*1955), fled into exile in Switzerland, fearing for his life after being withdrawn from the investigation into a multi-million-crown fraud of Slušovice's management in April 1991. He communicated with the Czechoslovak public, as well as with President Václav Havel (1936–2011), through the Swiss press (*Weltwoche*), which tried to summarise Czechoslovakia's complicated post-November stories for western readers, taking the story of the Slušovice case as the cornerstone. It highlighted the role of the cooperative information centre⁵⁰ in gathering and evaluating information from home and foreign sources, the preparation of JZD AK Slušovice for the transition to the market economy long before the events of November 1989 and the lightning-fast conversion of the de-concentrated business units into stock businesses at the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990. Most importantly, however, it emphasized the attention paid to JZD AK Slušovice by the post-November establishment, in Parliament,⁵¹ the government⁵² and in the President's office.

⁴⁹ FIALKA 2017, pp. 222–225.

⁵⁰ TRNKA 1998, pp. 54–56.

⁵¹ TRNKA 1998, pp. 131–132: At the beginning of March 1990, the nationwide media published the first reports of the conversions into joint stocks in JZD AK Slušovice. Less than two months later, at the joint session of the House of the People and House of the Nations, the first of the interpellations was issued, raising concerns about the seizure of power over Czechoslovak agriculture by the criminalised Slušovice structures.

⁵² TRNKA 1998, p. 126: On 29 April 1991 Minister of the Interior Ján Langoš (1946–2006) attacked JZD AK Slušovice at the session of the Landowners' Association of the Czech Republic, as its prosperity was, according to Langoš, based on cooperation between the Russian KGB and the Czechoslovak State Security.

President Václav Havel repeatedly condemned Slušovice, for the last time in front of tens of thousands of people gathered in Wenceslas Square in Prague on 21 August 1990, the 22nd anniversary of the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armies.⁵³ One day later, František Čuba resigned from the management of JZD AK Slušovice.⁵⁴ While Čuba explained his resignation as a consequence of a concentrated attack on him in person, the media portrayed his resignation as justification for the investigation into the Slušovice complex, which faced a series of lawsuits in the first half of 1991.⁵⁵ In the middle of 1991 the public was completely lost in the maze of Slušovice's media (mis)interpretations. However, a more important up-to-date issue affecting the whole society then occurred — the breaking apart of the joint Czech and Slovak state as of 31 December 1991.

The glamour and appeal of the 'Slušovice miracle' faded surprisingly quickly after the events of November 1989. The rapid emergence of the market economy, so-called small and large privatisation projects and the conversion of hundreds of small businesses into joint stocks, the disintegration of which was facilitated by the de-concentrated character of Slušovice's entrepreneurial activities, made JZD AK Slušovice lose experts, experienced managers and pro-active employees. They formed into a multitude of pioneers of post-November capitalism. The cooperative swirled between the lasting authoritative management style and the loud calls for its democratisation. As an accompanying phenomenon of the conflict, there was a sharp decline in working morals and performance, high staff fluctuation and eventually the disintegration of its stable labour core.⁵⁶ Their flair of exceptionality was also lost by Slušovice's stalls and havens of consumerism. Often imitating Slušovice's patterns, including the graphic package, they began to appear throughout the country. They lost the hallmark of a forbidden fruit when Slušovice discos and exchanges moved to the regional capital Zlín and ceased to be lucrative, when Czechoslovak

⁵³ 'Over our factories, agricultural combines and most diverse enterprises, there float vast clouds of useless directorates and inept bureaucrats. Foreign trade companies parasitize on production, selling goods that the manufacturing companies could sell better and quicker on their own. Behind all of this are the tentacles of invisible mafias trying to make a buck with property that does not belong to them, establish suspicious joint stock companies and look for ways to safely stash away their ill-gotten capital. The extremely dark veins of Slušovice creep inconspicuously throughout our entire food industry', said Václav Havel, according to whom Slušovice was a symbol of the late-normalisation economic mafia (Address of President of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic on the anniversary of occupation of Czechoslovakia by the armies of five countries of the Warsaw Pact, Prague, Wenceslas Square, 21 August 1990, online, accessed on 27 July 2018, available at http://vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=projevy&val=300_projevy.html&typ=HTML).

⁵⁴ TRNKA 1998, pp. 107, 122–123, 134, 148.

⁵⁵ TRNKA 1998, p. 137: On 22 February 1991 the first of a series of criminal charges was filed which accused the management of JZD AK Slušovice from falsifying its financial results, abuse of cooperative property to create private joint stock companies, theft of property and other economic crimes.

⁵⁶ TRNKA 1998, pp. 147–149.

consumers went across the borders for western brands of consumer goods as early as at Christmas 1989. The western distributors, faced with uncertainty over the future state of affairs, preferred to bypass their Slušovice contacts and placed their goods on the Czechoslovak market without their Slušovice intermediaries.

The fate of the ‘Slušovice miracle’ was eventually decided by the mass media which, to a considerable extent, had helped to create it, and argued about its origins, successes and opportunities to imitate it from the end of the 1970s. The Slušovice race track and motorway were becoming overgrown with grass in the mid-1990s; while Slušovice’s top management turned their back on the post-November establishment, ordinary cooperative members shared the castaway aftertaste of unacknowledged inhabitants of a village once always present in the media, and the Czechoslovak public, burdened with the economic recession in 1997–1999, was re-evaluating its attitude to the market economy.⁵⁷ However, the vision of the ‘Slušovice miracle’ regularly reappeared as a specific Czechoslovak symbiosis of socialism and market economy, as ghostly as the illusion of Czechoslovak socialism with a human face before the 1968 August occupation. Slušovice is still a milestone and a point of contention in modern Czechoslovak history. All the more so, when František Čuba, the former chairman of JZD AK Slušovice, was elected Senator in the 2014 elections and accepted the post as agricultural advisor to President Miloš Zeman. Slušovice’s controversies are therefore revived even today, when the ‘Slušovice miracle’ still remains a tool to legitimise the smooth transition of the consumer society from the late state socialism era into the early post-November liberal market.

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Summary

It would be impossible to find a more well-known unified cooperative farm in Czechoslovakia than JZD AK Slušovice before 1989. It played the role of an omnipresent media touchstone of Czechoslovak economics and perestroika reforms. The media conflicts focused on the resignation from agricultural production in favour of, or to the detriment of, other production, the consumer economy and services, while using technologies, organisational principles, nomenclature and strategies which denied the principles of the centrally planned economy. The study explores the transformation of Slušovice from a stagnating cooperative farm into a prosperous socialist enterprise, and also two areas of its activities, consumerism and the media, which made Slušovice an omnipresent phenomenon of late-normalisation Czechoslovakia. The official media discourse oscillated between adoration and condemnation, and indirectly revealed the ideological and generational conflicts inside the ruling establishment. The unofficial media discourse did not disguise its suspicion over the operation of Slušovice's cooperative, whose fictitious as well as real setting attracted filmmakers across all genres. The transformation of Slušovice into the biggest consumer attraction of the 1980s was the result of synergy between the enterprise's expanding social policy and its involvement in the consumer goods and services sector. The demise of the Slušovice miracle after 1989 came quicker than could have been expected in the preceding decade. It was caused by the break-up of the Soviet bloc of centrally planned economies, the breaking apart of the Czechoslovak state and the post-November establishment's deliberate attack on the Slušovice agrocombine, constantly suspected of economic crime.