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“ALL CHILDREN ARE OURS” – CHILDREN’S HOMES  
IN SOCIALIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA AS LABORATORIES  
OF SOCIAL ENGINEERING<sup>1</sup>

*Introduction*

In a 1962 issue of the educational journal *Vychovávateľ* (“The Educator”), Josef Krupauer, head of department at the Czechoslovak ministry of schooling and culture, gives an overview of institutions that were charged with caring for what were referred to at the time as “children without family”.<sup>2</sup> This term (in Czech “Děti bez rodiny”) did not primarily refer to orphans in any literal biological sense but to “social orphans” (“sociální sirotci”) – i.e. children whose parents were alive but not considered capable of raising and educating their child (or children) properly. While the article has at first glance the look of a rather technocratic listing of numbers and figures, it quickly develops into a passionate plea for improvements in the staffing, facilities and educational environment of Czechoslovakia’s children’s homes. Krupauer declares the subject to be a socio-political task of the highest priority: after all the socialist regime maintained a claim that “All children are ours!”. If the state were to fail in providing adequate care for “children without family”, it would not only be endangering the development of such children but would also be jeopardizing the future of the entire society.

Krupauer’s plea marks a crucial point in an ongoing postwar project of social engineering of the socialist state. That state had comprehensively restructured childcare provision in order to introduce new, allegedly better forms of education, even going so far as to take the place of the family altogether in cases where that was seen to be necessary. Collective childcare in children’s homes was designed to meet ideological requirements as well as scientifically proven norms for children’s health, development and education. However, as many other officials and scientific experts aside from Krupauer became aware, the Czechoslovak system of children’s homes had turned out in reality to be unsuitable and insufficient for its intended purpose in several respects. The discussion increased in intensity from the late 1950s on, finally coming out into the public sphere as what was referred to as the “childcare issue” (dětská otázka) in the early 1960s. The main diagnosis reached through this discussion was that the children’s homes had failed in their task of replacing the family, as

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<sup>2</sup> *Krupauer*, Josef: Všecky děti jsou naše [All Children Are Ours]. In: *Vychovávateľ* 6 (1961-62) 10, 314-316.

a majority of children residing in such homes developed serious mental, emotional and behavioral problems, which child psychologists summarized under the concept of "deprivation syndrome". As a consequence of this damning judgement, the legal and structural foundation of the entire system of residential childcare in socialist Czechoslovakia<sup>3</sup> was put into question.

The aim of this article is to reconstruct the establishment and development of this system as a project in social engineering, delving deeply into the primary sources left by the administrative bodies responsible for the system. Just how did the state organize the care for "children without family" after the war? What forms of residential care were used? How and for what reasons were children separated from their families and admitted to children's homes? What educational and childcare principles and goals were followed? What were the influences that initiated the change in childcare policies during the late 1950s and where did that change lead? What new forms of care were discussed as potential replacements for the failed system and what model was finally introduced when the discussion had concluded?

Although the system of residential care affected only a small proportion of the population – around 20,000 children were admitted in 1965<sup>4</sup> – it mirrored important issues that affect modern societies in general: perceptions of childhood, definitions of what constitutes "good" care and education, normative images of individual and family life, notions of "normality" and "abnormality" in relation to physical, mental and social conditions experienced by children, among many other questions. This paper can offer no more than a sketch of some of these aspects and trace out some lines of comparison against other socialist countries in East Central Europe. There is, however, no doubt that this field has the potential to provide several innovative approaches to research into postwar societies, not least from a transnational, comparative perspective involving further examples from both the socialist and the western world.

#### *Remarks on Research and Analytical Concepts Employed*

Research into the interrelationships between attitudes to childhood, education, the state and science in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been conducted in the main by such disciplines as sociology, educational sciences and literary studies, and far less by historians.<sup>5</sup> An interdisciplinary approach generally referred to as "child-

<sup>3</sup> Since the name of the state underwent some changes over the years – it was renamed the ČSSR, for example, in 1960 through the adoption by the state of a new constitution – I will just use "(Socialist) Czechoslovakia" as a general name to avoid confusion. See: *Pánek, Jaroslav/Tůma, Oldřich: A History of the Czech Lands. Prague 2009, 18.*

<sup>4</sup> *Dunovský, Jiří: Péče o děti zbavené rodinného prostředí [Care for Children Deprived of a Family Environment]. In: Vychovatel 10 (1965-66) 5, 155-158, here 155.*

<sup>5</sup> *Corsaro, William A.: The Sociology of Childhood. Los Angeles 2011. – Lesnik-Oberstein, Karin (ed.): Children in Culture, Revisited. Further Approaches to Childhood. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire 2011. – Andresen, Sabine/Diehm, Isabell: Kinder, Kindheiten, Konstruktionen. Erziehungswissenschaftliche Perspektiven und sozialpädagogische Verortungen. Wiesbaden 2006. – Tesář, Marek: Governing Childhoods through Stories. A Havelian Analysis of Childhood Subjectivities. Aotearoa 2012.*

hood studies” in particular has revealed the influence of politics, science, the media and economics on perceptions of childhood and children’s lives, offering fruitful suggestions for new directions in historical research.<sup>6</sup> Childhood should be understood as one of the most important social categories influencing modern times, at a par with such other concepts as “gender” or “race”, for example.<sup>7</sup> The concept of “childhood” is not a biological condition but rather a social construct, shaped not least by perceptions and norms produced by science as well as by state institutions entrusted with the task education and childcare.<sup>8</sup>

The modern concept of childhood involves a deferment of other functions to provide a period for development and education, requiring freedom from the responsibilities and duties of the adult world.<sup>9</sup> This concept of deferment reframes two contrasting perceptions and ideals of childhood.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, children are considered to need care and protection due to their vulnerability and innocence.<sup>11</sup> On the other, children, as future adults and citizens, need to be socialized and disciplined from the very earliest stages in order to prepare them to fulfill the demands of society and the modern state. By setting up daycare and educational institutions, the state, in cooperation with emerging professional disciplines such as educational sciences, pediatrics and psychology, became an important agency in the regulation of children’s lives.<sup>12</sup>

Recent research has already pointed out that general perceptions of childhood in socialist regimes overlap with the above-described modern paradox.<sup>13</sup> By favoring

<sup>6</sup> *Qvortrup, Jens / Corsaro, William A. / Honig, Michael-Sebastian: The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire 2011.*

<sup>7</sup> *Honig, Michael-Sebastian: Geschichte der Kindheit im „Jahrhundert des Kindes“. In: Krüger, Heinz-Hermann / Grunert, Cathleen (eds.): Handbuch Kindheits- und Jugendforschung. Wiesbaden 2010, 335-358, here 336.*

<sup>8</sup> *Pressler, Shirley J.: Construction of Childhood. The Building Blocks. In: Kassem, Derek / Murphy, Lisa / Taylor, Elizabeth (eds.): Key Issues in Childhood and Youth Studies. London, New York 2010, 14-26.*

<sup>9</sup> *Andresen, Sabine: Kindheit als Dispositiv. Ein Zugang erziehungswissenschaftlicher und historischer Kindheitsforschung. In: Pongratz, Ludwig A. (ed.): Nach Foucault. Diskurs- und machtanalytische Perspektiven der Pädagogik. Wiesbaden 2004, 158-175, here 163-164.*

<sup>10</sup> *Zeiber, Helga: Ambivalenzen und Widersprüche der Institutionalisierung von Kindheit. In: Honig, Michael-Sebastian (ed.): Ordnungen der Kindheit. Problemstellungen und Perspektiven der Kindheitsforschung. Weinheim, München 2009, 103-126.*

<sup>11</sup> *Mierendorff, Johanna: Kindheit und Wohlfahrtsstaat. Entstehung, Wandel und Kontinuität des Musters moderner Kindheit. Weinheim 2010, 23-31.*

<sup>12</sup> For a general approach for use in Central European settings see: *Hopfner, Johanna / Németh, András / Szabolcs, Éva (eds.): Kindheit – Schule – Erziehungswissenschaft in Mitteleuropa 1948-2008. Frankfurt am Main et al. 2009; Nóbik, Attila (ed.): Normalität, Abnormalität und Devianz. Gesellschaftliche Konstruktionsprozesse und ihre Umwälzungen in der Moderne. Frankfurt am Main et al. 2010.* – For the Czechoslovak case see: *Knapík, Jiří: Školní družiny a kluby v 50. a 60. letech jako součást socialistické mimoškolní výchovy [After-School Care and School Clubs in the 1950s and 1960s as a Part of Socialist Out-of-School Education]. In: Kuděj. Časopis pro kulturní dějiny 14 (2013) 1, 5-25; Knapík, Jiří: Socialistické školství a tzv. mimoškolní výchova v Československu v 50. a 60. letech [Socialist Schools and So-Called Out-Of-School Education in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and 1960s.]. In: Acta historica Neosoliensia 16 (2013) 88-106.*

<sup>13</sup> Though such research has tended to concentrate mostly on the Soviet experience: *Kirschen-*

collective over individual forms of care and education, the governing communist parties linked the period of deferment with the ideological imperative of raising what was referred to as the "new socialist man".<sup>14</sup> Providing "the best for the child" in various types of residential care was closely connected with combatting the concept of the "bourgeois" family and with achieving socialist re-education.<sup>15</sup> Despite the fact that removing a child from his or her family in favor of long-term residential care was one of the most radical possible interventions available to the state, we nevertheless know very little about this topic in socialist Czechoslovakia,<sup>16</sup> in contrast, for example, to the case of the GDR.<sup>17</sup> Filling this gap also has the potential to broaden our knowledge of contemporary theoretical ideas on, as well as the practical effect of, collective childcare in a socialist country. So can socialist regimes then simply be identified with the idea of collective education or can we identify any grounds to reconsider our view of the relations between families, the state and mass organizations with regard to childcare and education?

The aim of this article is not simply to reconstruct the institutional setting within which arrangements were made to care for "children without family" during the first three decades of the socialist period in Czechoslovakia, but also to introduce an

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*baum*, Lisa F.: *Small Comrades. Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia. 1917-1932.* New York, London 2001. – *Kelly*, Catriona: *Children's World. Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991.* New Haven/Conn., London 2007. – *Leingang*, Oxane: *Sowjetische Kindheit im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Generationsentwürfe im Kontext nationaler Erinnerungskultur.* Heidelberg 2014. – For Austria and Germany: *Andresen*, Sabine: *Sozialistische Kindheitskonzepte. Politische Einflüsse auf die Erziehung.* München 2006, 212-220.

<sup>14</sup> *Margedant*, Udo: Das Bildungs- und Erziehungssystem der DDR. Funktion, Inhalte, Instrumentalisierung, Freiräume. In: *Deutscher Bundestag* (ed.): *Materialien der Enquete-Kommission „Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland“.* Vol. 3.3. Baden-Baden 1995, 1489-1529.

<sup>15</sup> *Iarskaia-Smirnova*, Elena/*Romanov*, Pavel: Institutional Child Care in Soviet Russia. Everyday Life in the Children's Home 'Krasnyi Gorodok' in Saratov. 1920s-1940s. In: *Schilde*, Kurt/*Schulte*, Dagmar (eds.): *Need and Care. Glimpses into the Beginnings of Eastern Europe's Professional Welfare.* Opladen, Bloomfield Hills/MI 2005, 91-121.

<sup>16</sup> The need to fill this gap is clearly formulated – though not satisfied – by: *Knapík*, Jiří: *Děti, dětství a socialismus jako badatelská výzva [Children, Childhood and Socialism as Challenge for Research]*, in: *Knapík*, Jiří (ed.): *Děti, mládež a socialismus v Československu v 50. a 60. letech [Children, Childhood and Socialism in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and 1960s]*. Opava 2014, 9-26. – Some brief remarks on this subject are to be found in: *Kovářík*, Jiří: *Childhood as a Social Phenomenon. National Report Czechoslovakia.* Vienna 1992, 9-11; *Kováříková*, Dagmar (ed.): *História starostlivosti o opustené, osirelé a sociálne narušené deti [The History of Care for Orphans, Neglected and Socially Disturbed Children]*. In: *Pedagogická Revue* 52 (2000) 5, 463-476. – A more highly elaborated overview with a focus on "disabled" and "Roma children" as objects of segregation in residential care is provided by: *Shmidt*, Victoria: *Child Welfare Discourses and Practices in the Czech Lands. The Segregation of Roma and Disabled Children during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.* Brno 2015.

<sup>17</sup> *Hannemann*, Martin: *Heimerziehung in der DDR.* In: *Deutscher Bundestag* (ed.): *Materialien der Enquete-Kommission*, Vol. 3.2, 1207-1222 (cf. footnote 14). – *Krause*, Hans-Ullrich: *Fazit einer Utopie. Heimerziehung in der DDR, eine Rekonstruktion.* Freiburg im Breisgau 2004.

innovative analytical approach to analyzing the politics of childcare and family as a paradigmatic field of scientifically legitimated political planning in modern societies.<sup>18</sup> The concept of social engineering that we introduce in the text to follow is highly likely to shed new light on discursive and structural aspects of the concept of modernity as interpreted by a socialist regime. For a long time now “modernity” has seemed to be a concept exclusively attached to western societies, while “eastern”, “communist” states – among other polities – are regarded in many senses as “the significant other”.<sup>19</sup> However, there is a strong argument in favor of examining socialism as at least one specific type of “organized” modernity, on the grounds that it shares many structural and institutional similarities with the “West”.<sup>20</sup> Stefan Plaggenborg convincingly suggests focusing on such aspects as the need to limit contingency, to regulate society and to steer it into the future as primary aims of socialist regimes in power.<sup>21</sup> The means used to achieve these aims may be characterized as social engineering, a category recently introduced into the historical discourse by Thomas Etzemüller.<sup>22</sup> The term “social engineering”, taken in its most general sense, aptly describes a set of ambivalent cooperative relationships that have been going on between state administrations and scientific experts since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The concept indicates discourses and practices that aim to “re-organize” society either in its entirety or in one or other specific field – the field of the family, education, work or reproduction, for example. According to the diagnosis of the social engineers, all of these areas were brought into a state of disorder and crisis due to the deliberating processes of modernization. The intellectual basis of social engineering projects is thus constructed upon specific blends of political ideology and scientific thinking, all relying on allegedly “objective” methods and data. By restructuring social institu-

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<sup>18</sup> See *Raphael*, Lutz: Die Verwissenschaftlichung des Sozialen als methodische und konzeptionelle Herausforderung für eine Sozialgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (GG) 22 (1996) 2, 165-193. – *Scott*, James C.: *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven 1998.

<sup>19</sup> The (discursive) formation of the West against the “rest” of the world is profoundly described by: *Hall*, Stuart: *The West and the Rest. Discourse and Power*. In: *Hall/Gieben, Bram* (eds.): *Formations of Modernity*. Cambridge 1994, 184-227.

<sup>20</sup> *Wagner*, Peter: *A Sociology of Modernity. Liberty and Discipline*. London, New York 1994, 123-140. – Eisenstadt also sees several similarities in “western” and “eastern” modernities: *Eisenstadt*, Shmuel N.: Multiple Modernen im Zeitalter der Globalisierung. In: *Schwimm*, Thomas (ed.): *Die Vielfalt und Einheit der Moderne. Kultur- und strukturvergleichende Analysen*. Wiesbaden 2006, 37-62, here 44-45. – *Kaelble*, Hartmut: *Konvergenzen und Divergenzen in der Gesellschaft Europas seit 1945*. In: *Raphael*, Lutz/*Caruso*, Clelia (eds.): *Theorien und Experimente der Moderne. Europas Gesellschaften im 20. Jahrhundert*. Köln 2012, 21-36.

<sup>21</sup> *Plaggenborg*, Stefan: *Experiment Moderne. Der sowjetische Weg*. Frankfurt am Main, New York 2006, 323-369.

<sup>22</sup> *Etzemüller*, Thomas: Die Romantik des Reißbretts. Social engineering und demokratische Volksgemeinschaft in Schweden. In: GG 32 (2006) 4, 445-466. – *Etzemüller*: Social engineering als Verhaltenslehre des kühlen Kopfes. Eine einleitende Skizze. In: *Etzemüller* (ed.): *Die Ordnung der Moderne. Social Engineering im 20. Jahrhundert*. Bielefeld 2009, 11-39.

tions, conditions and relations, the social engineers aimed to comprehensively plan and produce the future conditions that they favored.

Etzemüller, who concentrated on western, and in particular on Scandinavian examples, did not specifically stipulate that this category should be applied to socialist societies. Nevertheless, there are other studies that suggest such an approach may be useful in this context.<sup>23</sup> Socialist regimes strongly depended for their legitimacy on the vision of a better future through the reorganization of society.<sup>24</sup> Philosopher Karl Popper, who actually coined the term "social engineering" in his 1945 work "The Open Society and Its Enemies", explicitly characterized socialist regimes as social engineers. Popper distinguished two types of social engineering: a "utopian" and a "piecemeal" type, associating the former with totalitarian regimes (both communist and fascist) and the latter with liberal democratic systems.<sup>25</sup> While the utopian approach tended to violently revolutionize social relations and institutions in order to realize a holistic vision of a new, ultimately "better" society, the piecemeal method identified urgent problems in particular areas of society in a step-by-step manner, discussed and compared potential solutions and gradually arrived at compromises to ameliorate those problems.

The question for us here is how fitting this strong dichotomy turns out to be when applied to concrete empirical material. In our case, we presume that, as state institutions, children's homes served as small-scale laboratories for testing out educational and childcare theories on how to replace the family. Psychologists, pediatricians and educational specialists had the opportunity to examine and supervise the children who lived in such homes and to document their development. They also were in a position to intervene in the system and to argue for modifications to it. Thus it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the state and the scientific community as the two driving forces behind social engineering, as they cooperated at several levels in actual practice. The limitations of this article force it to focus on state administration, law-making and discussions on reform as decisive aspects of the social engineering project. The role of scientific experts in the matter is discussed in detail elsewhere, where there is space to recognize their complex discourses and their interventions in an appropriate manner.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Lehmann, Rosa: Social(ist) Engineering. Taming the Devils of the Polish Bieszczady. In: Communist and Post-Communist Studies 42 (2009) 3, 423-444. – Gestwa, Klaus: Social and soul engineering unter Stalin und Chruschtschow, 1928-1964. In: Etzemüller: Die Ordnung der Moderne, 241-277 (cf. footnote 22).*

<sup>24</sup> *Schulze Wessel, Martin: Zukunftsentwürfe und Planungspraktiken in der Sowjetunion und der sozialistischen Tschechoslowakei. Zur Einleitung. In: Schulze Wessel/Brenner, Christiane (eds.): Zukunftsvorstellungen und staatliche Planung im Sozialismus. Die Tschechoslowakei im ostmitteleuropäischen Kontext 1945-1989. München 2010 (BWT 30), 1-18.*

<sup>25</sup> *Popper, Karl: The Open Society and Its Enemies. Vol. 1: The Spell of Plato. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. London 1989, 157-168.*

<sup>26</sup> *Henschel, Frank: A Project of Social Engineering: Childhood-Experts and the "Childcare Issue" in Socialist Czechoslovakia. In: Acta Historica Universitatis Silesianae Opaviensis 9 (2016) (forthcoming).*

*Establishing a New System of Children's Homes in Postwar Czechoslovakia –  
The State as Social Engineer*

During the first seven years after the end of the war, the Czechoslovak state set out on a road of radical change in how “children without family” were cared for. The process was characterized by a rapid centralization of responsibilities, transferring them from private and public institutions to the state. The role of the family as primary educational environment for children was pruned back considerably whereas the role of collective institutions was strengthened.

As early as 1947, the state's preference for a centralized childcare model over giving a role to civil society and family education was given expression in a new law: Law 48/1947 Sb.<sup>27</sup> The public associations for childcare that had existed up until then, the District commissions of childcare (“Okresní péče o mládež” in Bohemia and Moravia, or “Okresná starostlivosť o mládež” in Slovakia), which had organized residential childcare since interwar times, were dissolved. All their property was nationalized to allow a new system of children's homes (Dětské domovy) to be set up. The state took upon itself the role of social engineer by redefining its role in the field of childcare. Law 48/1947 Sb. did not include any preamble to explain the justification for the measures taken in its various provisions, nor did it provide any concrete reason why the state was being granted its new responsibility. However, it can be assumed that the justification can be found in a perceived need to centralize and unify structures and processes in the field of childcare.<sup>28</sup> The Ministry of Health took over residential nurseries (Kojenecké ústavy), while the Ministry of Social Affairs was assigned the management of homes for preschool- and schoolchildren from the age of one year.

The aim of residential childcare at this time was less to produce a specific educational product than to provide basic humanitarian needs as part of the effort to deal with the consequences of the devastation left by the war. Homelessness, migration and re-population in the aftermath of the violent expulsions of the German population and the widespread poverty of families and children represented extremely serious challenges to postwar Czechoslovak society.<sup>29</sup> The state immediately began investing millions of crowns to expand the network of children's homes as quickly as possible to accommodate the large numbers of war orphans and abandoned

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<sup>27</sup> Zákon o organizaci péče o mládež [Law on Youth Services], číslo [number, č.] 48/1947 (19.03.1947), Sbírka zákonů republiky Československé [Body of Law of the Czechoslovak Republic, Sb.], částka [part] 25, 859-861.

<sup>28</sup> This assumption is also supported by a ministerial document, discussing concepts for the expansion of the home system. Národní archiv Praha [National Archives Prague, NA]. Fond MPSP P-1/7, IV 1800, karton [box] 79, Ministerstvo práce a sociální péče/Treichlinger: Program pro výstavbu dětských domovů – Nový opravený návrh [Program for the Development of Children's Homes – New, Revised Concept]. 07.02.1948.

<sup>29</sup> For a very detailed picture of the general situation in Europe and of the struggles involving children during the expulsions that took place in Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of WWII: Zahra, Tara: *The Lost Children. Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II.* Cambridge/Mass. 2011, 3-23 and 173-197.

children.<sup>30</sup> The local national councils (Národní výbory, NV) not only had the property confiscated from the now defunct associations for child protection available to them, but also possessed many abandoned and expropriated chateaux and mansions.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, their capacities soon reached their limits.<sup>32</sup>

The institutional and administrative structure of the state childcare system under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs was not transformed immediately in the wake of the communist coup in February 1948. However, new political priorities began to gain weighting, and some leading positions in the provision of childcare facilities were entrusted to loyal "comrades".<sup>33</sup> Ministerial guidelines on residential care clearly set out the aims of the new regime. In contrast to "capitalist" states and their poorly equipped orphanages, the socialist regime claimed to offer not just shelter, food and material support but to comprehensively replace the role of parental care. The collectively-inspired educational methods that were applied in children's homes would ensure that the children would "feel happy" and become "decent citizens" and "builders of socialism" in the future. Consequently, the aim of fostering "love of the people's democracy" was explicitly defined as the first goal of the children's education.<sup>34</sup> In this respect the Czechoslovak system did not differ from other socialist countries, but simply adopted a standard model of socialist education – one that was destined not to be put into question throughout the 1950s.<sup>35</sup> Residential care in the Soviet Union, where A. S. Makarenko had developed a specific model of collective education,<sup>36</sup> had been pursuing such objectives since the 1917 Revolution, and the GDR had put similar principles into practice as well.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Státní okresní archiv [State District Archive, SOkA] Cheb. Fond 266, Okresní Národní Výbor (ONV) Cheb, karton 455, inv. č. [inventory number] 1063, sign. [signature] VIII/17. Okresní péče o mládež (OPM) v Chebu. Rozpočet na rok 1947 [Budget for the Year 1947]. 22.04.1947.

<sup>31</sup> SOkA Cheb. Fond 266, ONV Cheb, karton 455, inv. č. 1063, sign. VIII/17. Foundation of the children's home in Plesná 1948.

<sup>32</sup> SOkA Cheb. Fond 266, ONV Cheb, karton 455, inv. č. 1063, sign. VIII/17. Inquiry on children's accomodation 1948.

<sup>33</sup> SOkA Blansko. Fond Dívčí vychovatelna Boskovice, č. 104, zn. [key mark] K7. Zápisy o poradách učitelského sboru 1937-1954; Fond Krajský dětský domov Boskovice, č. 171, zn. K15, Soudobá dokumentace. KDD v novinách/tisku II. 1955. Dívčí vychovatelna vrací chovanky řádnému životu [Girls' Home Leads Wards back to an Orderly Life] (Newspaper Article). 03.02.1950.

<sup>34</sup> Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí: Směrnice pro zřizování a provoz dětských domovů pro děti předškolního věku [Directive for Organizing and Operating Children's Homes for Preschool Children] (č.j. VI-1067/78); Směrnice pro zřizování a provoz dětských domovů pro děti školního věku (č.j. VI-1067/78) [Directive for Organizing and Operating Children's Homes for Schoolchildren]. In: Sbíрка oběžníků pro KNV [Collection of Circulars for the Regional National Councils] - Příloha [Supplement] 1950.

<sup>35</sup> For example, the first handbook on pedagogical practice in residential institutions in Czechoslovakia was a straight translation of a Soviet original: Učebně výchovná práce v dětských domovech. Sborník [Schooling and Education in Children's Homes. Volume]. Praha 1954; Nováková, Eliška: Ideově politická výchova v dětských domovech a družinách mládeže [Ideological-Political Education in Children's Homes and After-School Care]. In: Vychovávateľ 3 (1959) 10, 291-295.

<sup>36</sup> Furrer, Hans: Mut zur Utopie. Zur Pädagogik A. S. Makarenkos. Frankfurt am Main 1988.

Since the system of care for “children without family” was transformed into such an ideologized project of social engineering, it was only logical that ministerial competencies should be reallocated to match in a series of laws and directives. In 1951, the Ministry of Health was given charge not only of residential nurseries, but also of infants’ homes, which were residential institutions that catered for children between one and three years of age.<sup>38</sup> Homes for preschool children (between three and six years of age) and schoolchildren (from six to either fifteen or eighteen years of age, depending on the educational model followed) were transferred to the Ministry of Education when the Ministry of Social Affairs was abolished.<sup>39</sup> These facilities, along with institutions designed to cater for “children requiring specialized care”, were legally subsumed under the general term “out-of-school educational institutions” (“mimoškolní výchovná zařízení”),<sup>40</sup> in effect making them a regular, inseparable element of the educational system.

With the enactment of Law 69/1952 Sb. on youth protection, which replaced Law 48/1947 Sb. (itself only five years old), children’s homes became the primary option for providing substitute care for “children without family”.<sup>41</sup> Alternative solutions such as adoption had already been marginalized through Law 265/1949 Sb. on the family.<sup>42</sup> Due to its “unsatisfactory outcomes”, the Ministry of Social Affairs went so far as to ban foster care in 1951 and every child who was not either staying with relatives or available for adoption was re-admitted to a children’s home.<sup>43</sup> This legal and institutional set-up, which was very similar to those used in other socialist coun-

<sup>37</sup> *Iarskaia-Smirnova / Romanov: Institutional Child 95-98* (cf. footnote 15). – *Krause: Fazit einer Utopie, 17-19* (cf. footnote 17).

<sup>38</sup> § 7 of Zákon o jednotné preventivní a léčebné péči [Law on Integrated Preventive and Therapeutic Care], č. 103/1951 Sb. (19.12.1951), částka 50, 265-268. – Nařízení ministra zdravotnictví o organizaci preventivní a léčebné péče [Decree of the Health Minister on the Provision of Preventive and Therapeutic Care], č. 24/1952 Sb. (28.06.1952), částka 15, 181-185. – Ministerstvo zdravotnictví: Organisační a provozní řád dětských domovů [Ministry of Health: Organizational and Operative Instructions for Children’s Homes]. 1952. SOkA Karviná. ONV Karviná, inv. č. 315, karton 71. – Ministerstvo zdravotnictví: Organisační a provozní řád KÚ [Ministry of Health: Organizational and Operative Instructions for Residential Nurseries]. 1952. SOkA Nový Jiřín, ONV Nový Jiřín. inv. č. 686, karton 633, sign. 482.4.

<sup>39</sup> Zákon o sociálně právní ochraně mládeže [Law on the Social and Legal Protection of Youth], č. 69/1952 Sb. (30.10.1952), částka 35, 317-320. – Ministerstvo školství, věd a umění: Pokyny pro přijímání dětí a mládeže do ZDD, DD a DMVZP [Instructions for Placing Children and Youth into Retaining Homes, Children’s Homes and Residential Homes for Young People Providing Specialized Care], č. j. II-1067/188-1952 (20.12.1952). In: Sběrka oběžníků pro KNV 4 (1952).

<sup>40</sup> § 14 of Zákon o školské soustavě a vzdělávání učitelů (školský zákon) [Law on the School System and Teacher Training (Schooling Law)], č. 31/1953 Sb. (24.04.1953), částka 18, 193-196.

<sup>41</sup> Zákon č. 69/1952 Sb., 317 (cf. footnote 39). – SOkA Cheb. Fond 266, ONV Cheb, karton 654, inv. č. 1351, sign. 447, 4. Krajská Soudní Správa v Karlových Varech: Úřadovny ochrany mládeže – ústavní výchova [Regional Court Administration of Karlovy Vary: Youth Protection Offices – Residential Care]. 28.01.1953.

<sup>42</sup> Zákon o právu rodinném [Law on Parent’s Rights], č. 265/1949 Sb. (07.12.1949), částka 86, 745-753.

<sup>43</sup> Věstník ministerstva práce a sociálních věcí 5 (1951) 3, 18, no. 94.

tries like Poland, Hungary and the GDR,<sup>44</sup> in the first place expressed an increasingly dismissive attitude to the role of the family in favor of collective institutions. Secondly, it also revealed an internalized conviction that the highest priorities for younger children were hygiene, medical care and simple play activities, while older children required more complex socializing education and subsequent support in school.

Taking the first few years after the war as a whole, it may be concluded that the socialist state quickly arranged to take over responsibility for residential care and to transform its role into a project in social engineering. The term "children without family" was no longer limited to orphans and "lost children", but could now be applied to children whose parents were not in a position to care for and educate their children in the manner considered appropriate and necessary. Child welfare was no longer defined simply in terms of satisfaction of material needs and keeping children healthy, but rather as a complex process of collective education whose aim was to produce the "socialist man". Although collective education was regarded with suspicion in Czechoslovak society due to the experiences of the Nazi occupation,<sup>45</sup> the regime managed to rehabilitate the notion by introducing particular normative perceptions of what constituted a "normal" childhood and family life, along with a view of what constituted adequate care and education.

#### *Objects of Social Engineering – Children and Families*

In the immediate postwar years, the institutions of long-term residential childcare were primarily occupied by the duty to care for the "lost children" – war orphans and abandoned or displaced children whose parents had either died or were missing. In the act of taking over responsibility and control in this field, the state became a social engineer that was beginning to set on its way a strategic project in social and population policy. Besides the politically fostered general effort to homogenize the population of the revitalized Czechoslovak state in terms of nationality through expulsions and the reconstruction of the "Czech" family,<sup>46</sup> the devastation of the war, migration (whether forced or economically motivated) and socio-economic and

<sup>44</sup> *Szczepaniak-Wiecha, Izabela/Malek, Agnieszka/Slany, Krystyna*: The System of Care for Abandoned Children in Poland 1900-1960. The Development of Family-Forms of Care. In: *Schilde, Kurt/Schulte, Dagmar* (eds.): *Need and Care. Glimpses into the Beginnings of Eastern Europe's Professional Welfare*. Opladen, Bloomfield Hills/MI 2005, 179-196, here 185. – *Szikra, Dorottya*: Tradition Matters. Childcare, Preschool, and Primary Education in Modern Hungary. In: *Hagemann, Karen/Jarusch, Konrad H./Allemann-Ghionda, Cristina* (eds.): *Children, Families, and States. Time Policies of Childcare, Preschool, and Primary Education in Europe*. Oxford 2011, 364-384, here 377. – *Wapler, Friederike*: Rechtsfragen der Heimerziehung in der DDR. In: *Schmidt, Hans-Jürgen* (ed.): *Aufarbeitung der Heimerziehung in der DDR*. Berlin 2012, 5-123, here 37-38.

<sup>45</sup> *Zabra, Tara*: "Children Betray their Father and Mother". *Collective Education, Nationalism, and Democracy in the Bohemian Lands. 1900-1948*. In: *Schumann, Dirk* (ed.): *Raising Citizens in the Century of the Child. The United States and German Central Europe in Comparative Perspective*. New York 2010, 186-205, here 187.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* – For a more detailed analysis see: *Zabra, Tara*: *Kidnapped Souls. National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948*. Ithaca 2008.

socio-political change also dramatically affected the lives of families in the country.<sup>47</sup> These transformations offered both new opportunities and new challenges to traditional family relationships and gender roles,<sup>48</sup> leading to unpredictable dynamics and increased demand for substitute care. Many parents, most notably widowed and single mothers, in order to be able to work or to reduce the numbers of mouths to feed, actively sought for one or more of their children to be admitted (at least temporarily) to a residential institution.<sup>49</sup> This practice soon waned, but was to remain common even into the early 1960s.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the hardships referred to above, the Czechoslovak state was in a position by the beginning of the 1950s to set up a systematically planned system of institutional care for “children without family”, leading to the structural and institutional changes in administrative responsibilities that we have already discussed. Laws and regulations were reframed, unified and modulated to set out the norms of appropriate care and appropriate education for children, all of which put parents into a new situation. The 1949 family law explicitly declared a child to be a good of society, not a subject of merely private interest. A child’s best interest is to be secured primarily in order that he or she should “contribute to society’s welfare through his or her ability to work, skills and predispositions”.<sup>51</sup>

In cases of these demands not being met by parents, the state was entitled to intervene.<sup>52</sup> In the light of this purpose set for childcare and education, the duty of inter-

<sup>47</sup> Kalinová, Lenka: Společenské proměny v čase socialistického experimentu. K sociálním dějinám v letech 1945-1969 [Social Change under the Socialist Experiment. A Social History, 1945-1969]. Praha 2007.

<sup>48</sup> For a detailed analysis of transforming gender roles see the contributions of Květa Jechová, Natali Stegmann and Dana Musilová in: Kraft, Claudia (ed.): Geschlechterbeziehungen in Ostmitteleuropa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Soziale Praxis und Konstruktionen von Geschlechterbildern. München 2008 (BWT 25).

<sup>49</sup> SOkA Cheb. Fond 266, ONV Cheb, karton 455, inv. č. 1063, sign. VIII/17. Mother looking for a residential place for her child. 12.08.1947.

<sup>50</sup> The practice is harshly criticized, for example, by the director of a residential nursery in Olomouc: Mores, Antonín: Rozbor problémů dlouhodobého a trvalého pobytu dětí v kojeneckém ustavě, týdenních jeslích a mateřské školce a ve všech dětských domovech olomouckého okresu [Analysis of the Problems of Long-Term and Permanent Residential Care for Children in Infants’ Homes, Weekly Boarding Care and Nurseries and in all Children’s Homes in the District of Olomouc]. In: Československá pediatrie 18 (1963) 74-80.

<sup>51</sup> Zákon č. 265/1949 Sb., 748 (cf. footnote 42).

<sup>52</sup> Where not otherwise stated, the remarks to follow are based on: Ministerstvo školství, věd a umění: Pokyny pro přijímání dětí a mládeže do ZDD, DD a DMVZP [Instructions for Placing Children and Youth into Retaining Homes, Children’s Homes and Residential Homes for Young People Providing Specialized Care], č. j. II-1067/188-1952 (20.12.1952). In: Sběrka oběžníků pro KNV 4 (1952). – Ministerstvo školství, věd a umění: Přijímání dětí a mladistvých do DD, ZDD a DMVZP a jejich propouštění z těchto domovů [Placing Children and Youth into Retaining Homes, Children’s Homes and Residential Homes for Young People Providing Specialized Care and Their Release from These Facilities], č. j. 30 622/56-A I/3 (26.06.1956). In: Věstník Ministerstva školství a kultury 12 (1956) 209-213. – Organizační a provozní řády pro dětské domovy pro děti předškolního věku, dětské domovy pro děti školního věku, dětské domovy se zvýšenou výchovnou péčí, záchytné dětské domovy a domovy pro mládež vyžadující zvláštní péči [Organization and Daily Operation Regime of Residential Institutions for Preschool children, Children’s Homes for School-

vention was assigned to a number of different institutions. Everyone who had any professional relation with children was exhorted to be attentive to any possible failure in care or education on the part of parents, and to any visible "deficits" in the behavior and attitude of a child. However, it was not just pediatricians, kindergarten care-givers and schoolteachers who were expected to inform the offices of child protection at the National Councils of any neglect or family problems: work colleagues, unions and local party officials were also asked to keep an eye open for such problems. In contrast to the GDR, where the official bodies responsible for youth protection were much more powerful,<sup>53</sup> any final decision on admittance to a residential institution, if not requested by parents themselves due to temporary severe illness or for work reasons, could be taken only by a court.

Whereas younger children could be admitted directly on request or by court decision, children from the age of six upwards in most cases had to pass through a "Retaining Children's Home" (Záchytný dětský domov). Such homes, later renamed "Classification Homes" (Dětské domovy třídící), were established in each of the country's ten major regions (kraje).<sup>54</sup> Their later name much better expressed their actual task, a task which made these homes the central institution in which cooperation between state and childcare experts occurred in relation to their shared social engineering project. Classification homes were thus charged with examining any child admitted to them within six to eight weeks to determine his or her physical and mental state of health, to assess family case histories, to predict future prospects and to provide an educational prognosis.<sup>55</sup> Finally, the psychologists and educationalists were charged with deciding on the appropriate type of children's home within the region for the child. They would either be sent to a home for "normal" children, to a home providing "specialized care" (zvláštní péče), i. e. facilities for physically or mental disabled children or to a home providing "increased educational care" (se zvýšenou výchovnou péčí), where all kinds of socially "disordered" children were sent as a consequence of criminality, sexual and moral "abnormality" or violent behavior.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, the "Classification home" was expected to diagnose the "normality" or "abnormality" of both the child and his or her parents.<sup>57</sup> The underlying normative

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children, Homes Providing Increased Educational Care, Retaining Homes and Residential Homes for Young People Providing Specialized Care] (24.09.1956). In: *Věstník Ministerstva školství a kultury* 12 (1956) 309-323.

<sup>53</sup> *Laudien*, Karsten/*Sachse*, Christian: Erziehungsvorstellungen in der Heimerziehung der DDR. In: *Schmidt*, Hans-Jürgen (ed.): *Aufarbeitung der Heimerziehung in der DDR*. Berlin 2012, 125-297, here 167.

<sup>54</sup> *Nakonečný*, Milan: Zásady pedagogicko-psychologické praxe dětského domova třídícího [Principles of Pedagogical-Psychological Practice in Classification Homes]. In: *Vychovávateľ* 6 (1961-62) 7, 199-204.

<sup>55</sup> *Musil*, Josef: K činnosti záchytných dětských domovů [On the Activity of Retaining Children's Homes]. In: *Vychovávateľ* 5 (1960-61) 10, 295-298.

<sup>56</sup> *Strejček*, Karel: Děti v dětských domovech vyžadující zvláštní péče (Poruchy sociální adaptace) [Children in Homes with Specialized Care (Failure of Social Adaptation)]. In: *Vychovávateľ* 3 (1959) 2, 61-62.

<sup>57</sup> *Císař*, Vlastimil: Náměty k zlepšení práce záchytného dětského domova [Suggestions for Improving the Work of Retaining Homes]. In: *Vychovávateľ* 4 (1960) 2, 63-64.

patterns of perception of a “normal” family and “normal” children were quite consistent.<sup>58</sup> Most children were sent to institutions as a result of problems in school such as telling lies, playing truant from school or behaving aggressively, as well as through such misdemeanors as thefts and minor delinquencies. Children were taken away from parents characterized as asocial, or who were alleged to be leading an immoral lifestyle, changing partners frequently, abusing alcohol and/or committing domestic violence. Simply being classified as being of “Roma origin” seems to have been enough to legitimize admittance in a residential home, as the “tribal family” of such children was considered deeply suspect. In addition to this, single mothers in particular were stigmatized. They were considered unable to raise their children properly, not least due to their increased risk of falling into poverty. They also were suspected of cultivating a lifestyle that was not approved of, involving frequent changes of partner. The “normal” family was obviously perceived as the typical two-parent unit with two to three children. Large families, which in the case of Roma suffered additional patterns of discrimination, and single parents were regarded as likely to be “unstable” and “dysfunctional”. Thus, although the model of the “bourgeois” family was officially rejected by the leading ideology, it nevertheless provided the prototypical pattern for experts and state officials.

However, consistent complaints would appear to indicate that the system in which classification homes served as gatekeepers did not develop to everyone’s satisfaction. The psychologists lamented the overwhelming pressure they suffered and absence of the sort of mutuality they needed to give a basis to their work,<sup>59</sup> while the directors complained of unrealistic demands,<sup>60</sup> while teachers in the residential homes objected to being expected to multi-task between education and childcare functions.<sup>61</sup> In addition to all this, the specific residential institution to which a child was admitted often complained of receiving the “wrong” sort of children, either because they were too “normal” or too “abnormal”.<sup>62</sup> Even the courts made contradictory decisions.<sup>63</sup>

All in all, this leads to the provisional judgement that, while the social engineering project constituted by the country’s system for raising “children without family” in socialist Czechoslovakia may seem to have followed a holistic vision in theory, in

<sup>58</sup> A number of case files from the “Classification Home” in Prague that I have reviewed support this appraisal: Archiv hlavního města Prahy [Prague City Archives, AHMP]. Fond Dětský diagnostický ústav (DDÚ), NAD 2392, č. 43, 397, 2677, 2688, 2891.

<sup>59</sup> *Tatranský, Štefan*: Skúsenosti s súčasné problémy práce v záchytných domovoch [Experiences and Contemporary Problems of the Work in Retaining Homes]. In: *Otázky defektologie 1* (1959) 6, 178-181.

<sup>60</sup> *Strejček, Karel*: Zlepšení práce záchytného dětského domova [Improvement of Work in Retaining Homes]. In: *Vychovávateľ 4* (1960) 6, 186.

<sup>61</sup> *Kalibán, Václav*: Náměty k zlepšení práce záchytného dětského domova [Suggestions for the Improvement of Work in Retaining Homes]. In: *Vychovávateľ 5* (1960-61) 1, 27-28.

<sup>62</sup> *Langer, Stanislav*: Několik zkušeností se zařazováním dětí a mládeže do výchovných a léčebných zařízení [Some Experiences in Allocating Children and Youth in Educational and Therapeutic Facilities]. In: *Pedagogika 10* (1960) 3, 356-367.

<sup>63</sup> SOkA Opava. ONV Opava, inv. č. 288, karta 189. ONV Opava. Opava: Opatrovnické a poručenské spisy týkající se péče o děti [Custodial and Curatorial Documents on Child-care] 1954.

practice, responsibilities were adjusted constantly and discussions on the deficits of the system were practically incessant. This would seem to indicate that the project should be characterized as belonging to the piecemeal variety of approaches to social engineering, especially since by the end of the 1950s criticism of the system was expressed openly, and accompanied by constant negotiations on reforms and adjustments.

*Dimensions of the System of Residential Homes in the 1950s and 1960s*

But just how many children were actually admitted to the substitute childcare system? In contrast to the GDR, where at peak times some 30,000 children were in long-term residential care,<sup>64</sup> Hungary in the 1950s, with over 5,000 children up to the age of three in care,<sup>65</sup> and the Soviet Union, where all the way back to the 1920s over 300,000 children were placed in care,<sup>66</sup> we know very little about the dimensions and expansion (or contraction) of this social engineering project in Czechoslovakia. We provide some numbers and figures below, extracted from a number of sources, which mostly referred to specific forms of residential care, but which can nevertheless give reliable hints as to the overall picture. Since adoptions and especially foster care played a bigger role in the First Republic, during which time care for orphaned or abandoned children was provided by churches and private charity organizations, there was no centralized institutional framework in place in 1945 to do the job, even before we begin to consider the consequences of the war!<sup>67</sup> Immediately after the war the capacity of children's homes in the Czechoslovak Republic was rather small and obviously not meeting the need. Up to 1950, when responsibilities in childcare were re-ordered by the communist government, the number of beds had grown to some 8,800 beds in the Czech lands, with several homes still in responsibility of private or church associations.<sup>68</sup>

The number of children aged up to three years placed in care increased between 1955 and 1964 from 9,000 to nearly 11,000.<sup>69</sup> For older children, the Ministry of Education provided 257 homes with a total of 10,474 beds. Such homes typically had occupation rates of up to 85 percent.<sup>70</sup> In total, there were around 20,000 beds in homes for "normal" children by 1965, which was equivalent to some 0.5 percent of

<sup>64</sup> Krause: *Fazit einer Utopie* 11 (cf. footnote 17).

<sup>65</sup> Varsa, Eszter: *Child Protection, Residential Care and the 'Gypsy-Question' in Early State Socialist Hungary*. In: Hering, Sabine (ed.): *Social Care under State Socialism (1945-1989). Ambitions, Ambiguities, and Mismanagement*. Opladen, Farmington Hills/MI 2009, 149-159, here 151.

<sup>66</sup> Iarskaia-Smirnova/Romanov: *Institutional Child* 92 (cf. footnote 15).

<sup>67</sup> Schiller, Milan: *Péče o děti v ČSSR [Childcare in ČSSR]*. Praha 1971, 10-16. – Dunovský, Jiří: *K vývoji pěstounské péče [On the Development of Foster Care]*. In: *Československá pediatrie* 24 (1969) 7, 651-653.

<sup>68</sup> NA Praha. Fond MPSP, 1067 DD všeobecné, Karton 610. Ministerstvo práce a sociální péče: *Přehled dětských domovů v zemích českých k dni 31.7.1950 [Overview over Children's Homes in the Czech Lands as at 31.7.1950]*.

<sup>69</sup> Dunovský, Jiří: *Statistické údaje o osvojení v letech 1955 až 1964 v ČSSR [Statistics on Adoption 1955-1964 in ČSSR]*. In: *Československá pediatrie* 21 (1966) 170-176.

<sup>70</sup> Krupauer, Všecky děti (cf. footnote 2). – *Dětské domovy v roce 1963 [Children's Homes in 1963]*. In: *Vychovatel* 9 (1964-65) 2, 50-52.

the total population aged 0-15 years.<sup>71</sup> However, the scale of the expansion varied from region to region, depending on the resources, the will and the skills available in local NV administrations. The region of Brno (Kraj Brněnský) provided far more beds than other localities, especially for “disabled” children.<sup>72</sup> Elsewhere, residential nurseries and infants’ homes in particular were often seriously overcrowded, especially in Slovakia, although the number of beds available had almost doubled between 1957 and 1960.<sup>73</sup> However, five out of six children aged 0-3 years in 1955 were admitted in the Czech part of the country, though only two-third of the Republic’s population lived there.<sup>74</sup> While the disequilibrium in bed capacity and admittance levels between the Czech and the Slovak portions of the country should not be overstated, as it was to rebalance over subsequent years,<sup>75</sup> it does point to substantial differences in the social structures, family conditions and attitudes towards the family in the two parts of the state that could bear closer investigation.

In relation to the total numbers of beds available for newly admitted children every year it would seem to stand to reason that the majority of children were placed in residential care for only a short time and returned to their families soon afterwards. However, it should also be emphasized that a considerable portion of such children were admitted repeatedly, in cases when their family situation deteriorated again, for example.<sup>76</sup> As we have already indicated, there were effectively no alternatives to the state-run system of substitute care. In 1955 only 2 to 3 percent of children in residential nurseries or infants’ homes were to find new parents.<sup>77</sup> The legal preconditions for adoption remained unclear for a long time and foster care was banned entirely.<sup>78</sup> Since the new 1963 law on the family<sup>79</sup> at least contemplated the

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* – *Collegium Carolinum* (ed.): Tschechoslowakei. München 1977 (Länderberichte Osteuropa 3), 52-54.

<sup>72</sup> SOkA Blansko. Fond Dívčí vychovatelna Boskovice, č. 144, zn. K12. Seznam dětských domovů v kraji Brněnském [List of Children’s Homes in the Region of Brno]. 01.04.1952.

<sup>73</sup> Štolová, Olga: Výsledky zdravotní péče o dítě v roce 1955 a úkoly v roce 1956 [Results of Healthcare Provision for Children in 1955 and Tasks for 1956]. In: *Československá pediatrie* 11 (1956) 2-3, 82-89. – Štolová, Olga: Výsledky činnosti na úseku péče o dítě za rok 1961 [Results of Activities in the Sector of Childcare in 1961]. In: *Československá pediatrie* 17 (1962) 850-856. – Havlíčková, V.: Výsledky činnosti jeslí, dětských domovů a kojeneckých ústavů v roce 1965 [Results of Activities of Crèches, Children’s Homes and Nurseries in 1965]. In: *Československá pediatrie* 21 (1966) 1007-1017, here 1014-1015. – Urban, Rudolf: Zur Entwicklung des Gesundheitswesens in der Tschechoslowakei nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. In: *Harmsen*, Hans (ed.): *Zur Entwicklung des Gesundheitswesens in Polen und in der Tschechoslowakei nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg*. Hamburg 1959, 32-54, 40. – *Harmsen*: *Das tschechoslowakische Gesundheitswesen* 55-57 (cf. footnote 67).

<sup>74</sup> *Dunovský*: *Statistické údaje o osvojení 172* (cf. footnote 68).

<sup>75</sup> *Dětské domovy v roce 1963* (cf. footnote 69).

<sup>76</sup> Radilová, Eliška: Příspěvek k otázce fluktuace dětí v dětských domovech [A Contribution on the Question of Fluctuation of Child Numbers in Children’s Homes]. In: *Otázky defekologie* 3 (1960-61) 5, 139-141.

<sup>77</sup> *Dunovský*: *Statistické údaje o osvojení 172* (cf. footnote 68).

<sup>78</sup> A detailed examination on this is now being carried out. It is intended for publication as: *Henschel*, Frank: *Adoption and Foster Care in Socialist Czechoslovakia*. Engineering Social Parenthood. In: *Soudobé Dějiny/Czech Journal of Contemporary History*.

<sup>79</sup> *Zákon o rodině [Family Law]*, č. 94/1963 Sb. (04.12.1963), částka 53, 339-349.

option of adoption, that year marked a turning point in the project of social engineering that was the system of care provision for "children without family". This turnaround in the country's family policies was not least the result of massive scientific criticism and the professionals' call for reform that had been building up since the late 1950s. An influential group of experts on childhood warned of the consequences of collective education after conducting a number of studies in children's homes. In fact, they went so far as to demand the rehabilitation of the family as the primary and most important educational environment for a child and to at the very least make the care provided in children's homes more "family-like".

*Critic and Reform – Adjustment of the Social Engineering Project*

Through the positions they held on the commissions of childcare set up by the national councils or their direct roles in children's homes, experts on childhood played an integral role in the social engineering project of childhood education in postwar Czechoslovakia. By the end of the 1950s, some experts had redefined their role and become more critical in their discussions on the forms and consequences of collective childcare. Young psychologists and pediatricians responded to studies by western psychologists<sup>80</sup> like John Bowlby, William Goldfarb or René Spitz by conducting a number of studies of their own on children's homes and publishing their findings in relevant national journals. These findings were to put the entire corpus of aims and efforts in collective education of "children without family" into question. The experts presented evidence that the contemporary situation in residential institutions, far from offering better care and education than the original, allegedly unfit parents, was actually endangering the mental, emotional and social development of the children in their charge.

During the early 1960s this discussion took on the status of a nationwide "childcare issue".<sup>81</sup> The issue was popularized by renowned psychologist Zdeněk Matějček along with the director of the residential nursery at Luhačovice, Marie Damborská, who together participated in the documentary "Děti bez lásky" (Children without Love). The film pictured the sad and lonely life of the child residents of such homes, contrasting them against happy children in families and explaining the problems of collective childcare in popular terms. After an initial ban on the program was lifted, it was shown as a pre-feature documentary in cinemas, so widely that it was viewed all across the country. Matějček and his colleague Josef Langmeier summarized the

<sup>80</sup> Bowlby, John: The Nature of the Child's Tie to his Mother. In: *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 39 (1958) 350–373. – Goldfarb, William: Effects of Psychological Deprivation in Infancy and Subsequent Stimulation. In: *American Journal of Psychiatry* 102 (1945) 1, 18–33. – Spitz, René A.: Hospitalism. An Inquiry into the Genesis of Psychiatric Conditions in Early Childhood. In: *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 1 (1945) 53–74. – Spitz: Hospitalism. A Follow-Up Report. In: *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 2 (1946) 113–117.

<sup>81</sup> In Czech "dětská otázka"; Jechová, Květa: Matky a děti, chtěné i nechtěné [Mothers and Children, Wanted and Unwanted]. In: *Tůma, Oldřich/Vilímeček, Tomáš* (eds.): *Opozice a společnost po roce 1948* [Opposition and Society after 1948]. Praha 2009, 10–72, here 40.

results of their work in 1963, reframing the diagnosis of “deprivation” as a description of the consequences of the emotional and social neglect of children that they had observed in children’s homes.<sup>82</sup> Many psychologists – and other childcare professionals too – confirmed these findings and began exerting pressure on the regime. However, the critics did not speak with one voice, but debated a variety of reform proposals shaped according to their individual perceptions of what constituted a “normal” childhood and appropriate education and care.<sup>83</sup>

It would be misleading for us to claim that commitments to reform emanated exclusively from experts whose warnings constituted a sort of “wake-up call” to the state. As we have already seen in the introduction, the comments of Josef Krupauer, who represented the Ministry of Education, show that the party itself had already become aware of deficits in the law and the institutional structure and had decreed some initial legal changes as early as the late 1950s. Law 15/1958 Sb., for example, made adoption easier<sup>84</sup> and the new law on the family, Law 94/1963 Sb., comprehensively re-evaluated the role of the family in childcare and education, though the creation of the “socialist new man” remained the primary aim.<sup>85</sup> Aside from legal changes, the first practical steps were taken by state authorities to test out new forms of residential care. This process was actually initiated before the controversy over the “childcare issue” had reached its peak in the public mind, which underlines the fact that the discourse of crisis that tends to be a characteristic of social engineering projects does not necessarily go on ahead of social and political practice, but that both processes can run in parallel, overlapping with each other in time.

To provide alternative solutions to the contemporary pattern of large long-term residential childcare institutions separated by age, a task force created by the Slovak schools’ administration in 1962 proposed the idea of “Detské Mestečka” (children’s towns). Due to a number of political and financial factors, only one out of the six originally projected “Mestečka” was actually created in the town of Trenčín-Zlatovec – and that after a delay of several years.<sup>86</sup> A similar conceptual design was employed in three “family children’s homes”. opened between 1965 and 1966 in Ostrava, Klánovice and Rumburk, which were to receive a very positive response.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>82</sup> The key work to arrive at this diagnosis is *Matějček, Zdeněk/Langmeier, Josef: Psychická deprivace v dětství* [Mental Deprivation in Childhood]. Praha 1963. The book was reprinted several times (1968, 1974, 2011) and has also been translated into English (1975), German (1977) and Russian (1984).

<sup>83</sup> *Henschel: A Project of Social Engineering* (cf. footnote 26).

<sup>84</sup> Zákon o změně předpisů osvojení [Law to Amend the Adoption Act], č. 15/1958 Sb. (17.04.1958), částka 5, 15-17.

<sup>85</sup> Zákon č. 94/1963 Sb. (cf. footnote 78).

<sup>86</sup> *Chochoľ, Štefan: Detské mestečko v Zlatovciach otvorené* [Children’s Town in Zlatovec Opened]. In: *Vychovávateľ* 19 (1974-75) 3, 65-67. – *Chovanec, Viktor: Vychova detí mimo vlastnej rodiny* [Raising Children Outside Their Own Family]. Bratislava 1985, 67-71.

<sup>87</sup> Ministerstvo školství a kultury: Zpráva o komplexním zhodnocení činnosti rodinných dětských domovů. April 1967 [Report of the Comprehensive Evaluation of the Activities of Family Children’s Homes]. NÁ Praha. Fond MŠK ČSR, inv. č. 14 - Dětské domovy 1967-1972, karton 613. – *Poláčková, Vlasta/Ondrušová, D.: Naše zkušenosti s dětskými domovy rodinného typu* [Our Experiences of Family-Type Children’s Homes]. In: *Československá pediatrie* 24 (1969) 10, 875-881.

Not the least of the effects of these new models was that they served as an example for other innovations: Jan Kučera, who was director of the children's home in Kašperské Hory near Plzeň, unilaterally proclaimed the transformation of his facility into a "Family-type children's home" ("Dětský domov rodinného typu"), where 85 children lived together in mixed age-groups under the care of permanent educators.<sup>88</sup>

Even the controversial "western" concept of the SOS children's village was adopted in places. In 1964, pediatrician Josef Volný skeptically introduced the idea to the country's scientific community, discussing its benefits and drawbacks.<sup>89</sup> He praised the Austrian inventor of the concept, Hermann Gmeiner, for providing a "natural", familial environment for children, who enjoyed the benefits of living in group foster care, though Volný did not feel comfortable with the religious impulses behind the idea. After renowned pediatrician Jiří Dunovský and others became vehement advocates of the idea in the teeth of objections,<sup>90</sup> SOS villages were finally established in Doubí near Karlovy Vary (1970) and in Chvalčov near Kroměříž (1974), further extending the choice of "new forms" of long-term residential childcare.

While the above described innovations were isolated local initiatives, in the early 1970s the Ministries of Education and Health, which were actually in overall charge of the system, returned to a more systematic approach, pursuing a more coherent reform effort on children's homes. Interestingly enough, it was the Ministry of Education that was to engage in a thorough restructuring of the facilities under its control. Although the original discussion on appropriate childcare arrangements appealed in the first instance to massive deficits in the care provided by residential nurseries and infants' homes, the Ministry of Health, which was in charge of this side of the equation, did not respond with a corresponding reform program designed to answer these criticisms. The concept they drew on spoke of the need to professionalize staff and promised to implement educational innovations following a family-like pattern, but did not propose any particular concrete measures.<sup>91</sup> It seems that even then babies and infants were still regarded as primarily needing good hygienic and medical care rather than advanced pedagogical attention or intensive emotional and social care.

<sup>88</sup> Bůžek, Karel: K novým formám péče o děti trvale vychovávané mimo vlastní rodinu [New Forms of Substitute Care for Children Permanently Educated outside Their Own Families]. In: *Pedagogika* 25 (1975) 323-333.

<sup>89</sup> Volný, Josef: Nový druh dětských domovů [New Type of Children's Home]. In: *Vychovávateľ* 8 (1963/64) 2, 43-44.

<sup>90</sup> Dunovský, Jiří: K SOS dětským vesničkám v Československu [On SOS Children's Villages in Czechoslovakia]. In: *Československá pediatrie* 24 (1969) 10, 882-884. – Sebrová, Jiřina: SOS - dětské vesnice [SOS Children's Villages]. In: *Otázky defektologie* 11 (1968-69) 163-168. – Michal, Jaroslav: Vyřeší SOS vesničky naše problémy? [Will SOS Children's Villages Solve Our Problems?]. In: *Vychovávateľ* 13 (1968-69) 6, 146-147. – Dunovský was also head of the official Association of SOS homes in Czechoslovakia, which administered the construction and maintenance of the villages. NA Praha. MV spolky, sign. 144/1, Schůze přátel SOS DV 1969-1975 [Meetings of the Association of SOS Children's Villages 1969-1975], karton 220 B.

<sup>91</sup> *Ministerstvo zdravotnictví: Koncepce péče o dítě v ČSR* [The Concept of Childcare in the Czech Socialist Republic]. In: *Československá pediatrie* 29 (1974) 5, 288-293.

However, the Ministry of Education was to pursue a fairly ambitious agenda, which may be explained to some extent by the direct participation of experts in education in the law-making process. In 1972, after a debate that had lasted several years, the various sides managed to arrive at a compromise.<sup>92</sup> The first main aspect of the agreement was that a differentiation was made between the various facilities according to the social and familial backgrounds and the current mental, physical and social condition of the children that they were to host. The task of setting standardized norms for children and developing care and education in accordance with such norms became a much more important feature of the residential childcare system than previously. First of all, the administration preferred to group children of the similar circumstances together in order to be better able to offer them the care and education appropriate to their needs. Secondly, all homes were to be transformed into family-like institutions. Differentiation according to age was discontinued as it was felt that the only decisive factor in placements should be the estimated duration of the child's stay. On the one hand, the Ministry of Education defined residences resembling boarding schools to cater for children needing short-term separation from their families and/or children with good prospects of adoption, while on the other hand also considering family-type homes designed for children expected to stay in residential care in the long term. In this regard, the above-mentioned home in Kašperské Hory served as an example of the latter type; it created groups of eight to ten children of mixed age supervised by a permanent staff of education professionals.<sup>93</sup>

Meanwhile, the decision on what child was to be admitted to what institution was further centralized, giving this function to that category of homes previously been referred to as Retaining and Classification Homes. Under their new title of "Institutes of Child Diagnosis" ("Dětský diagnostický ústav"), they were charged with acting as "gatekeepers" for the system. In cooperation with the courts it was their responsibility to decide whether to admit a child for a short or long-term stay and whether he or she should be placed in a home for "normal" children, in a special home for children with behavioral or educational "deficits" or in a home designed especially for "disabled" children with mental, physical and/or behavioral problems.

In several respects this reform represents a final step in the adjustment of the state administration's grand social engineering project in cooperation with scientific experts. Over the following 15 to 20 years the institutional structure of the system remained more or less stable. The various actors retained their right to intervene in the lives of families and children, but increased the number of instruments of inter-

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<sup>92</sup> Organizačné smernice MŠ SSR č. 6 398/1972-I/2 pre detské domovy, osobitné výchovné a diagnostické ústavy [Decree of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Socialist Republic No. 6 398/1972-I/2 on Children's Homes, Specialized Care and Institutes of Diagnosis]. In: Zvesti MŠ SSR 8 1972. – For the preceding discussion see: *Henschel: A Project of Social Engineering* (cf. footnote 26).

<sup>93</sup> *Bráňík, Michal/Bráňíková, Kamila: Prechodná forma kolektívnych zariadení v praxi* [Transitional Forms of Collective Institutions in Practice]. In: *Vychovávateľ* 20 (1975-76) 5, 141-142.

vention they used, concentrating on re-stabilizing the situation of children's original families and further promoting the use of adoption and foster care, the latter option having been finally re-introduced by law in 1973. These changes, however, led to only a slight decrease in the rate of children going into long-term residential care,<sup>94</sup> since in cases where children suffered from "difficulties" or "disabilities", improved diagnostics increasingly guided therapeutic interventions in the direction of re-socialization and re-education.

#### *Summary and Perspectives*

This article has examined the legal foundations and structural development of the system of children's homes implemented in postwar Czechoslovakia and analyzed it as an instrument of social engineering on the part of the state in cooperation with experts in the fields of childcare and education.

The postwar years represent a turning point in the field, particularly with regard to the role of the Czechoslovak state, which began to make its claim that "All children are ours". The act of considering children, as well as their educational environment and care, as more than simply a private good, but rather as a legitimate matter of public and political concern is an extremely important pattern of thinking in modern times. There are a number of different variations in discourse and practice, but the Czechoslovak State made the decision in 1947 to take over full responsibility for residential childcare institutions in order to centralize, unify, professionalize and not least expand the capacity of the system. After the communist coup, however, the expansion of institutional childcare facilities was intensified to the extent that it took on the nature of a classic social engineering project. The quality of collective, scientifically based childcare was regarded as being superior to care in the family, especially in the light of the ongoing socio-economic changes at the time and the parallel re-definition of gender roles, let alone the consequences of the recent war and of the expulsions that accompanied and followed it. Poverty, shortages of living space and the demands of work shattered families and laid a heavy burden on single mothers.

Thus, in the immediate postwar years, children's homes were forced to act mainly in the role of emergency shelters. Since the issue of "children without family" was primarily regarded as a social question, it was the Ministry of Social Affairs that was given responsibility for the matter. Nevertheless, a further ideologization of childcare began to be pursued through the issue of ministerial decrees and guidelines, especially after the Ministry of Education took over the country's children's homes in 1951. The aim was no longer simply to provide the children with material, social

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<sup>94</sup> Numbers and Figures of the 1970s and 1980s: *Houštěk, Josef/Kotzmannová, J.*: 30 let péče o dítě v ČSR [30 Years of Childcare in the Czech Socialist Republic]. In: *Československá pediatrie* 30 (1975) 6, 249-253. – *Hrdličková, Vlasta*: Rozložení sítě dětských domovů na území české socialistické republiky [The Distribution of Children's Homes in the Czech Socialist Republic]. In: *Vychovávateľ* 22 (1977-78) 10, 308-310. – *Seznam kojeneckých ústavů a dětských domovů v ČSSR* [List of Nurseries and Children's Homes in the ČSSR]. In: *Československá pediatrie* 42 (1987) 2, 115-116.

and emotional care, but to do so in order to raise them in the image of the “new socialist man”. Collective models of childcare further gained importance, and parents were increasingly evaluated according to whether they were fulfilling their educational duties. Everyone who had professional dealings with children was exhorted to report “dysfunctional” families or children exhibiting “behavioral deficits”. While the final decision on admittance into residential care was reserved for the courts, a number of different actors were involved in this process, primarily scientific experts, who were charged with examining the child and his or her family in specialized “classification” or “diagnostic” homes in order to decide where they should be placed. Due to the redefinition of the tasks of residential care, the majority of child residents were no longer made up of biological orphans or abandoned children but by what were referred to at the time as “social orphans”. Since their parents were not considered capable of caring for them appropriately, the countermeasure of choice was to separate such children from their parents and to place them in a home. Children’s homes were thought to offer not only better material conditions, but to be capable of fulfilling every emotional and social need of the children better than their parents. During the whole of the 1950s, adoption and foster care were to most intents and purposes legally banned.

The above-described changes in responsibilities had an impact on the number of children admitted to residential care. Up until the mid-1960s around 20,000 children, representing about 0.5 percent of the population up to 15 years of age, were either temporarily or permanently separated from their parents. Czechoslovakia shows a very similar ratio of children in permanent residential care to those that obtained in other socialist countries: The larger GDR had 30,000 children up to the age of 15 in permanent residential care, while in almost equally large Hungary too some 5,000 children under the age of three lived in children’s homes (a number similar to the Czechoslovak figure). Even a comparison with Western Germany points to similar patterns both in terms of numbers and in relation to ongoing institutional diversification in the direction of the establishment of specialized residential care institutions for children with “deficits” or “disabilities”.<sup>95</sup>

What seems to clearly distinguish Czechoslovakia from other communist regimes is the astonishingly open discussion that occurred in the country from the late 1950s on in relation to the deficits in the system of residential care. The critical intervention of experts on childhood in the controversial reform process was to lead to a reorientation of the entire social engineering project. Aside from complaining about such structural problems as the lack of financial resources, shortages of qualified staff and overcrowded homes, psychologists and pediatricians, making reference to earlier studies by such western scholars as Bowlby, Goldfarb and Spitz, also identified specific deficits after examining the emotional and mental states of home-children as compared with children living in “normal” families. Through this work, they

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<sup>95</sup> Frings, Bernhard: Annäherungen an eine differenzierte Heimstatistik. Statistik der Betroffenen. In: Damberg, Wilhelm/Jähnichen, Traugott (eds.): Heimkinder. Geschichte der konfessionellen Heimerziehung in der frühen Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Münster 2010, 28-46.

arrived at a diagnosis of deprivation, the inevitable effect of the long-term neglect of emotional and social needs, an effect that has particularly serious consequences in the case of children.

In general, it was not in fact "dysfunctional" families who were now identified as the most serious threat to a child's development, but the very institutions set up to provide long-term care meant to replace such families. At the end of the day, the experts insistently argued, the contemporary state of residential care not only prevented children from experiencing a "normal" childhood but actually produced "deficient" adults, and thus endangered the future of society in general. The use of children's homes as an instrument of social engineering that aimed to create a better society by providing a substitute for poor family environments had actually turned out to be counterproductive to this aim. The state was also forced to respond to the "childcare issue" that was emerging into the public sphere at the time. Josef Krupauer of the Ministry of Education, whose contribution to the debate was referred to in the introduction to this article, expressed a commonly held conviction: that the socialist state had a responsibility to care for all children, since children were its most important future resource. The authorities therefore had a responsibility to comprehensively reconsider the measures they had taken if they seriously wanted to claim to be fulfilling this duty in relation to "children without family".

In the early 1960s the state reinstated previously abandoned forms of substitute care such as adoption. The family was ideologically vindicated and legally strengthened as social institution and as the preferred environment in which a child should grow up. The regime also welcomed a number of institutional innovations: all the way from children's towns in Slovakia, through the first "family-type homes," such as the one in Kašperské Hory, up to and including even solutions based on the "western" SOS villages model. However, it was to take several years before a series of decrees instituted any real structural reform in the early 1970s. Even this reform was a compromise in nature, as it integrated aspects of familial care into the concept of collective education, further promoted the option of adoption and re-introduced the concept of foster care.

The analysis described here shows that an "eastern" socialist regime cannot be designated tout court as having an irredeemable commitment to the concept of collective education, with "domestic" or "individual" forms of bringing children up being characterized by way of contrast as ideologically "western". While it is true, especially in the first 10 to 15 years of communist rule, that the family remained under suspicion as the state's educational goals were formulated in accordance with socialist ideology. However, despite the dominant discourse on the subject, these ideologically determined goals did not provide the main reasons for separating children from their parents and admitting them to children's homes. The main justification had more to do with a complex set of perceptions as to what constituted a "normal" family life and a "normal" childhood, which included the concepts of emotional support, affection, social stimulation and of mental and physical development. Even traditional moral ideas of what it meant to lead a decent way of life and ideals of parenthood, and especially motherhood, played an ever-important role. At the end of the day, it seems that every form of family life that deviated from the

“nuclear family” model involving two parents with two or three children came under suspicion of being “dysfunctional”. This was as true for families with large numbers of children as it was for single parents or parents who frequently changed partners. This particular subject – the topic of normative perceptions of the family – could certainly be fruitfully examined in more detail through further research. Possible research directions might also include the examination of a variety of aspects of the topic which either could not be considered here at all or were only briefly mentioned. These possible directions might include a more detailed examination of the Czechoslovak reform of childcare, adoption and foster care, and of the establishment of SOS Villages in particular, but might also, for example, include a more detailed examination of perceptions of dis/ability and the practices of specialized childcare, as well as the goals and practices in the re-education of “deviant” children and not least the itself very complex issue of the “Roma question”, which intersects in various places with other related issues.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the social engineering that occurred in the field of childcare and education in socialist Czechoslovakia constituted a project of modern state intervention into the most basic social relations involving the family and the lives of individual children. It was a multi-faceted, complex enterprise that underwent a number of changes of direction and that tested out a variety of different approaches. It appears clear that the binary differentiation of social engineering into two patterns as proposed by Popper is not adequate to describe the historical forms taken on by this particular case of “socialist” social engineering. It was not an utterly centralized, top-down process following an incontrovertible utopian blueprint that aimed at revolutionizing society from top to bottom. In fact, the project contained several characteristics that Popper held to be typical of the sort of “piecemeal” social engineering that went on in liberal democratic societies, though it by no means fully corresponds to this ideal type either. None of this implies that the concept of social engineering is an invalid or ineligible topic for historical research. On the contrary, the concept can be very useful in the analysis of power relations and of processes of regulation, planning and standardization in modern societies in the various fields of family life, education and caring activities. In addition, it can render new perspectives through comparative research, not just comparing socialist countries against one another, but also crossing the boundaries of the two blocks defined by the Cold War.