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Changes in Housing Discourse in Four Czech Municipalities. Will Young People Get Support?

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Abstract In post-communist countries, the early years of housing policy after 1989 were characterised by the withdrawal of the state. Municipalities played an important role in the housing privatisation process in the Czech Republic. Thirty years later, a global boom in housing prices occurred in major urban centres. Young people are facing the problem of decreasing housing affordability. The analyses of the programme statements of electoral parties and coalition agreements in selected regional centres reveals the issue's increasing saliency as well as a change in the overall discourse of housing. Moreover, local path dependencies and ways of bridging ideological differences in a coalition are explained. Electoral programmes tend to focus on young families rather than young people in general. In the crisis of housing affordability, those groups that have something to offer cities are preferred in party programme statements.

Keywords: • housing policy • local governance • electoral programmes • young people

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1 Introduction

Housing is one of the most important needs that people everywhere in the world have. Nowadays, the housing plans of young adults in particular are being impacted by the global urban housing affordability crisis (Wetzstein, 2017) that is occurring in major urban centres around the world and involves a combination of booming housing prices and soaring market rents. In the Czech Republic, as a central eastern European country, today's young adults are the first generation to have grown up in municipalities governed by local governments re-established after the collapse of the communist regime. The Municipal Act (No. 128/2000 Coll., section 35) lists 'meeting the need for housing' as the first example of the needs that municipalities, as self-governing entities, must attend to 'in accordance with local conditions and local customs'. We argue that for years 'meeting the need for housing' meant first of all the privatisation of municipal flats. However, amidst the current crisis in housing affordability the political leaders of towns can hardly continue to pursue this policy. Here, therefore, we ask, how important the subject of housing is for local politicians. We divide the post-privatisation years into a period of stagnating housing prices and a period of sharp price growth. We want to see whether it is possible to observe differences between localities with different experiences of municipal housing stock privatisation. We will also examine whether politicians are promising support to households being established by young people.

This study is structured as follows. First, we briefly describe and contextualise the context of Czech housing policy and the privatisation of municipal housing stock after 1989. Second, we outline the research questions we formulated based on a literary overview and then we explain the focus of the study and our methodological approach. Finally, the main research findings from the content and discourse analyses are presented and discussed. A comparative analysis of the 2014 and 2018 electoral programmes and coalition documents in four major Czech cities shows the increasing and path-dependent saliency of the housing issue. However, political declarations have offered little support for young people and their interest in acquiring housing.

2 Literature overview

Twenty years after the neoliberal turn in the West (Jacobs 2019) post-communist countries were in the years after 1989 adopting housing policies characterised by the withdrawal of the state and the large-scale privatisation of public rental flats to sitting tenants. In that time of economic transformation, the giveaway privatisation of public housing and the preservation of rent controls served as shock absorbers and as hidden economic subsidies provided by governments to mitigate the effects of rising wage differentiation (Lux & Sunega 2020). In the case of the Czech Republic, Lux, Sunega & Katrňák (2013) showed that during this period inequalities in housing were only weakly connected to social stratification. As a

result of (housing) privatisation, homeownership has come to be the prevailing form
of housing tenure in post-communist countries (Lux, 2003; Struyk, 1996). Over
time, and as housing prices boomed, wealth disparities connected to housing
ownership rose (Sunega & Lux, 2018). The segment of the population that did not
own their own home, typically younger age cohorts, became internally
differentiated according to whether and how much they were able to draw on
intergenerational support (Lux et al., 2018), notwithstanding the ambivalent effects
of these ties (Souralová & Žáková, 2020). It is for this reason that this study focuses
on support for young people in local housing policy.

The Czech Republic was one of a small group of countries in which privatisation
decisions were devolved to the local level (Hegedüs & Tosics, 1998). According to
the survey 'Local Democracy and Innovation' (LDI) conducted in the autumn of
1991, the prevailing opinion among local politicians was that housing or most of it
should be in private hands (Ryšavý, Šaradín, 2011). Elected politicians soon got the
opportunity to privatise flats when the Czech state transferred state property to
municipal ownership (Czech National Council Act 172/1991 Coll.). This massive
transfer included nearly one quarter of the country's housing stock (Sýkora, 2003).
Before privatisation more than one-third of rental units were public; by 2010 about
75% of the public housing stock had been privatised (Lux & Sunega, 2014).
Twenty-five years later, the mayors of Czech municipalities still saw things the
same way, and their counterparts in most other European countries largely agreed,
claiming '[t]he market is the best way to attend to housing needs' (Magnier et al.,
2018). Despite this general trend, the scale, terms, and local conditions of the
privatisation process varied from place to place. It can be assumed that the current
local housing policy depends on the local privatization history and its outcomes.

At first municipal flats were sold at very affordable prices. Over time the conditions
of privatisation came to increasingly reflect the rising prices in the housing market.
After peaking in 2008, flat prices and transactions in the residential real estate
market decreased during the ensuing economic crisis (Hegedüs et al., 2011). They
began to rise again in 2015 and quickly soared to new heights. The average flat price
in 2018 jumped to 140 percent of the post-crisis price in 2010 (Czech Statistical
Office, House Price Index, Figure 7-1). The simultaneous rise in flat prices and rents
is a global phenomenon and it is primarily affecting big cities. It makes sense for a
study of local housing policy to focus on those cities that privatised the largest
number of flats and currently watching prices soar.

Housing policy is not usually considered an ideologically neutral matter. For
example, British studies on public housing reform and on the supply of affordable
housing have raised the question of whether the political orientation of town-hall
leaders or the political opinions of local populations come to be reflected in changes
in the volume of housing stock municipalities own and hold on to (Alonso &
Andrews, 2018) or in using powers to compel private developers to include

affordable housing in new developments (Clegg & Farstad, 2021). It can be expected that right-wing parties favour the privatisation of municipal flats and left-wing parties oppose this and place the emphasis on public housing provision. This difference was confirmed by a survey of local politicians' attitudes towards the market's role in attending to people's housing needs (Magnier et al., 2018). However, in large Czech towns in particular the privatisation of municipal flats was a decision made by town-hall coalitions that included members from both main parties on the right and on the left, the Civic Democrats and the Social Democrats (see Balík, 2012). Moreover, in the past five to ten years the left-right ideological axis has diminished with the rise of new and hard to define political actors (Mansfeldová & Lacina, 2019), which have appeared not just on the national level, but also in in local government. Some of these new political parties, such as the Pirate Party, and some local movements are closer to young people in terms of their descriptive characteristics (e.g. their candidates tend to be younger). The question then is whether these electoral parties take a different approach to young people than, for example, the approach taken by the party with traditionally the oldest supporters, namely, the Communist Party.

Issue saliency analysis is one of the main goals of the Manifesto Project (MP), an international programme that seeks to collect and analyse election programmes and other materials (Budge et al. 2001, Klingemann et al. 2006). In the *Manifesto Project Codebook* (2019), *social housing* falls under the domain *Welfare and Quality of Life*. Positive and negative references to privatisation are among the sub-categories of the domain *Economy*. Recently the MP inspired a number of similar projects focused on the sub-state level of governance that have made it possible to study traditional topics on the local level (e.g. Gross, Jankowski 2020) or to compare important cleavages on the regional level (Alonso, Goméz, Cabeza 2013). However, there are only a few studies that have focused on an analysis of issue saliency at a lower level of governance (Ashworth & Boyne, 2000; Libbrecht et al. 2009; van De Voorde et al. 2018). This is even more true for the topic of housing, which has received only marginal attention, as was observed in a qualitative study of regional-level election programs (Vašát & Čermák 2016).

The issue of housing affordability, the significance of which has been further underscored by the current housing affordability crisis, should not be confused with support for housing for the most economically vulnerable citizens. In a situation where prices and rents are soaring, housing affordability can play the role of a 'valence' issue, which 'is characterized by interparty similarity of position or engagement and competition over performance' (Clegg & Farstad, 2021, p. 168), rather than a 'partisan' issue owned by left-wing parties. In other words, the more salient the housing issue becomes, the less closely it is bound to the ideological position of a party.

Inspired by Manifesto Project research, in this study we focus on the political declarations contained in the electoral programmes of political parties and the programme statements of the coalitions in government in selected Czech cities. Based on our review of the literature, the research questions we formulated are: How important do local politicians consider the housing issue? It can be assumed that because of the housing affordability crisis the salience of housing as an electoral issue varied over time. In a time of soaring prices, housing becomes a 'valence' issue rather than a 'partisan' issue. Strong, ideologically motivated views on privatisation and the housing issue should be relatively marginal as housing becomes an increasingly salient issue. Are local conditions reflected in the pre-election and post-election political discourse? We assume that the salience of housing varied spatially based on the different paths that municipalities followed to privatise housing stock. Instead of party ideological differences, it is expected that one bigger difference will exist between the parties in a governing coalition on the one hand, who are defending the status quo, and the parties in the opposition or new challengers, on the other hand. If young people are the people who are being the most visibly affected by the housing affordability crisis, are local politicians focusing their attention on them? An ideological position can be of little help here. It is thus not entirely clear where local politicians stand on the issue of housing as it relates to young people – or whether and how they are trying to appeal to them. Politicians can ignore young people because of their weaker voting habits (Linek & Petrúšek, 2016) and concentrate more on households with school-aged children that are more interested in local elections (see, e.g., Lappie & Marschall, 2018).

3 The locus of study, source of the data and research methods

For analysis of local election and post-election discourses, we selected four of the ten biggest cities or towns in the Czech Republic: Prague, Brno, Olomouc, and Pardubice (see TABLE No. 1). These are regional centres that have seen big increases in housing prices over the past five years, and they are currently the most expensive places to live in the Czech Republic. They differ, however, in terms of how they handled their municipal housing and its privatisation. According to the most recent national census (2011), the shares of flats still in municipal ownership ranged from 6.8% in Olomouc to 20.6% in Brno. Since then, this share has decreased to an average of around 5%. Brno is an exception in that 15% of flats there are still municipally owned.

The selected cities have a structured system of local politics. All the key national parties and, with varying degrees of success, multiple local movements and political parties regularly compete in these cities for the support of local voters in elections. After the elections in 2014 and 2018 the selected cities were governed by coalitions of three to five parties. The opposition was made up of similar numbers of successful election parties. Local coalition governments were formed by traditional parties (the right-wing Civic Democratic Party, the left-wing Social Democrats and

the smaller centre-right Christian Democrats) and new political parties (the right-wing TOP09, populist ANO 2011, and the Pirate Party) along with some local parties and movements (see *LL* in TABLE 1).

We analysed 60 election programmes from the various political parties and movements and their election coalitions were elected into office in the 2014 or the 2018 elections.[1] We also analysed the programme statements of eight municipal coalitions. These materials were in the form of individual continuous texts or lists of the basic points in a pre-election programme.[2] We also obtained materials from public sources (the websites of municipalities or political subjects) and by directly contacting political parties and movements.

Table 1: Descriptive characteristics of the selected cities and their elected political officials

	Population	Municipal flats	Coalition 2014	Opposition 2014	Coalition 2018	Opposition 2018
Prague	1309	12.1 %	ANO+SD+3coal	TOP09, CD, Com, Pir	Pir+coal+*LL*	CD, ANO
Brno	381	20.6 %	ANO+ChD+Gr+*LL**	SD, CD, Com, TOP09*	CD+Pir+ChD+SD	ANO, SPD
Olomouc	101	6.8 %	SD+ChD+CD+TOP09	ANO, Com, 2x *LL*	ANO+CD+ChD+*LL*	Pir, SPD, Com, SD, LL
Pardubice	91	9.4 %	ANO+SD+TOP09+ChD	Com, CD, *3x LL*	ANO+CD+ChD+*LL*+SD	Pir, *LL*, Com
			15	17	16	12

Notes: Population of municipalities as of 1 January 2019 (thousands). Municipal flats: % share of municipally owned flats according to 2011 Census (both Czech Statistical Office). Party abbreviations: SD – Social Democrats; CD – Civic Democrats; ChD – Christian Democrats; Pir – Pirates; Com – Communists; Gr – Green; LL – different local lists; 3coal (Prague) – Three-Party Coalition (ChD+Gr+Mayors and Independents/M&I); coal (Prague) – Coalition (ChD+TOP09+M&I); SPD - populist Freedom and Direct Democracy (in Olomouc 2018 in coalition with Citizens' Right Party/SPO). Brno*: In 2016 the four-member municipal coalition was expanded to include TOP09 which had originally formed part of the opposition.

Current analysis of party manifestos use quantitative as well as qualitative methodological approaches and different analytical methods with or without computer assistance (see, e.g., Merz, Regel & Lewandowski, 2016, van Atteveldt, Welbers & van der Velden, 2019). This study is based on a combination of qualitative (interpretative reading and discourse analysis) and quantitative methods (content analysis). All the materials were read repeatedly by both authors and analysed without the help of specialised analytical software. The first stage involved preparing a systematic description of the overt content of the material in the positivist tradition of content analysis (Neuendorf 2002). The content analysis was guided by the following questions: Where in the programmes of individual political parties is housing addressed? How much space is devoted to it? The ensuing qualitative analysis of pre-election programmes employs the inductive approach of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and the methods of critical discourse

analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2002). Our approach follows van Dijk´s (1993) sociologically cognitive tradition, where discourse is understood not only as a written text, but also as the broader framework of social practices and contexts. The first step in the analysis, in line with the principle of grounded theory, was the open coding of text (sentences or paragraphs) relating to the housing issue. In the next step, axial coding, quoted passages were compared to each other and contextualised. The goal was to describe the main characteristics of housing discourse that appear in election materials and to reveal the context in which young people are addressed in relation to the subject of housing. The analysis focused on identifying key frames and sub-topics in the representation of the housing issue and on analysing the exact wording used in the narrativisation of the housing issue in individual programmes.

4 Results

4.1 The growing autonomy of local housing politics between 2014 and 2018

It was not until cities had almost entirely freed themselves from the role of owning housing stock that local politicians began to treat housing as a more serious issue and devote more attention to it. That could be taken as the main conclusion of the analysis that compared the electoral programmes of the parties that competed in the local elections in 2014 and 2018. In 2014 there was still at least one political party in Prague and one in Pardubice that had been voted into the local council whose programme nowhere included the word 'housing', and in Olomouc the programmes of three of the eight elected parties made no mention of 'housing'. Housing-related issues were not a priority. Election parties did not consider the issue of housing to be something that would sufficiently appeal to voters. In Brno, by contrast, none of the electoral programmes in 2014 ignored housing entirely. The space devoted to housing in the programmes of successful parties was proportional to the share of municipal flats in the housing stock (Figure 1). On average, the least space was devoted to the issue in Olomouc (2%), followed by Pardubice (4%) and Prague (6%) and the largest in Brno (8%).

Figure 1: The correlation between the share of municipal housing stock in a municipality (2011) and what share of an electoral programme on average in 2014 and 2018 was devoted to 'housing' and 'flats'
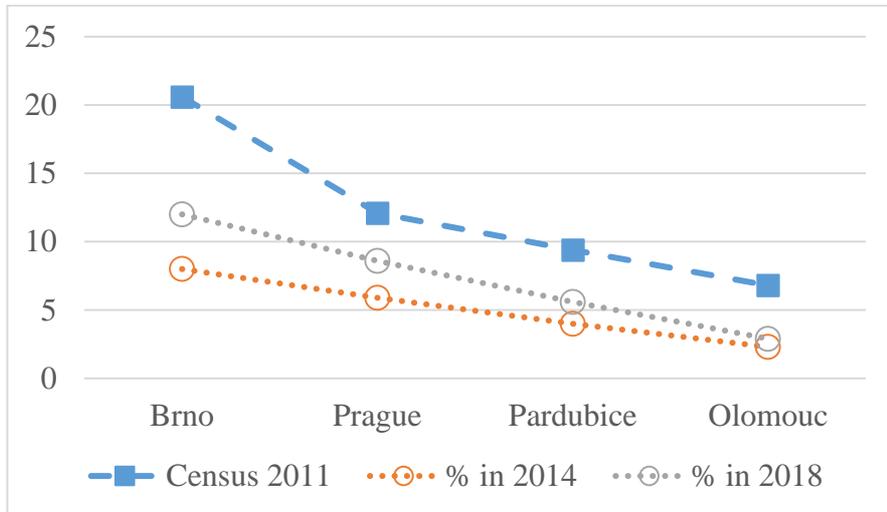
Note: The number in the figure is the share of words in the programme that was/were devoted to housing or flats out of the total programme. The share of the programme devoted to the topic/issue was based on the occurrence of the keywords 'housing' or 'flat' and the titles of sections of the programmes.

The electoral programmes differed in terms of how much space was given to housing and where it was addressed in the programme statements of municipal coalitions and how they framed the issue. In Brno, the programmes of four of the eight elected parties included a section called 'housing' (local list 'To Live Brno'), 'affordable housing' (Greens), 'Social Democrats for good housing', and 'Support for housing in municipal flats' (Communists). Three political parties (Christian Democrats, Greens, and To Live Brno) addressed the subject in greater detail and presented arguments based on social conditions and demographics. Thanks to these parties a housing policy was included in the programme of the coalition in Brno's city council. Similarly, in Prague housing was presented as a separate programme point or was addressed in longer passages of text in the programmes of all the parties that formed a coalition in city hall after the elections in 2014 and in the programme of the opposition Communist Party.

When it comes to which parties devoted the most space to the housing issue, the Communist Party was found to devote the most space to the issue, followed by the Christian Democrats (or their electoral coalitions). Candidates from the Communist Party are on average ten years older than candidates from other parties.[3] Conversely,

in Brno the programme of the youngest candidate list ('To Live Brno') paid the most attention to the issue of housing.

We find both differences and some continuity when we compare the 2014 and 2018 election programmes. The housing issue received much more attention in 2018 than 2014, despite a significant increase in the length of most parties' programmes. Housing appears in the programmes of almost all the elected political parties, and in most cases it is presented as an issue in its own right. The correlation between the amount of attention paid to the housing issue and the size of municipality housing stock remained unchanged between 2014 and 2018 (Figure 1). The shift in rhetoric is the most visible in programmes of the candidates from Prague and Brno, where housing is only rarely absent from the party programme section titles (TABLE 2). While in 2014 it was often discussed within the wider frame of social issues, by 2018 it had become a separate and independent issue. And in cases where parties were already identifying housing as a separate point in their programmes in 2014, by 2018 it had become a top issue or was at least being referred to more often and at greater length. Finally, housing was pushed into the foreground by the parties that formed the new municipal coalitions in 2018.

Table 2: The housing issue in the programmes of the parties that were successful in the 2014 and 2018 elections in Prague and Brno

Party	City	Order and section titles 2014	Words	Order and section titles 2018	Words
CD	Brno	9th Social & Medical Care	5 %	2nd Affordable housing	17 %
SD	Brno	11th SD for good housing	5 %	1st Housing	13 %
ChD	Brno	4th Support for family and seniors	7 %	1st Affordable housing	10 %
ANO	Brno	8th Responsible care for every true Brno resident	1 %	3rd Brno & housing	8 %
Average number of words of chosen programs			*1523*		*3550*
Pir	Prague	0	0 %	6th Affordable housing for all	14 %
Coal*	Prague	10th Affordable housing for young and elderly people	9 %	2nd Increasing housing affordability in P.	9 %
ANO	Prague	2nd Housing	4 %	3rd Affordable housing for everyone	5 %
CD	Prague	5th Social Politics	2 %	4th Functional city development and infrastructure	2 %
Average number of words of chosen programs			*2742*		*5231*

Notes: *Coalition 2014 (CD, Mayors & Independents, Greens); Coalition 2018 (CD, M&I; TOP09).

Conversely, in Olomouc only two parties that ended up in the opposition in 2018 addressed housing policy as a separate issue (the Communists and the coalition of the SPD & SPO, see table 1). Similarly, in Pardubice we mainly encounter the word 'housing' in the programmes of parties outside the municipal government coalition. The Social Democrats, however, took 'affordable housing' from their manifesto and inserted it among the key points in the programme of the governing coalition.

In 2018, the Communists lost their position as the main supporter of city-owned housing. Almost all the parties that had paid no attention to housing in 2014 and new electoral parties also devoted considerable space to the issue in their programmes. The Civic Democrats and Pirates took the most differentiated approach to housing issue. These two parties were more successful in the cities in which they developed detailed and more extensive housing programmes. In the places where did not do this, they remained in opposition, which is what happened to the Civic Democrats in Prague and the Pirates in Olomouc.[4]In sum, by the time of the 2018 elections, housing had come to figure as an important part of the programmes of the majority of the successful election parties in the selected cities. At a time of soaring rents and real estate prices and increasing housing unaffordability, especially in big cities, this is not a surprising finding. Nevertheless, the local context remains an important factor behind the presence and saliency of the housing issue in parties' electoral programmes and in coalition agreements. The visibility and significance individual parties ascribe to the issue of housing reflect how large a role municipally owned flats play in the local housing market. Housing appears to be devoted the most attention in the party programmes in Brno, less so in Prague and Pardubice, and in Olomouc it receives only marginal attention.

4.2 The housing discourse in party programmes and coalition materials

The programmes of the parties in the 2014 elections differed on the issue of housing to only a small degree. The rhetoric and style of most of the pre-election statements is very similar across parties. They reproduce the neoliberal political discourse of individual citizens' responsibility and their (in)ability to obtain suitable housing. The following statement could have figured in the pre-election programmes of almost all the elected parties: '*Our goal is to have a well-functioning municipal housing system that offers quality housing at affordable rents, gives young couples an easier start in life, and provides security for seniors.*'[5] As noted above, another significant feature is that housing policy issues were included within the wider frame of social policy and thus as a kind of tool for dealing with the cities' social problems. One of the few exceptions was the programme of the Communist Party, which promised '*Housing for all*' (Prague 2014) and stated that '*the clearance sale in housing stock is over*' (Olomouc 2014).

After two decades of privatisation of the municipal housing stock, this issue did not receive too much attention in the programmes we analysed. In 2014, right-wing

parties expected the privatisation process would reach completion and wind down (e.g. the Civic Democrats in Prague and Brno; a local list named Pardubaks), while the Social Democrats in Prague softly spoke about '*completing the transformation of the housing stock*'. In coalition negotiations the more successful parties were the ones that talked about amending the rules surrounding the sale of flats (the parties in the town hall coalition in Brno) or that vaguely promised '*to finish the process of privatising the city's housing stock, except for flats intended as social housing and service flats intended to provide stability for public sector workers*' (ANO, Prague). Strong statements were not very common[6]. In 2018, party programmes that, in line with neoliberal rhetoric, expressed support for privatisation either failed (TOP09, Brno[7]), were toned down, with the adoption of an individual approach instead of talking about selling entire tenement buildings (Civic Democrats, Brno), or were entirely abandoned in exchange for the party being able to join a municipal coalition. In Pardubice, the election promises (the sale of redundant city property, including flats) did not prevent the Civic Democrats from forming a local government coalition whose programme included the statement: '*We are fundamentally against the further privatisation of the housing stock along the lines of previous privatisation waves, that is, [the privatisation of] large tenement buildings with large numbers of tenants*'.[8] Instead of '*Housing for all*', the Pirates Party in Prague offered '*Affordable housing for all*' and the new Prague city coalition declared that because of housing unaffordability the city could 'no longer afford to privatise and thus decrease the number of municipal flats'. On the contrary, the coalition programme mentions the possibility of buying real estate as one way of increasing the (municipal) housing stock.

At the end of the second decade of the 21st century privatisation has lost its saliency as an issue, undoubtedly in light of how much stock has already been privatised. An ideological position on this issue can be applied in pre-election programmes rather than in the post-election coalition statement. These documents instead focus on maintaining the existing share of municipal flats or increasing their number by constructing more municipal housing. When there is any mention of plans for further privatisations or, conversely, for the remunicipalisation of housing, then it is always just as one and not a key component of a local housing policy.

Among the four cities and towns we studied, Brno was the only one in which it would be possible to privatise on any larger scale flats still owned by the city. The election programmes of the opposition and new parties, however, repeatedly devoted more attention to criticism of the large number of municipal flats that were unoccupied. The ruling coalition of the Civic Democrats and the Social Democrats thus became the target of criticism in 2014 and as the opposition in 2018 used the same arguments against the city hall coalition from 2014-2018.[9] Ideology clearly could not have played a significant role in this dispute.

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4.3 Housing policy – for whom?

Whom do politicians identify as needy in their electoral programmes? Do they notice young people, who are being impacted by the housing affordability crisis as they try to obtain their first housing? If we were to identify one specific group that was the target of the party programmes in the 2014 elections, then it was seniors. The need to ensure that there are enough available places in residential senior care homes was mentioned repeatedly. The parties thus responded to the long-term demand for this social service instead of responding to the general housing situation. In addition to social services for seniors, the programme statements of town hall coalitions also mention medical care (for seniors), support for active ageing, advantages in transport, etc. The pre-election political programmes also explicitly turned their attention to 'young families' (or families just starting out), who were mentioned much more often than 'young' people in general.[10] Unlike seniors, in this case the promises of municipal representatives are limited to the topic of housing, unless support for youth leisure activities, sport, and crime prevention are also included. As well as seniors and young people, the other most frequent references in 2014 were to people with health disabilities and, to a lesser degree, also groups of the population defined as socially vulnerable (single mothers, homeless people, etc.). The discourse in the programmes of election parties in this way created a diverse group within contemporary society who are not self-sufficient and are unable to secure housing on their own, because 'they can't afford commercial housing' (coalition agreement Prague 2014).

It is possible to observe in the pre-election materials from 2014 a significant degree of standardisation in the discourse on housing in terms of the subjects identified as the targets of housing policy. An emphasis on the social aspect of the issue can be traced across the programmes of different parties. The main focus was on starter flats, disabled-friendly flats, and community housing. The catchword '*accessible housing*' was primarily used in reference to the specific social groups mentioned above. The housing issue was sublimated within social policy and within that frame was reduced to social housing for people in temporary need.

Although the term 'young people' appeared in many of the statements, it is not clear whom politicians were addressing with this reference. The addressees of housing policy were identified not by reference to their age but by reference to their stage in the life cycle. It is clear from the context that the people being referred to were not first-time voters or young adults leaving their background family and looking to move into their first own dwelling. A more accurate term for the group targeted by these statements is 'young families' or just 'starting families'. Even the references to 'starter housing' or flats that appear repeatedly in the programmes are usually associated with 'families'. The pre-election discourse does not work with age definitions or terms for the generation being addressed (e.g. millennials). Rather, it

is dominated by an imaginary group of two-parent families with children in which no significant role is played by the age or social status of the parents.

The increase in the amount of attention devoted to municipal housing policy in party programmes before the 2018 communal elections was reflected in the diversity of the programmes. Parties were not just focusing on housing construction or renewal but also on rent regulation, amendments to zoning regulations and brownfields, reducing the duration of the building approval process, etc. The repeated emphasis on the social dimension and focus on the above-mentioned groups of seniors, young families, and people with health disabilities or social disadvantages resulted in the further standardisation of the discourse. In 2018, however, a new narrative emerged in the pre-election discourse. As well as the target groups mentioned in 2014, new groups were introduced who were defined according to their profession (teachers, fire fighters, police officers, health workers, public transit drivers), and their need was conceptualised in reverse. Cities need these professions, they are essential, and there are not enough of them. And a shift in rhetoric occurred in this connection. These people cannot be blamed for not being able to afford to buy a flat or to pay market rent because the costs of housing are already too high.[11]

As regards millennials, in 2018 the competition between housing policy's addressees increased further. Overall, references to starter housing decreased. Sometimes housing is referred to in association with young people without any further specification or with young couples (recent graduates). However, many individual programmes began to more specifically define the sub-groups who ought to receive support from the city because, in the words of local politicians, 'the city needs them'. Electoral programmes no longer referred just to 'young families' and instead started to emphasise that they were talking about '*young Prague families*', '*young families with children*', or '*working young people and families*'. Politicians were declaring they wanted to assist '*young craftspeople*' or '*university graduates*', for example, and encourage them to stay in their city. The Pirate Party in Brno stated: '*We have to help meet the housing needs of the most at-risk groups, these being university graduates, families with young children, and retired persons*.'

All in all, the programmes ignore the internal heterogeneity of the emerging generation that is the result of the differences in the opportunities they have to draw on intergenerational support. Support is not being offered primarily to the neediest members of the population but rather to those who have something to offer that the city needs – whether this means in the area of infrastructure (transport, healthcare, education), development potential (utilising skills some people have acquired through a post-secondary/university education), or biological reproduction (children).

5   Discussion

The Czech Republic is far from the only country that has seen the privatisation of public housing in recent decades. However, it ranks as one of the few in which the scale, form, and timing of privatisation were based on decisions made by local politicians. We were therefore interested in learning what position local politicians have adopted on the issue of housing in a time of soaring real estate prices and rents. We studied changes in local housing policies by carrying out a contextualised analysis of the election programmes of political parties and movements that were successful in the last two municipal elections in four Czech cities and the programme statements of the municipal coalitions that were formed after the elections. We examined how significant a role the issue of housing played in parties' election programmes and what groups were defined by parties as deserving of support in this context. We were especially interested in learning whether politicians had forgotten about young adults, whom the housing crisis has hit at a time in their lives when they are establishing their own households.

For years most local politicians and inhabitants shared the view that housing and the responsibility for securing housing are private matters and the personal concern of individuals and their families. For many of the election parties that ran in 2014 in the selected cities, housing policy itself was not an issue worth paying attention to. For the Communist Party, on the other hand, housing was one of the main 'partisan' issues. However, at a time when real estate prices and rents were rising significantly, it seems impossible for election parties to ignore the issue of housing. Housing became established as a separate issue in its own right within the programmes of most of the parties that were successful in the 2018 communal elections. The results of our analysis of election programmes clearly support the finding by Clegg and Farstad (2021) that during the crisis the issue of housing has shifted from being a 'partisan' to a 'valence' issue. Moreover, housing privatisation, which is usually considered a highly ideological subject, ceased to play a significant role in the election manifestos in the last two local elections. During the elections in 2018, the biggest advocates of housing privatisation either did poorly in the elections and in the negotiations to form a town hall coalition or they sacrificed this programme point in exchange for being able to join such a coalition.

When the urban housing affordability crisis struck cities in the Czech Republic, local political leaders had over the past twenty-five years already gotten rid of most of the public housing stock that had been transferred to municipal ownership after the restoration of local government in the early 1990s. However, the situation is not uniform. This study shows that the space devoted to the topic of housing tended to reflect the share housing owned by the city both when housing prices were stagnating and when they were soaring. Local conditions clearly shape the way in which 'meeting the needs for housing' (Municipal Act) manifests itself at the declaratory level in the party programmes. To further study the rising and path-

dependent saliency of the housing issue, it would be useful to perform a deeper textual analysis of multiple cases or a case study that combines data sources and methods, such as interviews with key actors, and an analysis of housing policy documents while also monitoring how much programme promises are met at different levels of government (see, e.g., Pixová, 2020).

The rise in housing prices and rents has had big impact on households that are just starting out. In most cases it is young people who are setting up these households. They are the ones who more often and more strongly than in the past deem housing support to be the biggest priority among various state social policies (Ryšavý 2021). Local politicians have not entirely forgotten about them in their election programmes. However, they tend to promise support for 'young families' rather than 'young people' in general and without further qualification. No such narrower specification is however applied to the senior population, although it is mentioned more often.

At a time when housing is becoming increasingly less affordable, it is not just 'young families and seniors' who are being discussed. Those who have something to offer, such as people who perform particular professions or occupations that cities depend on to function, may also expect to be the targets of accommodating steps from politicians. Young people are expected to work, increase their education levels, and then start a life together and have the children that will ensure the city's future prospects beyond a single electoral term.

Notes:

[1] In 2018, some of governing parties did not pass the minimum threshold of obtaining 5% of the vote in order to obtain seats in the city council of Prague and Brno.

[2] The text that was included in the analysis is not in every case necessarily the only version of a given election programme (for example, in terms of its length). Wherever possible, different versions of the material were included in the analysis.

[3] The candidates' ages are published on the Czech Statistical Office's election website: www.volby.cz.

[4] In Prague the Pirate Party devoted more than one-eighth of its programme to housing. In Olomouc, however, the same party only mentioned the issue of homelessness in its programme.

[5] Social Democrats, Brno 2014.

[6] Civic Democrats in Prague stated that 'The city should not build "social" flats and provide them cheaply to selected groups…'.

[7] The strongest advocate of housing privatisation was TOP 09, one of the parties in the municipal coalition in 2016-2018, which in the 2018 elections failed to defend its place in the Brno municipal council.

[8] The Social Democrats drew 'NO to the privatisation of municipal flats' from their own electoral programme and got it into the coalition agreement.

[9] It moreover strongly came out against the Housing First programme, for which the local list 'To Live Brno' in particular had been trying to obtain empty municipal flats. Although the programme involved only several dozen flats, it became a hot topic among politicians in Brno. This affair warrants more attention (see also case study of the political movement Prague for Us in Pixová, 2020).

[10] Right-wing political parties and movements did not mention young people or young families at all, but most of them did not fail to mention the senior population.

[11] 'Prague is turning into a city where it is difficult even for residents with a good income to acquire a flat.' (Election statement of the coalition of Christian Democrats, TOP09 and Mayors & Independent 2018 that was included in the programme statement of the City Hall coalition. 'For many living in Brno is almost an unattainable dream' (Civic Democrats, 2018); 'Housing in Brno is becoming a luxury that few can afford' (Social Democrats, 2018).

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