Housing and Moralities:  
Construction of Home and Middle-Class Identity in Post-Socialist Context

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Abstract: Constructing the personal and social identity in the current complex era might be seen as non-trivial achievement. In the context of post-socialist housing market and in the practice of creating the home I present the findings of my field research based on several interviews with “middle-class” people from Czech Republic acquiring their home during recent years. Combing the narrative and content analysis the article presents broad and deep insight into the people’s understanding of space, places and morality. The conclusion is that the realm of housing is more important, than might have been regarded in the connection of performance of certain roles – good parent, capable husband or wife and successful person in general. Thus it reveals the values and ethos, which are regarded as principal by the middle-class people. Moreover the issue of emotions is tackled and proved to be crucial in the people decision making and moral evaluation. The article thus provides the presentation of original method of analysis and persuasive presentation of ordinary people everyday life with regard to their valued ethos, objects and beliefs.

Keywords: housing, narrative, emotions, post-socialism, constructivism, moral ethos

Buying a house, might be a very important decision, but creating yourself a home, may be the most important and hardest decision one can ever made. Making these decisions in the times of uncertainty, in the times of rising or dropping of real estate’s market prices, may be even harder, yet potentially stimulating for the construction of certain social identities. This text presents findings of research, which was conducted during my master thesis research project and which was supposed to focus mostly on the issue of the Financial crises. However other themes in the informant’s accounts have proven to be significant in connection to their narratively (re)constructed identities. These themes have involved the ability to express the well performed role of good parent, capable person or respon-

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sible partner in connection with the process of creation of home for them and their families. Following text describes the results of the analysis of narratives and presents the answer for research question: What kind of “language tools” (tropes, themes and figures) informants use in their narratives, when speaking about the experience of social construction of home? Formulating the answer for this research question also enable me to present more general findings about the links between the significance of home in the process of construction correct and acceptable middle-class identity. The importance of such research may seem at first glance unclear. Why we should deal with accounts of “ordinary”, middle-class people and their stories, how they acquired their homes? I have two answers on both theoretical and “practical” levels. From the theoretical point of view, in the anthropological and sociological research has been tendency to observe the “different”, “otherness” and even “exotic” and the “normal”, “ordinary” and “banal” has been usually omitted from the interest of researchers (Highmore 2002). My focus was thus to reverse this usual approach and shed light on the “ordinary” bourgeoisie middle-class, which might be sometimes regarded as intuitively understandable, however more systematic and rigorous ways to describe and interpret these domains are desperately missing. People belonging to the middle-class has experienced also significant pressures due to the combination dismantling of welfare state, increasing tax burden and sustained aspirations to climb on the social ladder (or at least not to fall down). Thus even thought the concept of middle-class may be problematic (we may be facing the “danger” of essentialism), focusing on this “average” terrain may be fruitful in order to understand more general social processes and changes. From the “practical point of view”, understanding the processes of how people, who are identified (by themselves or by the others) as belonging to the middle-class’ economical and cultural milieu, construct their identities through certain performance on housing markets, may be essential in order to suggest potential future scenarios of housing market development. In other words, significance of home as cultural tool, which serves to construct the “correct” identity, and the practices of people conducted in order to perform this identity has also structural impacts on housing market, e.g. due to the preference of ownership housing or certain forms of housing (family house with garden etc.).

Broadening the angle of view on the issues of housing and social construction of identity from the historical perspective of the experience of post-socialism in the context of the Czech Republic, regarding the housing market, is also one of the aims of this article. In this perspective, the domain of housing and process of the transformation of the housing market, represented by the privatization and restitutions of the real estate (Lux 2012), became the stage where people could learn how to live their lives under different structural conditions. Experiencing the changes on the housing market (which affected, if not everybody, then most of the people) was one of the learning tools how to live under new capitalist post-socialist conditions. As for example the practice of using the mortgage as a instrument to obtain the real estate has definitely not been “natural” in the Czech context and actors on the market have had to learn it. The learning of the practices of the global capitalism could be seen as marked by the narratives of independence and emancipation on different scales and dimensions: politics, economics, family and individual. All these experiences during the period of transition and transformation might be seen as important regarding the symbolic tropes, certain ethos and imaginations rooted in the collective memory and used in the current narratives (Halbwachs and Coser 1992).

I. Housing: Global and Post-Socialist Contexts: Material and Symbolic Domains

The concepts of modern housing and modern home as certain safe places are not culturally neutral and natural. They are subjects of the collective social constructions through usage of certain more or less local or global imaginations (Burawoy 2000). Although often communicated through global channels of communication, they are often contested and modified in the local contexts. Especially remarkable is the example and the relevance of the “dream of own family house”, which origins might be traced from 1930s’ and interestingly enough in connection with the Great Depression, when the single-family household unit was supposed to increase the levels of consumption (Taylor 1999: 13). The irony of history is that the American dream for home-ownership, (Stephens 2003: 1013; Boehm and Schlottman 1999: 217-218) which should be preferably in the suburbs, (Taylor 1999: 20) in connection with the transformation of ethos of thrift into the ethos of greed and/or (over)consumption (Kenway and Fahey 2010) resulted into the fertile ground for the housing bubble on the American housing market.

That we can never get away from the sprawl /// Living in the sprawl /// Dead shopping malls rise like mountains beyond mountains /// And there’s no end in sight (Arcade Fire – Sprawl II – The Suburbs 2010)

The experiences of living in these specific places – suburban neighborhoods – under certain conditions, which require certain conformity to the imagined ideal, are so strong, that apart from scientific discourse they have been also subject to mainstream cultural production (such as The Stepfords Wives, Blue Velvet, American Beauty). At this point we should prefigure the non-trivial relation between two domains of experience: material and symbolic. One possible approach is the framework of Herbert Blumer, where the material domain is being subjected to the scrutiny of the symbolic domain and the meaning of objects and practices is being constantly recreated using the symbolic resources (Blumer 1966). However, Jean Baudrillard has problematized the simple distinction between objects and
meanings/signs presenting the idea of collapse of the symbolic into its own and neglecting the exchange between “real” and “sign” (Baudrillard 1993: 6 – 7; see also Baudrillard in Foster 1983: 126 – 134). In his perspective, the crucial role in this process is marked by the end of production and the era of consumption, whereas both material and symbolic may be the subject of consumption.

In order to be able to develop the meaningful and practical analytical framework, I deliberately put aside the theoretically problematic division of materiality and symbolic into two realms. The symbolic domain I define as being constituted by certain abstract “tools”, which are able to communicate meanings. First, (global) imaginations, which represent certain visions of how the “ideal” reality should or might look like (Gille and O Riain 2002: 283 – 285); second, ethos, which is the set of moral principles and values, which are used by people in order to coordinated their behaviour and construct certain identities (Ossowska 2012); third, narrative tropes, which are the references in the communication, which draws his imaginative power from a pool of metaphors, images and references to cultural, historic or situational cliches (Knight 2013). Through these symbolic references the meanings are communicated, identities constructed and in certain situations symbolic boundaries are being enacted (Lamont and Fournier 1992). This differentiation between me/us as “better” than the others might be constructed on the basis of emotions (Sayer 2005), on the basis of moral valuation of conduct (Ossowska 2012), on the status of old-resident or new-comer (Southerton 2002) or as suggest on the basis of practising of certain aesthetics or (non)conforming to certain standards of everyday practice.

In the context of aesthetics and standards of everyday behaviour we cannot neglect the historical dimension. We might assumed, that the condition of post-socialist experience in the housing market and in the process of social construction of home is different, than in the United States or Western countries in general. Krisztina Fehérvary is developing argument, why has been the ideal of suburban family houses so successful in the Hungarian context and how is the materiality connected to the process of (social group) identity construction (Fehérvary 2011). She suggests that the social differentiation as a process is being achieved by the specific material condition (living in the certain type of house) in connection to the certain management of space through certain activities, such gardening and others (Fehérvary 2011: 20-21). These practices are also reified by discourses of normality and morality, which circulate and in some cases are being narrated when there is a need to express some stances towards the lived situation. In other words those who wants to express their belonging to the middle class have to perform certain behavior regarding their housing i.e. family house with “pretty accessories”, both inside and outside the house (Fehérvary 2011: 23-26).

In the Czech context, the suburbanization has been subject of study mostly for the social geographers and sociologist. Either with the interest in it as phenomen-
II. Narrative(s): The Story Is behind It All

When having a conversation about housing and your communication partner says: “Oh! This mortgage is such a good buy!”, it does not just mean, that it is rationally and economically advantageous, but it also makes you feel good and capable, because you were able to fix this kind of advantageous financial instrument. This remark would be like for the social scientist like one of the top-chart summer tunes hundred times repeated in the radio: language is not neutral medium of communication, but using it you also create and construct the world for yourself and also for others. This idea is of course deeply rooted in the works of many important authors (Wittgenstein 2001) (Garfinkel 2002) (Berger and Luckmann 1973) (Searle 1969) and eventually the ideas of “interpretative turn” rest upon it (Reckwitz 2002).

Although “narrative” is often regarded to an overloaded concept, the attempts to clarify the different (analytic) meanings and to construct diverse theoretical frameworks has been made (Hájek, Havlík and Nekvapil 2012). The wide variety of usage of the narrative approach reminds us of the importance of this specific communication genre in the effort of grasping both biographical life-times stories and small stories about everyday life experiences (Spector-Mersel 2010: 213). Moreover narratives often enable people to bridge the great divide between the personal biographical experience and structural historical events (Hanninen 2004) (Polkinghorne 1988: 14). In other words, narrative as a communication genre serves also individuals to make sense of their lives (Ezzy 1998: 239; Spector-Mersel 2010: 210).

This may be illustrated in the very concrete historical case of transformation from the socialist state into the post-socialist, capitalist system during the 1989 and 90’s. Jiří Kabele has promoted the idea of dual social construction, which one the theoretical element is the interaction between the narrativization and institutionalization of social reality (Kabele 1998). This interplay is crucial in the construction both meaningful everyday lives and “functional” institutions in the course of (historical) uncertainty. In other words “nobody” knew what is going to happen after the Velvet Revolution, but there were two main huge narratives – Havel’s democratic and life in truth and Klaus’ neo-liberal market style. These two huge narratives then functioned as a frame for the biographies of people helping them “make sense” of the events they were experiencing, (de)legitimizing them (e.g. free elections, coupon privatization). Balázc Vedres in case of Hungary suggests, that “the reality” is even more complicated and not only huge narratives are enough to provide the interpretation of transformation, but more subtle and multiple ways how to narrate/understand the events in their temporal, dynamic dimensions (Vedres 2004).

Classical work of William Labov, dealing with the structure of narrative, highlights the significance of the evaluation part of narrative (Labov 1972: 354-370). The evaluation in this sense serves like a justification of the account, but also serves as a medium to communicate certain stances of the story-teller and serves as a performance of certain morality or ethos (Atkinson and Delamont 2006: 165). Narratives also may serve as a tool how could people describe themselves in the “favourable light”, being a “good person” (Hanninen 2004: 78) and constructing thus a certain face and practising the impression management in the Erving Goffman’s sense (Goffman 1959). Another issue is the fact, that the meaning in not inherently contained somewhere in the story itself, but has to be created not just by the story-teller, but in the cooperation with listener (De Fina 2009: 238, 246-248). In the context of ethnomethodological re-use of data from the narrative accounts from socialism Zdeněk Konopásek and Zuzana Kusá has demonstrated this issue (Konopásek and Kusá: 2005: 63). So the significance of narratives might be summarized in their three important features: they make sense of the reality, especially during the times of “transformation” (Kabele 1998: 158-159); through them the people evaluate the social reality, creating the moral stances; the meaning of the narrative is created in the interaction of teller and listener.

These features of narrative, as a genre of communication, are essential is the process of social construction of home. We get here back at the beginning to the postulated research question, which opens the field of language tools in the process of home’s construction. Through usage of certain language tools, people are to articulate their everyday experience with their homes and they may signify those issues, which are relevant for them. Moreover they are able to bring in the temporal dimension in their accounts and in fact this is crucial for the construction of meaning, both what is being told (to the listener), and what is being lived and experienced (by the narrator). Conceptually this is closely linked to the Doreen Massey concept of place, which is characteristic by the relevance of procesuality in the construction of places (Massey 1994). Her approach is remarkable not only because she points on the significance of process and dynamics of place, but that she also suggest understanding places like texts. Places themselves have no inherent meaning. They are ascribed to them only by “readers” (people, networks of people) summoning certain values and characteristics, which are based on their knowledge and networks of relations between them (Massey 1994: 149-156). In this process the language and certain language tools are significant and thus “home spoken” is “home real”.

III. Field, Data, and Analysis

During the field research eleven narrative interviews which ranged from 40 to 75 minutes have been conducted. Nine of them were done with individual and two of them with couples. Two of these interviews were preliminary and were done only without explicit scenario, only framed by the topic on my research. I al-
so tried to specify the group of my informants in order to be able to get a deeper understanding about certain imagined social group. In my case I was interested in the people who bought their houses or apartments slightly before, during or after the Crisis, so the likelihood that the Crisis is relevant theme for them might be higher. They were also mostly men and women with families (two of them divorced) and young children in their thirties or early forties. Roughly half of them are from Prague and half of them from Pisek, a town with 30 thousand inhabitants located one hundred kilometres far from Prague. Most of them were also what could be classified as middle-class and in terms of education with mostly university or college degrees. Therefore the chance their narratives would converge around certain themes was increased.

The conceptual significance of narrative as communication genre has been already stressed out. However from the analytical point of view, I have decided not to conduct the narrative analysis in the strict sense, but combine it with the qualitative content analysis (Krippendorf 2004). I have decided for this combination from two main reasons: a) application of narrative analysis alone increase the risk of overlooking certain figures or tropes in the narrative, which might be crucial; and b) qualitative content analysis is very flexible (White and Marsh 2006) and enables combinations with other kinds of analysis and conceptual framework i.e. narrative analysis. Certain branches of narrative analysis, which may be labeled as structuralist, are quite limited in the results of analysis, being able to describe the common structure of narrative (Labov 1972), lifetime events related to the macroscale event (Kazmierska 2001), or represent certain process on the behalf of narratives into the visual, structural model (Bearman and Stovel 2000). These approaches alone would not sufficient enough to answer my research questions and analyze the narrative figures and tropes in their structural connections, but also in their embeddedness in the meanings and context. The concrete analytical procedure, which I have undertaken can be summed in the following steps:

1. Preliminary phase: transcription of the interviews, transfer of data into the Atlas.ti software, which I used in the following analysis.
2. Open coding of the interviews, where the unit of analysis (Schilling 2006: 31) were mostly sentences and/or paragraphs, which signified certain stance or evaluation of action of informants.
3. Roughly from the half of the data analyzed, I have developed preliminary categories, which I tried to use for every following coding and thus in the code combining categories and concrete codes. Categories were constructed on the behalf of their thematic similarities (Ryan and Bernard 2003) and involved symbolic and practical dimensions (as described in table 1).
4. After this the stage of what might be called “acute constant comparison”, rose up 500 codes, which were only limited in their affiliation to their categories.
5. All of the categories were subject of specific analysis in order to “make sense of them” and in order to identify the most relevant ones. Preliminary results were based on the careful comparison of accounts connected to each category – theme, were laid down.
6. Three most relevant categories were identified taking into account also their quantity (Schilling 2006: 34; see also see Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005) and the relevance for the construction of narrative: Crisis, ethos and emotions. Codes of these categories were visualized and then sorted out according to their content into the super-codes or sub-categories (as presented in the findings section).
7. Again the process of what Krippendorff calls hermeneutic loop (2004: 87–88) was undertaken and the relations of categories – supercodes – codes – data was reconsidered.
8. Three main findings were formulated and again the narrative aspect of the data was taken into account when constructing the main interpretation, which frames the main and minor findings into one coherent result.

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<th>Non-textual evaluation</th>
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Thus I have reduced the number of codes looking for the similarities in the accounts and assigned all codes to certain categories (in the Atlas.ti so-called families). This resulted in the number of 250 codes.

Describing the process of analysis in the very detail and clarifying each step, I would like to increase the “truth value” of my study (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Finally I would like to stress the fact, that I have not analyzed the accounts as taken-for-granted facts, but as performative accounts embedded in certain (un)wanted
language ideologies (Gal 2005). On the other hand I have not fully adopted the deconstructivist methodology (Martin 1990), but only focused on the certain ambiguities, contradictions and metaphors (ibid.: 355), which hailed the incoherence between what is being told and evaluated by narrator and what is being told in the other part of the story or is taken as the culturally “normal” way of referring to certain issues. It is essential to be reminded that I simple do not present the narratives and the informants’ account but also creatively recreate them in order to tell the narrative of my research (Grygar 2013: 523-524).

Following paragraphs present two kinds of narratives. First are narratives regarding the specificity of construction of particular home and community. Second are emotions and moral ethos, which are connected to this process of home construction. Logic followed here is to present more concrete, in practices rooted findings and then to provide their more general interpretation and conclusions.

IV. Narratives of Home and Community

Looking for a place, which could become one’s home seems to be a quest for a holy grail in the informants’ narratives. Analysing this ultimate decision, two important notions have proven to be significant. First, the particularity of certain places (locations) in terms of their atmosphere and accessibility of other places or objects. Second, so called “children factor”. Both of these are connected to the imagination of perfect home and then the actual decision to get certain home based on both “rational” and “irrational” factors.

Thematzization of space has been important in the construction of narratives. Certain configuration of space into places and objects, which are being “useful” and “pleasant” for informants is needed to satisfy the need for the ideal home or at least get to this ideal as close as possible. Most pervasive was the imagination of nature. This narrative trope enters as the most significance actor in the narrative evaluation of certain places (current of unrealized) home or during the description of the searching process. Nature should be close at hand. That is something, which is taken for granted, because it is just good for children. You can go there and be there, with children and there is nothing to question about. Even the thought the “nature” might sound a bit vague, it was used by my informants in a way, they supposed, I would understand it. Nature stands in the narratives as trope for the positive, healthy, enjoyable and happy situations.

Comparing this to the Fehérvary accounts, we can see striking similarity. Fehérvary also mentions the change from the socialist ideal (live in the city and be in the countryside on the weekends) to the post-socialist’s embodied in the suburbia housing and propose, that the continuity of dream was not abandoned completely and the arguments somehow remained the same even though the context has changed: “to be in the suburbs is good, because there is nature, therefore it is heal-

thy for your children.” However is has been modified by the emphasis on the self-realization through your housing and explicit denial of socialist past as backward using certain aesthetics (Fehérvary 2011: 25, 27, 32-34).

With one of my informants, Susan (all names used in the text are imaginary), we were talking in the newly built house, which mostly built by themselves – Susan was very proud of her husband being both hardworking during the construction of the house and also in his job (works like a chef in Germany). The house stands in the better-off neighborhood on the hill and it would have nice view on the city in the case, that their nearest neighbor would not build a house, which violates the rule about the high of family house. Susan and her husband have two kids and are happy to provide them the most possible comfort.

“Well of course, if you have small kids, you expect some standard of living. I mean some playgrounds and access to forest (…) you want to be close to the nature.” (Susan – 7:45)

Fortunately their house is indeed close to the nearby forest, so they are able to fulfill the need for the nature.

Realizing the interview with Martin was a little bit different. He is a friend of mine and we met in a café. He loves his children and thus for him the immanent goal was to fulfill, what he and his ex-wife regarded as important:

“(…) for me, the location was important, that I like the nature and surroundings.” (Martin – 8:7)

Even though he always used to be “urban-person” they moved to the suburban area, where the nature was close by.

Difference between the ideal of most of my informants (everybody except Martin) and the Fehérvary’s is the denial of suburbia by my informants. Not only because the distance and worse accessibility (you have to “drive everywhere”), but also due to the symbolic boundaries towards those who live in the suburbia, as will be described later in the text.

Similarly to this topic, in some of the narratives was present the idea, that public space has undertaken major change in terms of using it by children. There is no more “going out to streets” and play there on their own for them, as it used to be even fifteen years ago (as I can remember it myself). Now according to my informants, this is not possible due to several reasons, while the main one is the importance of feeling of safety for the children. Another one is the rising structuring of free time for children and thus the lack of it for them. But the idea of safety is quite interesting and some of informants spoke about the place with boundaries, where you can release your children, but not in the public space itself. This change of the public space, evident in the perception of people would deserve more attention in some other research, but here we need to focus back on the process of constructi-
on of “good home” narrative. I suggest, that the trope of nature as a certain space, which is semi-public: you go there and meet other people, but usually as a family – you do not leave kids alone, functions as a new public space and is important to use not only that you have fresh air and nice smell of recently cut wood.

Although nature is the most frequent term also another tropes are being employed in order to describe the perfect home. One of them, not surprisingly, is the imagination of garden, which acts as somehow tamed nature, again ready for children to play around.

The interview with the married couple Peter and Elisabeth, took place in a cafe. They talked about their “housing journey”, told me how they always ended in the house at the village, but at the last time changed their mind (by Peter’s decision). Even though they are absolutely content with their apartment – it is huge, close to the city centre and they enjoy not to work around the apartment as much as they would have to in the house, they feel the need for the nature. They recently bought a cottage nearby the city – so they could somehow “tame” the nature and provide it for the children.

“And kids can enjoy the garden. That is, what we did not have, when we had moved to the apartment.” (Elisabeth – 5:51)

Another objects and features, which are being summoned to illustrate the need for good accessibility, are mostly proximity to schools, jobs, and places like shops or hospitals and sometimes the fact you can reach them by foot is highly regarded. What is strikingly similar is the almost ever-present figure of importance of the possibility to access these objects or places for children and by children. Proximity of grand-parents sometimes become essential and influence the decision making process in terms of choosing the location of new home.

Mary had two kids, twins, and was expecting the third one during our interview. She lives with them and her husband in the older, yet beautifully renovated house. She told me, how she enjoyed the reconstruction – she took a major role in the construction process, consulting with the planner. She is also proud on her husband, him being very skilled, but the reconstruction was hard enough anyway. She managed to get a house of their dreams – in the (almost) perfect location.

“(…) I do not drive the car, so that we have everything nearby is advantage. Two elementary schools, we can decide, so for non-driver that is perfect. (…) the hospital is quite far away, but the locality is great, it is close to the river, so I think we are content here.” (Mary – 1:32)

The need for space, which can be used for children and also for self-realization evokes the dream for your own family house. However, this dream is not for my informants about the house in the suburbs, and possibly represents the dream not just for family house, but for family and house (as a place of security). Presence of this dream in people’s narratives is not being non-reflexive, but becomes certain reference point: you can refer to this ideal type of dream when creating the narrative of your ideal home. You can either fit in this category (which seems to be dominant) or you are kind of subversive and you have to bring certain arguments to support your decision not to move to family house. Children often serves also as an actors, who enable communication between people, becoming reason to bring them together and somehow enhance the relationships among the community (but not to build the community itself). Even though this was very common narrative, informants usually mentioned that their contacts within community (or better to say with close neighbors) are on the basis: “We are good, but we are not friends.” Children often figure in narratives as reasons, why to move or why to do a reconstruction of the apartment or family house.

Materiality and Symbolic Boundaries

Accessibility and “children factors” are important tropes in the narratives, but for some informants, they are not the only ones used in describing the ideal home. For some people certain material objects are significant in creating an impression of the ideal. Two most important are balcony and garage. I interpret these two as tools to enable better accessibility of the public space, keeping the tool itself being private per se at the same time. In other words, balcony brings a little bit of “nature” into the home, while garage enables to posses car (your private object) in order to be able to reach for work, school and other public places. But the significance of materiality and places is not in its “usefulness” and function, but resides also in the realm of aesthetics and symbolic dimension. Differentiation between the city as a cultural hub and countryside as a place for nature and the aesthetic and functional differentiation between gardens as places of “chill out” and places “to deal with” (cutting grass, etc.) are employed to create certain symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Fournier 1992).

These symbolic boundaries, constructed by narrators, are even more evident in the example of differentiation: them and “the others”, who are living in the suburbia. The suburbia figures as a place with a bad accessibility and place, which encompasses certain strict social norms, materialized in conform aesthetics of gardens and in a way comparative game run about the social status.

George and Margaret are couple with three children. We did the interview in their newly renovated house in the joint are of kitchen and living room. Drinking tea and eating home-made pie we talked about their housing journey “there and back again”. Even though they have lived in the apartments, renting and the last one owning, they always wanted the family house. The house, which would be in the nature, almost in the forest. They actually did not succeed in this (although it is replaced by the nice garden) because the prices for the properties at that speci-
fic area were insanely high and they were quite certain, that they do not want go to the suburbs.

“(….) when we moved here, I realized, that they are mostly denizens here and we would rather fit here, that in the newly build neighborhoods, where everybody is like: ‘look he has 2 garages and 4 cars’ (…) we would not meet that standard, which is expected there and we will be like thorn in the eye for someone.” (George – 3:5,6)

For Peter and Elisabeth it was rather an issue of remoteness of place. Having the interview in the cafe with the beautiful view on the Old bridge, they admitted, they are “urban-people” enjoying rather theater or music concerts rather than house-keeping. Yet also for them the issue has proven to be quite delicate, bringing in the expression of emotions:

“Well, and second thing is that Peter has a band and he likes to live a culturally rich life. I am also not a type, which cares only about the garden and the house.”(Elisabeth – 5:14)

“Well, we have a friend who lived in the city, but moved in the village…huge estate, house, everything…but there is a problem for them to come the city. We always have to go there to see them. It was like a thousand events we told them to come, and it is only like 10 km and they work here, but still the social activity zero. They have kids, and they cannot left them there alone, so it is horribly complicated. It is the choice, you either have sheeps on the garden or you can go to the coffee house…so we do not want the sheeps. (Peter – 5:91)

These symbolic boundaries serves as important figures in informants’ narratives, because they enable them to configure certain ideal place and express the “best” of it making other places “not suitable” for them and in general “suspicious” and just not that great. Referring to the imagination of nature and garden, to the city and suburbs in the specific contexts enable the narrators to construct their identities as those who care about their children and those who want create their home in specific environment. The importance of imagination in the ability to express certain value stances is described by the Zsuzsa Gille and Seán Ó Riain (Gille and Ó Riain 2002). Their conclusion that the usage of imaginations is important in the political domain may be re-interpreted and we can regards those imaginaries as the expression of certain moral ethos, while the informants construct their identities upon those ethos.

Atmosphere and Decision: Bond and Locations

The process of finding a home was narrated as a complex chain of events and stages, which employ the need to make several different choices, regarding the financial issues and accessibility and (in)security issues among the most important ones. Informants often stressed the difficulties and demands of the process of searching for a new home, which involves a lot of effort in terms of looking up information and going to visit the apartments or houses. Interestingly enough the final decision itself and sometimes the fact, they were able to get to a certain home or apartment was the result of what could be seen as “coincidence” or “irrational factor” on the first sight. It may be the coincidence in terms of acquiring the information about the certain house and possibility to buy it via informal networks of contacts. Also majority of narratives mention the crucial importance of certain instant emotional bond to the place, which is framed under the term “atmosphere”.

Here, I have several different quotes to illustrate the omnipresence of this topic in the informants’ narrative. It seems, that sometimes it is an instant “click” between the subject (informant) and object (house/apartment) creating the emotional bond, which triggers the construction of home.

“(…) the moment I came it, I felt good.” (Julia – 2:14)

“(…) but in that old house, when we came, so such a atmosphere just embraced me, which was kind a familiar for me, the one, which I wanted to enter into (…)”  (George – 3:4)

“(…) basically we did not have much time for the selection, but anyway we have searched for half a year, but still nothing really HEARTY.” (Rosamund – 4:23)

“So, we went there and we immediately knew that`s the one.” (Peter – 5:18)

“Certainly, you care about the impression [of the apartment].” (Eva – 6:30)

This immeasurable moment often deeply involves expressing emotions in the narrative configuration of the situation. The place is immediately able to generate certain emotions, which are essential in the establishing the connection between informants and the place to construct a home.

This again supports the Akhil Gupta’s and James Fergusson’s thesis about the importance of home and homeland in the imagination of people and also support their claim about the constant recreation of place(s) and culture(s) (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 10-13) through the emotional bond towards the places as stressed out by Doreen Massey (Massey 1994: 146-156). These emotions of attachments were not often limited to certain house or apartment, but to the place in the broader sense – certain city is being perceived as home. The evidence from narratives thus supports this conception of places not being created merely by the fact of being in the certain time-space coordinates, but also by certain interactions and processes.
V. Narrative Expression of Ethos and Emotions

I have already touched the theme of morality, which is inherently connected to the genre of narrative, because informants were making evaluative judgements, which were often connected and expressed by emotions. In other words, it is very hard to explain some moral imperatives by referring to them directly and explicitly, explaining them in the rational way or sort of logic. They are often taken-for-granted. Although, the rationalization of moral stances, may be one of the strategies how to legitimize them. The successful accomplishment of certain moral code is thus represented by narrating certain emotions. This is very closely related to the Arlie Russel Hochschild’s concept of the feeling rules (Hochschild 1975: 289). Certain cultural values are regarded as morally right and through the cultural prescriptions and typification of actions in specific situations certain states of mind are discursively reconstructed as concrete emotions. Emotions thus become one of the ways how to effectively express informants’ stances and opinions, while they are able to maintain the role of “good narrator”. One, who can both tell a meaningful story and who is morally right. On the other side, emotions did not work as a pure explanator of the ethos in informants narratives, e.g. “We are scared of having the mortgage, thus we think is bad,” but rather accompany the moral accounts in a illustrative way to make them more significant.

Another important feature in the stories, which enabled expression of moral commitments or judgements were certain tropes, which could informants relate, criticize or deny or in some other way use in their stories. Some of them were already mentioned: mortgage, loans or credit, nature, garden; and others were also used: role of expert, unrealized housing choices, family house, reconstruction of house/apartment (see the table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trope</th>
<th>Ethos</th>
<th>Expressed emotions</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage</td>
<td>Aversion to credit</td>
<td>Commitment, obligation – fear, concern Rich metaphors (&quot;rope on the neck&quot;, &quot;Sword of Damocles&quot;, &quot;commitment&quot;)</td>
<td>External advices being used – mostly from the informal social network (&quot;friend of friend&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loans or credit</td>
<td>Aversion to credit</td>
<td>Fear from the loan and from the inability to repay it.</td>
<td>Important is the to lower the loan towards the value of house or apartment: family support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Connection of tropes with certain ethos, emotions and evaluations

Two central moral themes, which were most often referred to, were analytically coded under subcategories Attitude towards consumption (in general, housing and money) and Morally correct identity construction. These two are connected through most cited moral reference, which was the Aversion to credit and are also connected via the category Management of housing finance. Other fields of moral evaluation are thematized in ethos: Freedom – certainty is not necessary, Stance towards the everyday reality and Right to good housing as depicted in the scheme 1.
When talking about the consumption either in general, or in particular about the consumption of space (housing), money and time, most prevailing narrative-ly expressed accounts were connected to the issue of frugality, modesty and thrift and aversion to loans, credit and debt. The theme of aversion to debts was most strikingly present and was rather ambivalent in nature. Even though some of the informants reflected, that in strictly rational sense it would be favourable for them to use loans to finance their consumption of housing, they try to avoid it as much as possible.

The extensive reconstruction of Mary and her family’s house was probably financially challenging, yet the approach was quite strict regarding the usage of loans. It seemed, that probably as important as the final goal (having the house reconstructed) was the also the fact not being indebted:

“When we have some credit, we always think how to pay it off as soon as possible, even from the point of view of economist it is not the most efficient strategy, because of course the debt is less expensive, than one’s own resources.” (Mary – 1:68)

Here is necessary to mention the essential role of the mortgage trope. Mortgage was likely to trigger fear in the informants and they tried to avoid having huge payments of the mortgage (but sometimes did not succeed). They developed several strategies, which share in common the diversification of the portfolio of loans (not having one huge loan, but smaller ones). First strategy was using the advice from expert, who is often in quasi-friendly relationship to informants. Second and the most common was the financial help from parents in order to reduce the value of mortgage. Interestingly enough this help from parents subverts the ultimate goal, which is to get one’s own place to live and also that is the manifestation of independence and capability (Peebles 2010: 230).

Another dimension of ambivalence of this loan and credit aversion is the fact that as informants tried to use the loans as little as possible, for the reason of getting the house or apartment (and thus home), credit was perfectly justifiable. They usually constructed symbolic boundaries between them as good creditors (using loan for housing) and the bad creditors (making debts for their overconsumption of material goods). The moral dimension of debt (ibid.: 232-233) is thus revealed in the informants’ accounts.

Jan lives with his wife and children and they have quite high proportion of mortgage towards the value of house, thus high payments. He runs a little IT company, where we also met and had a chat.

“Using the mortgage and housing loans is good, because you invest this money into your family. Using loans and credit to supply your consumption is wrong and despicable.” (Jan – 9:45)

He provided me not just with his experience and with the important moral distinction of good and bad debt, but also with beautiful criterion how one can figure out, that the Financial crises is on or over. He and his family lives in the tall panel-house almost in the last floor and have decent view on the Prague cityscape. During the New-Years Eve the people are very much into the fireworks. In 2007 it was madness, hours of lights and explosions. The next year to much less extent and in 2009 almost nothing. Now it seems to coming back to “normal”.

In Jan’s and other informants’ approach we may see, that the two main ethos are interconnected. Narrative performance of good, reasonable and capable creditor is essential in the performance and maintenance of morally correct identity. This face maintenance is achieved using and mixing the “rational” and “irrational” arguments, which is perfectly fine for the informants, because they do not understand the rationality as is usual in the economics discourse. What is being rational for them draws the rationality from the ethos and emotions related to places, objects and people.

Morally Correct Identity Construction

From the issue of frugality and thrift, which were in some narratives also strongly connected, not just to the loans/credit problem, but also to the rejection of

Scheme 1: Visualization of Ethos’ sub-categories
overconsumption of material goods and highly praised value of time we get to
the second frequent ethos – Morally correct identity construction. This subcate-
gory involves such narratives performances, which leads to actualization of cer-
tain ethos in order to construct the morally correct identity from the standpoint
of the narrator and supposedly also from the standpoints of the listener(s). It is
indeed connected to the previous category, because it partially relies on the same
value stances.

It seems that this theme is the most central one. Presence of certain figures in
narratives suggest, that for informants to be a good parents, capable finding nice
house or apartment in the good location, close to nature means far more, than just
the way how to acquire and maintain proper and correct face through performing
certain role of parent.

Who is according to my informants “good person” and thus more or less implicitly
them? As already mentioned, it is the one, who can: a) make a decision, that
results in acquiring a “good debt” and being able to repay it;

Julia has not been mentioned as my informant yet. She lives with her husband,
who works in IT and two children. Currently she is on the maternal leave and thus
the family depends on the husband᾽s salary, which is reasonably high. Anyway
they do not want to be indebted:

“And now, it is almost completed, we are not indebted at all. Last December,
November we paid off 95% of it. (…) Well, we had quite large capital at the
beginning. Thank to our savings and our parents gave us some funds and for
the rest we took a three years mortgage. We are thrifty.” (Julia – 2:73)

Rosamund is even more in the position, when her husband currently has a high
salary, but still the spectre of unwise debt haunts the story:

“Yeah, even though my husband makes a decent money, we did not want to
get unreasonably over indebted.” (Rosamund – 4:49)

who is b) hardworking, especially when it comes to searching for a new hous-
ing opportunities or taking care for the reconstruction:

“(…) and then we had start to build a house here and my husband did a lot,
I had helped somehow, we did quite a lot of thing in do-it-yourself style,
because my husband is skilled in this.” (Susan – 7:3)

c) who is independent and take care of not just him or herself, but whole fami-
ly (especially in times of crisis) either in the job or housing issues. All these three
are multiplied by the fact, that they have to be fulfilled in order to maintain the fami-
ly:

“(…) so when we planned to have a family, we have also started to plan this
huge reconstruction.” (Mary – 1:9)
significant role especially in the stage of final decision making (Levy, Murphy and Lee 2008: 284-265), this idea has been confirmed also in the accounts of my informants, when certain feeling of atmosphere related to the concrete place was actually important factor in the decision making process. The idea, that emotions are experienced (formulated and articulated) not thanks to the psychological essential states of mind, but thanks to the discourses, which enables people to understand "what is going on" (i.e. what is being felt by them) is more closer to my approach and interest in the language tools, which enables people to socially construct their homes.

Another connection between the accounts of my informants and my approach and the findings suggested by Christie, Smith and Munro (2008: 2302-2309) is that the certain emotions like fear and love have special place in the certain emotional discourses. Thus through people’s own self-regulation by feeling management and the will to retain a face (Goffman 1982) are both influencing the market and have significance for people themselves to be able to construct identity and ontological (in)security (Christie, Smith and Munro 2008: 2310). Also in the narratives of my informants the expression of pressure from not matching the housing ideal, (in)security in the certain localities or stress with the process of searching for a house and dealing with reconstruction (all of them expression of “fear emotional discourse”) is crucial in their management of certain identity construction. Emotions are thus having impact both on the practical actions (decision making) and on the symbolic process of identity communication and thus construction.

VI. Success, Responsibility and Adulthood

All of mentioned practices in the morally correct identity construction are components in the grand story of success of the individual (and family), which seems to be the meta-narrative, the reason d’être, the current under the river surface. The ability of acquiring and maintaining certain house or apartment turning it in the home even in the times, when things are uncertain or some difficulties approach (problems with financial repayments, divorce) tells an ultimate story of your life success and for young families with children this kind of success might be even more important than success in jobs career or other fields.

This story employs certain ethos and moral evaluation. These are illustrated by narrators expressing certain emotions. These emotions as Andrew Sayer suggest, serves as certain cultural tools with the ability to distinguish between “good” and “bad”; “favourable” and “unfavourable”. This seems to be inseparably connected to the certain emotions, such as fear, pride, guilt and shame, which are being drawn in the basis of evaluative aspect of these normativity constructing emotions (Sayer 2005: 947-953).

The story of being independent, responsible and capable tells a story of success on the level of everyday experience (ritual of leaving the old family and creating a new one) and on the extraordinary, macro-structural historical basis. Being capable to deal with the complex system of housing, which requires certain abilities, demonstrates that you are able to live a life in the context of complex and ever-changing world. By demonstrating independence, responsibility and capability one may perform the certainty, which is materialized in the home. What does it mean from the perspective of post-socialist country? These findings suggest that in the post-socialist condition, we have already through certain performances on the housing market acquired the basic capitalist values, which are represented by those three attributes.

VII. Conclusion

Providing the answer for my research question What kind of “language tools” (tropes, themes and figures) informants use in their narratives when speaking about the experience of social construction of home? I firstly present the summary of the partial findings from the narratives and then I interpreted them in the broader historical and social context.

Thematically the partial findings may be divided into two realms: narratives of homes and community and the expressions of emotions and ethos, which are based on its importance and recurrence in the narrative accounts. Being in detail described in the findings section, I present here the table with the summary of them in table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Narratives of Home and Community</th>
<th>1.1. Importance of accessibility of certain places for the good home: nature, work, garden etc. All these are mostly related and justified as being the children’s need. The &quot;children factor&quot; seems to be very significant for the narrators.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Symbolic boundaries related to certain practices and aesthetics is being employed to explain the choice for certain location of home. The figure of the &quot;unrealized housing choice&quot; is widely used in the narratives to illustrate the complexity of the searching process</td>
<td>1.3. The final decisions in the housing search process were often made not only with respect to the reasons related to the accessibility and the issue identity issues, but were also rooted in the emotional dimension and included the usage of informal social networks. This means that certain houses or apartments were chosen mostly because of their atmosphere.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Narrative expressions of the emotions and ethos

2.1. The stances of modesty and thrift were mostly expressed in relation to the financial issues such as loans, credit and mortgage were expressed the stances. The narrators put emphasis on the ability of debt repayment. The differentiation between a “good debt” (like an investment = for the family) and a “bad debt” (only for material consumption) was made.

2.2. Morally correct identity is presented mostly in relation to the issues of a) ability to repay the debt(s) b) be hardworking, especially in connection of the managing the housing search or/and the reconstruction of estate c) being independent and can take care of the whole family.

Table 3: Summary of partial findings

What can be said, bearing in mind my informants’ accounts, about the contribution to our knowledge of everyday life, issues of home, housing market and identity construction? Firstly, the housing choices employ far more issues, dimensions and factors than we would presuppose according to a certain conceptual decision making schemes (Wong 2002). The choices are being made on the basis of what would be termed like irrational behaviour under the terms of mainstream economics. But they are rather strongly rational for the regular, lay actors. This kind of rationality may be driven by emotions. The feelings of bond towards certain places and of commitment towards children make just perfect sense for the informants. Thus the idea, that places are being constantly re-created (Massey 1994) seems to have a lot in common with the emotions and their management. Also the connotations and co-occurrence of narratively expressed emotions and certain subjects or objects – such as house – locality – “children’s needs” suggest, that certain emotional discourses (Christie, Smith and Munro 2008: 2301) exist. The discursive expression of emotions is means of certain “rules” prescribed as “love” or “affection” being connected to the e.g. home – children – safety – garden/nature. As I showed in the theoretical section, emotions also influence the (self)respect of the subjects, so they mostly influence the decision making process. In other words, being good parent (i.e. one expressing love and responsibility) towards the children means to be able to secure for them a place with certain features (access for nature for example).

Secondly, the extraordinary decisions and everyday practices have been usually described in terms of some moral stance. Those are also very much rooted and connected to the (expressed) emotions, but not only to those. As Andrew Sayer suggests, emotions are important part of conducting moral evaluations. Fear (arising from uncertainty), pride (on the fact, that he/she is able to secure the home in the times of uncertainty) or guilt (towards the generalized society of overconsumption) are being employed to draw certain symbolic boundaries on the basis of evaluative aspect of these normativity constructing emotions (Sayer 2005: 947-953). Those symbolic boundaries draw certain line between those who are good (often people themselves) and bad (some of the others). To construct successfully the symbolic boundary, which may be expressed in the narrative (and thus being introduced by the narrator with the assumption being culturally understandable), requires the ability to draw its meaning from certain culturally and historically significant symbolic references. In other words, when my informants speak about the debt with the aversion, they presuppose, that their speech and stance would be understandable for me (and also for generalized others). Their stances might be either taken-for-granted or explicitly reflected. In order to construct the intelligibility and perform persuasiveness of their accounts, they refer to and use certain cultural tools to draw on what Ossowska calls bourgeois morality, which relies on the ethos of thrift, responsibility and family values (Ossowska 2012). The emphasis on the category of normality being expressed by the narrator is not accidental. Those specific values and qualities seem to have enormous relevance for the identity construction and also for belonging to certain social group, which is also connected to certain materialities – such as family house (Fehervary 2011: 20-21). In other words, expressing modesty (with the reference e.g. on the values inherited in the family or through global citizenship), responsibility towards children influence very much the decisions of the informants.

Scheme 3: Scheme of the main findings
This leads us to the third and final general finding. What becomes essential in the narratives of social construction of home (with the accent on emotions and ethos) is the ability of being independent, capable and responsible person. This does not just help perform normality through moral correctness, but also serves to ensure and by the success in ensuring the security and certainty for your family. The security is achieved by the ownership of house or flat, which stand as rock in the ever changing world. It may be the experience of the transformation from socialist to post-socialist/capitalism, which make the middle-class people so keen to have the security and certainty represented in their homes.

Relating these accounts of success to the wider historic and structural context i.e. to the conditions of living the post-socialist cultural milieu, we may interpret their significance as representation of similarity of current post-socialist middle-class people to the middle-class in the “classical capitalism western society”. Success being represented by independence, responsibility and capability is typical to capitalist-individualist values. However, the question for further research, lie in the issues of housing and home. Even though we may assume the importance of housing as cultural tool to perform the success of individual (and family of individual) we may be cautious to put the equation mark between the ways of how the context of housing is used in the “western” and post-socialist contexts. In the context of post-socialist society the overall success of individual is represented both by the material success itself (acquiring home has certain financial costs) and by the ability of being able to endure material/financial losses in order to ensure and by the success in ensuring the security and certainty for your family. The security is achieved by the ownership of house or flat, which stand as rock in the ever changing world. It may be the experience of the transformation from socialism to post-socialism/capitalism, which make the middle-class people so keen to have the security and certainty represented in their homes.

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Housing and Moralities: Construction of Home and Middle-Class Identity in Post-Socialist Context

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