

External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of Jakub Mazanec
"Cold War Technopolitics: Czechoslovak Hydroexpertise in Africa"
Submitted in 2023 at the Faculty of Arts, Institute of World History

I. Brief summary of the dissertation

The dissertation explores Czechoslovakia as an actor in hydro engineering and hydropolitics during the Cold War. The three empirical case studies focus on Africa (Ghana, Egypt, Ethiopia). The author argues that the country started to export dam expertise after 1948 as an attempt to disseminate socialism, using prewar expertise for Cold War technopolitics. However, due to Soviet interference and often complicated cooperation with African partners, who not always embraced political standpoints, Czechoslovakia soon became more pragmatic and used dam-building as a "money machine" to generate foreign exchange.

II. Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation

The dissertation is convincing. It uses a global history approach, vast archival sources, and relevant historiographical scholarship to advance our understanding of the history of global dam-building by examining a "smaller/medium actor" (p. 23). Neither being from the Global North nor a real big player like the Soviet Union, the thesis discusses a previously unknown case study of technology export during the Cold War and brings more complexity to the global history of the proliferation of dams. Three case studies on Ghana, Egypt, and Ethiopia (chapters 2-4) are well chosen and highlight different aspects of the story. A good context chapter offers a solid overview, and the last chapter explores the daily life of Czech hydro experts during their tenure abroad. The text is well-written. Some problems in the footnotes do not affect the overall good impression of the text.

III. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects

1. Structure of the argument

It is an exemplary well-structured and plausible text with clear research questions and an convincing argument (maybe questions and argument could appear a little earlier than on p. 32). The argument is presented very explicitly and reappears in the empirical chapters. Small conclusions after every chapter contribute to the coherence of the text. Due to its clarity and logic structure, the dissertation aims at achieving its objective successfully. It is also a strong point that the author looks at historical change, a task for which the structure and selection of the case studies are very suitable.

2. Formal aspects of the dissertation

Positive features are the presentation and formatting of the dissertation and the well-written English text. I could only find a handful of spelling mistakes (p. 38 Snadrine > Sandrine, p. 196 Gleijeseses > Gleijeses). Even though the text is written in British English, the author sometimes uses American English (p. 17 modernization, p. 16 civilizing). But these are just

minor typos.

The footnotes, on the other side, present some problems and should be revised before publishing. The main problem is that the syllable “ti” is replaced all over by “F” and “+” and the syllable “af” by the letter “T”. It seems to be a technical problem, as if by mistake someone (or the computer) had replaced all these syllables.

Other problems in the footnotes include:

- 1) “Ibidem” is not consequently used (for example footnotes 189-190 and 202-203).
- 2) Apparently, page numbers for quotations in chapter 4 are missing (footnotes 313, 321, 324, 326, 327).
- 3) Smaller mistakes: “Ibid.” instead of “Ibidem” (footnote 297), “pp. 36-17” (footnote 81), publisher instead of place of publication indicated (footnote 64). In the bibliography, the author sometimes writes “p.” instead of “pp.”, “issue” instead of “nr.”, and “vol.” instead of “Vol.”.

3. *Use of sources and/or material*

In general, the dissertation makes adequate use of both primary sources and research literature and provides proper references. The engagement with scholarship is well balanced and critical (for instance the critique of Sara Pritchard’s hydro-imperialism on p. 17). The used archival material is comprehensive and stems from different countries, although no Egyptian and Ethiopian archives were used. The interpretation of the primary sources is good.

I have found only one text passage without proper references: the CVs of the engineers Bulek, Sima and Hofmann (incl. quotation) on pages 153-155 are lacking references.

The bibliography is quite complete. However, two titles are missing:

Bamba, Abou B. ‘Triangulating a Modernization Experiment: The United States, France and the Making of the Kossou Project in Central Ivory Coast’. *Journal of Modern European History* 8, no. 1 (2010): 66–84.

Isaacman, Allen F., and Barbara S. Isaacman. *Dams, Displacement, and the Delusion of Development: Cahora Bassa and Its Legacies in Mozambique, 1965–2007*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013.

If the author reads German (which I do not know), there are two more relevant titles (alternatively, there might be articles in English written by these authors):

Blocher, Ewald. *Der Wasserbau-Staat: die Transformation des Nils und das moderne Ägypten 1882–1971*. Paderborn: Schöningh, 2016.

Štanžel, Arnošt. *Wasserträume und Wasserräume im Staatssozialismus: ein umwelthistorischer Vergleich anhand der tschechoslowakischen und rumänischen*

Wasserwirtschaft 1948–1989. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017.

A last title is just a recommendation. It is not on Africa, but could be of use:

Chastain, Andra B., and Timothy W. Lorek (eds.), *Itineraries of Expertise: Science, Technology, and the Environment in Latin America's Long Cold War*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020.

4. *Personal contribution to the subject*

Mazanec's PhD thesis is without doubt an original and important contribution to the field of dam history. He uses existing scholarship, global history, the concept of hydropolitics, and primary sources from Czechoslovakia, Ghana, the United States, the Netherlands, and Great Britain to explore for the first time the African endeavours of an understudied dam player from the East bloc. It brings complexity into dam history by redirecting the focus away from the United States and the Soviet Union to a medium actor, underscoring the polycentrism of the production and transfer of technology. Also, the analysis of historical change is very important, showing how idealist political goals soon made way for "capitalist" interests, even in socialist countries.

IV. **Questions for the author**

There are some further questions that could help to expand the text a bit and offer a better global contextualization:

How did the Global North perceive the role of Czechoslovakia in dam building during the Cold War?

What can be said about Czechoslovak cooperation with the West in dam building during the Cold War?

Which role did hydropolitics play for Czechoslovak activities in the global south in general, and which role had Czechoslovakia globally compared to other dam players? Was it an exceptional role, or were there other countries with a similar trajectory?

Finally, I would conclude with a question regarding the theoretical approach of the dissertation: Could you expand on the use of global history for your dissertation, also in relation to political concerns of global history such as criticism of Eurocentrism?

V. **Conclusion**

I provisionally classify the submitted dissertation as *passed*.