The Fall and Rise of the City of Most: On the Dynamics of Socialist Modernity[1]

Matěj Spurný

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Today, north of Hněvín Hill, sparkles the surface of a lake. Its waters mercifully conceal an extraordinarily dramatic story of post-war Czech history, a story that is both unique in its scope and characteristic of the principles behind it. One of the most valuable historical towns of north Bohemia was wiped off the face of the earth here. Treasures of Gothic and Renaissance architecture, burghers' houses, a monastery, churches, three squares, public buildings, and boulevards, attesting to the wealth that the local elite had accumulated here after the industrial revolution, were demolished, levelled to the ground. Fifteen thousand people lost their homes. The tangle of little streets and old houses was substituted for by a rationally organized town that was built a bit further away, the kind of town about which modern architects and urban planners all over the world dreamt about. It was a town that was supposed to open the way to a more dignified life for its inhabitants.

This is the story of the city of Most, a story set in north Bohemia in the 1960s and 1970s. The reason for destroying old Most (Brüx, in German) was the 'black treasure under the town'. Coal, thanks to which Most became rich and grew, turned out, after the Second World War, in times of the resolute building of an energy base, to be fatal for the old town. Mining was moved from deep pits to the surface, from the outskirts of the town right into its central streets. The problem was that one could have dealt with the coal under the pavement of the historic town in various ways, so the post-war history of Most could have followed other paths. That is why searching for the roots and circumstances of the decisions that determined the post-war story of this town continues and why it remains relevant. Of the tangle of questions, one in particular emerges as the most fundamental: What was the intellectual and social context in which it was possible to justify such a gigantic experiment resulting in the disappearance of one of the most valuable historic towns in the Bohemian Lands? When considering these questions, other questions arise. What was the role played by the former Sudetenland, expulsion, and deracination? Or did the utopia of progress and a more dignified life for everyone play more important roles? Or is it rather a story dictated by ideas which reduce the world to economic indicators? What was

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typical of the Communist discourse and what was rather a general part of the Modernist discourse of the 1960s and 1970s? Can one find similar stories elsewhere in the Eastern bloc and in the West? During the thirty years in which the destruction of the old town and the building of the new one were being considered and then carried out, did the predominant way of people's thinking about their natural environment, about the signs of being civilized, and about everything that belongs to a dignified life change? In this article, I cannot answer all these questions, but when thinking about what happened in Most it is important to bear them in mind.

CLEARING THE TOWN: FROM IDEA TO DECISION

The decision to demolish the town of Most may, in retrospect, be perceived as an example of the highhandedness and omnipotence of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, against whose plans ordinary citizens were helpless. An examination of the primary sources, however, tells a different story. The destruction of the town was not pushed through highhandedly; on the contrary, it smoothly followed on from long-existing notions and models of behaviour. Well into the 1950s, the notion was not being pushed for by the Communist Party, but by the top managers and engineers of the State-owned mining company. It was indeed possible to defend oneself against destruction on a vast scale, and town councillors did indeed seek to defend the town during the most hard-line period of the Communist dictatorship. Despite the great power of the economic and political elite, no actor was omnipotent. This is a story of negotiations, not of totalitarian power.

The knowledge that there was coal under the town already influenced its architectural and urban development from the late nineteenth century onwards, mainly in the gradually diminishing willingness of the inhabitants of Most to invest in their own town. From about the beginning of the twentieth century, rich burghers were building their homes on the slopes of Hněvín outside the original town boundaries, in places that could not be threatened by possible plans to mine local coal. The Zahražany district, which thus emerged, was the only important large-scale investment in the town in the periods shortly before and after the First World War; even in the 1950s, the town as a whole still comprised about ninety per cent of the buildings that had been erected here during the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[2] By the end of the First World War, there was little investment in new building, the renovation and modernization of flats, or in infrastructure and public utilities. With the development of opencast (strip) mining, even before the Second World War, uncertainty was intensified and recollections of individual houses falling into the shafts began to fade when faced with the greater likelihood of the total mining of the coal under the town itself.

The presence of this possibility in the political debate and mainly in the internal plans of the mining enterprises (which were gradually consolidated into Severočeské hnědouhelné doly [North Bohemian Lignite Mines, SHD] was evident immediately after the war. The now strictly Czech society and its politicians were ambivalent

2 Václav Krejčí, Most: Z deníku architekta Václava Krejčího, Most 2008, p. 38.

about Most at that time. It had predominantly been ethnically German, but, already from the late nineteenth century Czechs were settling there. They constituted in particular the lower social strata of the town, and Most, as the place of the largest strike in the history of inter-war Czechoslovakia, became, among other things, a symbol of working-class struggle against oppression and social insecurity.

From the period press, one senses mainly the determination to make Most a living city and the centre of the mining region once again. The Communist daily *Sever* [The North], for example, writes in early 1947: 'Come and look at Most today!' After the author of the article describes the atmosphere of destruction immediately in the wake of the war, he continues with a picture of a town that has now definitely recovered: 'The hustle and bustle of pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists in the street during the day, illuminated signs above shops, restaurants, and cafés, the merry tinkling of full trams, the continuous movement in the arts, entertainment, and sports enterprises of all kinds, that is the mining town of Most today after its resurrection [...].'[3] The festive tone and the theme of resurrection leave no room for doubt about the future existence of the town. In the government materials, however, as early as in November 1945, we find remarks that a 'large part of the town of Most, as well as the villages around it, have been directly earmarked for mining in the course of five to twenty years' and that the town of Most should therefore be considered (from the viewpoint of possibly accommodating north Bohemian miners) only temporary.[4]

More specific proposals and mainly the constant pressure on the 'mining of the coal pillar under Most', in other words, pressure for the demolition of the whole town or the greater part of it in the interests of mining lignite (brown coal), appeared from the SHD as early as in the second half of the 1940s and then mainly in the 1950s — regardless of the two changes of regime and economic system — as part of the endeavour to achieve the unobstructed development of mining, in the interest of the economic rationality of the enterprise and the State.

Until the mid-1950s, the SHD plans for the destruction of old Most or the greater part of it ran into the criticism of the Most Municipal National Committee. The interests of the local administration and communal policy were thus, not only in the period of that years later came to be called the Third Republic (May 1945 to February 1948), but also, indeed mainly, in the 'constructive' [*budovateský*] period of the Czechoslovak Communist Party dictatorship, confronted with the interests of industry, with which it sought to reach a compromise in the form of the destruction of only a lesser, peripheral, part of old Most. These plans, interactions, and conflicts provide a remarkable look into the actual negotiations amongst the key actors in political and economic life in the country in the era of 'Czechoslovak Stalinism'.

By 1949, as part of the Municipal National Committee agenda, representatives of the SHD declared their intention to mine in the centre of the old town. The Municipal

3 'Kousek nedávné historie', Sever, 14 January 1947, p. 3.

4 National Archive Prague (NA), Archiv ÚV KSČ, Osidlovací komise (f.23), a.j. 193, stručné poznámky vládního zmocněnce pro účastníky schůze svolané úřadem předsednictva vlády ohledně osídlovací akce na mostecku a falknovsku, 22.11.1945.

National Committee denied this quite sharply. The dispute came to a head in 1951, when the Most Municipal National Committee turned to the District and the Regional National Committees with a request to decide whether 'coal mining under Most, and therefore the moving of the whole town southward and south-eastward, would take place' or 'whether coal mining would take place only in part of the town, as determined by the "Overall Development Plan of the Town of Most", that is, all the way to Stalinova třída [Stalin Avenue].' The Municipal and the District National Committees came out unequivocally against the SHD plan, the first step of which was to begin opencast mining, which would separate the newly built Podžatecká housing estate from old Most; the second step was to demolish the old town centre. In addition to the 'unforeseeable consequences', which would, according to a letter from the Municipal National Committee to the Regional National Committee, emerge in the health and hygiene of the residents, the whole plan was, according to the Chairman of the Municipal National Committee, also unacceptable in view of the high demand for housing for workers (which the mines needed anyway). If carried out, the SHD plan would thus be an 'absolutely disastrous intervention in the development of the town today and tomorrow'. They therefore added: 'from the viewpoint of both the Municipal National Committee and the urban planners, one could not accept this initiative.' The historic value of the town was even presented as an additional argument: 'this regional centre has historically valuable buildings of various style periods, which today are irreplaceable and in themselves form a characteristic whole of medieval origin.'[5]

The local political authorities in the so-called Stalinist period were able to resist the far more powerful actors such as the State-owned SHD enterprise. The main reason was that old Most still had at its disposal important, even if poor-quality, housing for thousands of miners and other workers. The town had a functioning urban centre with a transportation infrastructure, the necessary services, and facilities for the arts and entertainment.

The managers of the SHD and the whole manager-technocrat lobby began to realize that in order for their efforts to succeed (in other words, to reach the millions of tonnes of lignite under old Most) it would be necessary to present a more thoroughly prepared strategy. That required two steps: first, to offer a comprehensive solution to the problem (in collaboration with urban planners and architects); second, gradually to persuade the central Party bodies in particular about the inevitability and benefits of the whole operation. That meant getting a wide range of influential actors to support the project, from experts in various fields all the way to senior politicians. The development of the Czechoslovak economy, the technological possibilities, and the *Sinnwelt* of the period nevertheless played into the hands of the SHD economists and officials. Ten years later, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, there were no longer any serious obstacles to their ambitions.

This new chapter of the story was preceded by three factors from late 1962, which also preceded — in connection with the clearance of the historic town — the oft-cited government decision about the clearance of old Most and the building of the new

5 Státní okresní archiv Most (SOkA Most), f. ONV II, Inv. č. 858, Ev.j. 317, Budoucí vývoj města Mostu vzhledem k plánovanému těžení uhlí SHD v prostoru Most, Dopis MNV adresovaný plánovacímu referátu KNV Ústí nad Labem, 22.4.1951.

Most.[6] The first factor was the drawing up of plans, at the initiative of the State, for the clearance of old Most, which were compiled as the roughly 200-page 'Clearance Plan for the City of Most' (Likvidační záměr města Mostu).[7] The second was the central Party bodies' debating and approving of the gigantic project 'to move' the city.[8] And the third was the setting up of the Government Commission for the Coordination and Monitoring of the Clearance of Old Most and the Building of New Most.[9] It was hardly possible to thwart these politically serious steps prepared by experts (except in the event of a radical change in the hierarchy of power and economic relations in the region). From the original utopia of coal barons and engineers or an ill-defined alternative for the future, the idea to clear old Most in the interest of mining changed into a real agenda of political and economic planning.

The story could conceivably continue with a detailed description of the stages in which the clearance of the old town took place, how the individual houses were photographed and described in detail and were then blown up, how people moved to new homes, how archaeologists endeavoured to document in the greatest possible detail the historic traces of old Most, and how experts from the State Heritage Institute sought to preserve at least the monuments that could be moved to safety.[10] But in the following discussion we are going to take a different path; our aim is to try to understand the construct of the official justification made in those days and its at least temporary persuasiveness. That is why the milieu that helped to create the nature of the relationship between the inhabitants of old Most and their town, and the *Sinnwelt* of those people who since the nineteenth century held most of the decision-making power regarding changes to that region — from the mine-owners to the architects and urban planners — will interest us more than the organizational details of the clearance of the old town and the building of the new one.[11]

6 Governmental Resolution no. 180, 26. 3. 1964.

7 NA Prague, f. 960 (Ministerstvo paliv III), Inv. č. 430, Sv. 419, Most — likvidační záměr, červen 1963.

8 NA Prague, f. 1261/0/11 (Politické byro ÚV KSČ), A.j. 458, sv. 365, Usnesení 213. schůze politického byra ÚV KSČ ze dne 2. října 1962.

9 NA Prague, f. ÚPV-běžná spisovna (nezprac.), k. 165, sign. 356/1/12, Statut vládní komise pro koordinaci a kontrolu postupu při likvidaci starého Mostu a výstavbu nového Mostu.

10 The destruction of the old city is well documented in pictures as well; see, for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFOwPrpY-Vs&index=2&list=PLB9180F04155B3FFA>.

11 The following perspectives were inspired by the arguments of Eagle Glassheims article about the story of Most (Eagle Glassheim, 'Most, the Town that Moved: Coal, Communists and the 'Gypsy Question' in Post-War Czechoslovakia'), Environment and History 13 (2007): pp 447–476. In many aspects, I try to further elaborate on Glassheims arguments and to deepen his perspective. However, some aspects of this article can be understood as a polemics with Glasheim. Etnicity (esp. the question of Gypsies) doesn't play such a dominant role in my narrative as by Glassheim; in contrary, I try to stress more the paralels between East and West, esp. confined to technocratic thought and urban utopias, and the paradigm shift in the 1970s.

A TOWN IN THE SUDETENLAND

> In the clearance of Zvíkovské Račice [a little village in Vltava River valley, near Zvíkov Castle, south Bohemia — M.S.], which had to give way to the Orlík dam, its inhabitants resisted moving into new family homes which were far better than their previous dwellings. If Chrudim or another town in the interior had been earmarked for clearance, the inhabitant would have defended themselves tooth and nail, even if aware of the futility of their actions. Something like that has not even occurred to the inhabitants of old Most, who in fact await this fate in the coming decade. Indeed, each of them is now looking forward to having a flat with large windows and central heating. If they have any fears at all, then it is only the fear that the public services in New Most might not grow proportionately to the population.
> František Šmahel, 1963[12]

As the then director of the museum in nearby Litvínov, the now highly respected historian František Šmahel (b. 1934), was, already in the early 1960s, expressing surprise at why the plan for the clearance of old Most did not meet with any noticeable resistance from the local population. The main reason, according to him, was that after the Second World War new people had completely taken the place of the original population: In the great population movement after 1945, the age-old relationships that had been formed by human beings during their many years of living in one place were torn asunder [...] It is reasonable to assume that most of the local population still has no relationship with their town, the bond formed from a sense of being part of the architectural landmarks is weak, and ultimately almost no one has any idea about the historic value of these landmarks and their value as monuments.[13]

Šmahel's article was one of the first critical analyses of the problem, pointing out the coming fate of old Most and its historically valuable buildings (which were condemned to annihilation) and defining the idea of the breaking of the bonds between man and the land which had taken place in about a third of the country when, after the Second World War, the original population was dramatically substituted for with a completely new population. This idea, eventually called, among other things, 'Sudeten homelessness' [sudetské bezdomoví],[14] was later considered in greater detail by some Czech and Slovak dissidents in the 1970s and 1980s and especially by Czech and foreign scholars since the Changes of late 1989.

After the Second World War, the former Sudetenland became a laboratory in several respects. In regions affected by the mass expulsion of the original population and the breakneck resettlement of the regions, the revolutionary transformation of the social and economic structures and also of the natural environment, which the dominant current of Czechoslovak Communist-led policy was endeavouring to achieve,

12 František Šmahel, 'Karty na stůl', Kulturní kalendář Mostecka, no. 6/1963, pp. 4–6.

13 Ibid.

14 See Jitka Ortová, 'Sudetské bezdomoví'. In: Matěj Spurný (ed.), Proměny sudetské krajiny, Prague 2006, pp. 188–97.

could not be slowed down or brought into line with traditional institutions like the Church, clubs, and associations like Sokol, which had in those places either completely ceased to exist or were weak. The bourgeois elite in the towns and the families that had been farming for centuries in the countryside were no longer there. The relationships between the land and the people, as well as the relationships amongst people themselves, which would have acted as a catalyst to the transformation of social identity and dampened its impact on the natural environment, were missing. That is why the 'borderlands' (a term that reflects the Czech view of the Sudetenland) were meant, in the eyes of the new regime, to become the true gem of the new republic that was being built, the first land where this great work would probably be achieved.

The new appearance of the Czech borderlands was shaped by distaste for all the survivals of the old German world. An inevitable result of such an attitude was the alienation of the new inhabitants from the cultural landscape, an essential part of which was not only the material traces of the past (ranging from Church monuments to old stone walls), but also people making an effort to 'read' these traces and able to do so. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to describe the new relationship between the environment and its inhabitants, particularly in the industrial areas, as only a vacuum and alienation. How this relationship was formed, particularly in areas with a strong Czech-speaking minority and a mining or working-class tradition, like the Most region, has been aptly explained by the Canadian historian Eagle Glassheim: by 'rejecting romantic/pastoral German conceptions of *Heimat*, postwar Czechs sought to create materialist regional identities in north Bohemia that emphasized labor, productivity, and industrial modernity [...].'[15] This was determined by the ethos of the socialist dictatorship as such, but also by the successes and failures accompanying the settlement of the individual border regions and the renewal of the function of sectors of the economy. Unlike the more remote mountain areas, it was the industrial towns of the north of the country which succeeded in being resettled according to plan. After all, there was something here to follow on from. Partly because of the large strikes that had taken place here in the early 1930s, Most itself, more than any other place in Czechoslovakia, symbolized, also for the linguistically Czech population, indeed particularly for them, the history of capitalist exploitation and the proletarian miners' dramatic struggle against poverty and unemployment.

The renewal and further development of industry in the borderlands, particularly heavy industry, provided evidence of the success. Tens of thousands of ethnic Germans were exempted from the expulsions and were left to work in industry. Unlike independent farmers, the urban settlers — engineers and labourers — from the interior were not bound to home. The high mobility of the work force, the influx of new workers from the countryside into the industrial centres, and the large-scale

15 Eagle Glassheim, 'Ethnic Cleansing, Communism, and Environmental Devastation in Czechoslovakia's Borderlands, 1945–1989', The Journal of Modern History 78 (March 2006), pp. 65–92; accessible online at <http://cozpserver1n2.jinonice.cuni.cz/vcsewiki/images/9/92/Ethnic_cleansing,_Communism_%26_Environmental_Devastation.pdf>

State investment in industry and housing soon created advantageous conditions for the lives of the hundreds of thousands of people who had come to settle in the border towns. The emphasis solely on industrial identity also overshadowed pre-modern and spiritual bonds between people and the land they lived in. The land became purely a source of raw material, an opportunity for even more massive and efficient exploitation, a quantity measurable by precise economic calculations.

The history of the town of Most was created by Czechs and Germans. By the end of the seventeenth century, Most was a linguistically German town — the linguistically Czech influence did not begin to regain strength until the development of coal mining, when it became necessary to bring in workers from more remote areas as well. This trend at first transformed the ethnic structure of the countryside rather than of the town, which remained mostly German.[16] Although the situation quickly changed in the inter-war period, the local bourgeoisie (which included property owners) mostly comprised Germans until the end of the Second World War. Consequently, social divisions and conflicts to some extent corresponded with the ethnic structure.

After May 1945, only a few hundred Germans remained in the town, most of whom were the badly needed miners and specialists with their families, together with a minority of original Czech inhabitants. From the interior of the country and from Slovakia came people mainly without university or even secondary-school education; they were mostly looking for manual work, often just short term. In the first fifteen years after the war, the population of Most grew quickly from 25,000 to 45,000 people; in reality, however, not 20,000, but almost 35,000 people gradually moved to Most at this time; in other words, in this short period more than 15,000 people also left Most (again).[17] For many people, Most became a city of temporary residence, a mere stopover in their lives, a place whose future was not really of any interest to them.

The almost complete change in the population and the extinction of the German identity of the town entailed not only the disruption of relations between people and their milieu, but also a marked weakening of religious life. Lively places of spiritual meeting became somehow superfluous buildings that could at best be perceived as historic architectural monuments. Although this development was accelerated by the establishment of the Communist dictatorship beginning in February 1948, the contrast between Most and towns of a similar size in south Bohemia and south and east Moravia (areas where settlement had not been disrupted) points to deeper causes of the almost total secularization, which in north Bohemia is linked not only with rapid industrialization but also, indeed mainly, with the expulsion of the original population and the subsequent social structure and cultural identity of the new settlers.

16 In 1880, Most had 10,136 inhabitants, of which 1,026 were Czech; in 1910, its population was 25,577, of which 3,965 people were Czech, and 21,267 were German. Karel Kuča, Města a městečka v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku, Pt 4, Prague 2000, p. 164.

17 For more on the changes in the structure of the population from 1945 to 1980, see Zdena Fröhlichová, 'Socialistické Mostecko' I–III, typescript, 1975, pp. 248–51. The typescript is deposited in the library of the Most county museum [Oblastní muzeum Most].

Even though, for example, Glassheim's emphasis on industrial identity, as well as the linguistically mixed character of the Most region between the wars, or the experienced legacy of the Most-region strikes, which was used in propaganda, somewhat revises the idea of homelessness (that is, the total absence of identification with a place), it is also clear that even these important factors do not cast doubt on the idea of the deterioration or marked weakening of the ability to perceive the land as a set of important references to the history of the community that inhabits it.

THE LANDSCAPE AND PRODUCTION

The dynamics of technological progress, from which stemmed the demand for mineral raw materials, mining, consumption, expectations of further progress, innovation, and then further increased demand, was, by the first half of the twentieth century, no longer depleting only natural resources and was no longer merely an abstract threat to life in the distant future. In this period, the self-perpetuating cycle of mining, production, and consumption also began to destroy what people had made, including, ultimately, whole towns. Civilization began to devour itself.

Coal mining played a key role in this historical process. The industrial revolution, from the steam engine to electrification, is unimaginable without coal. This makes the story of Most special in its scale, yet typical of the thinking behind the project and the dynamics of the development of the modern world. It is useful to look at the dynamics in essentially one of two ways: as testimony about the fantastic developments and potential of human civilization or as a story of humankind enslaved by a system that human beings themselves had set in motion and in whose increasingly greater power every member of society had a share. Whichever it was, we would be hard pressed to find an example of the interaction between coal mining, society, and human habit in a form as concentrated as in the Most region during the twentieth century. The history of the coal-related development, construction, and wealth-creation are interwoven here with the history of endangerment and destruction.

Coal mining began in the Most region in the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century. In the late 1850s, local businessmen opened the first large mines. After the completion of the railway line in the foothills of the Ore Mountains (Krušné hory, in Czech; Erzgebirge, in German), the demand for coal from the Most region began to skyrocket, because it had now become easily accessible throughout the Bohemian Lands and other parts of Cisleithania. At the end of the nineteenth century, in addition to underground mines, the first opencast mines were established in the area between the town of Most and the town of Duchcov (Dux, in German). These mines continued to grow during the First World War, when Most became an important centre of the war economy.

The demand for coal as a basic raw material of modern industry increased at certain periods (particularly wartime) more quickly than others, but essentially it grew continuously. How much coal a company could mine thus depended only on technological progress and a sufficient supply of labour. During the first half of the twentieth century the prospects for opencast mines began to appear to be good —

more efficient and far less risky both for miners and for the mining companies. In the foothills of the Ore Mountains, already during the Second World War, more coal was mined in big pits than underground.

Although the overall quantity of mined coal temporarily decreased from 20 million to 11 million tonnes after the war, and the privately owned mining companies were nationalized, the basic trend was not at all affected. Indeed, after the merger of the mining companies into the SHD, in March 1946,[18] mining was gradually reorganized and operations were made considerably more efficient. At the same time as elsewhere throughout Europe, in connection with the post-war renewal and development of heavy industry, the demand for coal began to increase sharply. In this period, coal mining played the central economic and also political role, and not only in the socialist dictatorships.

In the initial post-war thinking about the future of lignite mining under the Ore Mountains, an increase of as much as 25 million tonnes per year was expected. This target, however, was surpassed already in 1954, and in the next thirty years, the annual amount of coal mined increased threefold, to just under 75 million tonnes in 1984.[19] Afterwards, a bit later and more slowly than in the countries of western Europe, mining here gradually began to decrease.

The period of the preparation of the clearance of Most and its subsequent carrying out is therefore also the period of the most rapid increase in lignite mining ever — and also the period of the sharpest increase in the proportion of coal mined from large pits. The possibility of further expanding the large pits thus, by the second half of the 1950s, became the priority of the Czechoslovak economy and the key topic of Czechoslovak policy.

In the Most region, from the 1870s to the 1920s, the previously compact cultural landscape — with its fields separated by balks, roads lined with trees, together with wells, small Church buildings, conciliation crosses, and other little monuments — was continuously disappearing. The local landscape was gradually reduced to being a store of raw materials essential for the further development of civilization. Until the end of the war in 1945, the underground and surface mines had avoided the larger municipalities, but the people here were accustomed to being moved about continuously and living in temporary new colonies, which were then cleared in the interest of mining. After 1900, particularly in connection with opencast coal mining in the Most region, small villages were repeatedly cleared (or 'moved') — in 1905, Ledvice in the Duchcov region, Liptice near Most, and, by the First World War, also in the village of Zabrušany, whose church was dismantled and then reassembled one kilometre from its original location.[20] Other villages followed. After 1940, just after the start of the German occupation, when the transition to a more efficient form of obtaining lignite — namely, big open pits — required the clearance of large villages and, later, even towns (for example, Ervěnice, in 1958, and eventually also old Most), this meant a change only in quantity. From the example of the Most region, we can see how the appearance of

18 Ibid., p. 63.

19 Václav Valášek and Lubomír Chytka, Velká „kronika" o hnědém uhlí, Pilsen 2009, p. 101.

20 Ibid., p. 170.

society and the milieu which people lived in and helped to form (with no opportunity to resist) was gradually subordinated to the interests of increasingly depersonalized economic power and the apparently indisputable needs of progress. As part of the established direction of the development of modern society, these transformations, and the cost to society and the land, seemed irreversible, as if no alternative existed.

The State could balance out and dampen the social contradictions (rather unsuccessfully until the Second World War, but with increasing success afterwards). The mining companies and later also the State could partly mend the increasingly bigger scars in the landscape. And the demolished settlements could be substituted for with new building construction. But what was impossible (and to a considerable extent still is) was to cast doubt on the causes of these phenomena or even to remove them. The increasing scale of coal mining seemed to be an essential link in the chain of relations, which ultimately ensured a rising standard of living for the population — the cornerstone of the legitimacy of both liberal capitalism and State socialism. That is why the continuation of mining remained an unquestionable constant.

Paradoxically, it was not in the period of one-sided emphasis on heavy industry (during the Stalinist period of State socialism in Czechoslovakia), but in the next period, that purely technocratic and economic argumentation became the dominant discourse, not only amongst the managers of the State owned and operated enterprises, but also amongst the senior politicians. The revolutionary transformation of society and the ideal of a dignified life for everyone seemed to have given way to more palpable goals — profit, effectiveness, and economy. This is how one may reasonably describe the ideas behind the 'Clearance Plan for the City of Most', whose central argument (justifying the gigantic project for the demolition of the historic town, the moving out of its inhabitants, the mining, and the building of the new town) consists in an 'assessment of the economic effectiveness of the plan'. In this plan, it states that although the costs for the actual clearance of old Most exceeded two billion Kčs (Czechoslovak crowns), the financial profit from the coal mined from under the town would exceed four billion — and the profit of the operation would therefore be 2,213,346,161 Kčs. This positive balance was, together with the necessity of acquiring a nearby discharge area, recycled as the key justification for the whole project in many other documents from the first half of the 1960s. The fact that the calculations did not include the building of the new town was, however, not viewed as a problem; old Most, it was argued in the Clearance Plan, was 'going to seed, so its renovation would cost more than the completion of the new building'. Moreover, even if these expenses were taken into account, it was argued, assets of about one billion Kčs would still remain.[21] 'The expenses for the demolition of the buildings in old Most, the purchase of real estate from private owners, the moving of the population, the relocation of cemeteries, and so forth' were estimated 'in the calculation of operating costs of the Most pit mine at an average sum of 0.50 Kčs per tonne of coal'.[22]

21 NA Prague, f. 960 (Ministerstvo paliv III), Inv.č. 430, Sv. 419, Most — likvidační záměr, červen 1963.

22 NA Prague, 1261/0/4, Předsednictvo ÚV KSČ 1962–1966, sl. 110, Zpráva o efektivnosti likvidace starého Mostu, 1965.

In the dozens of internal documents, but also in some publications, the argumentation for the clearance of the historic town was based almost solely on numbers. What is of central importance is the following argument, which recurs in several variations: 'The necessary clearance of old Most as a whole is of a special nature compared to the clearance of other towns; elsewhere, clearance entails only costs, but the clearance of old Most will provide the Czechoslovak economy with high-quality lignite worth more than four billion Kčs.'[23]

To open the 'mining area under Most' was, from this point of view, quite necessary, and every other proposed solution was, by contrast, an economic gamble. The inexorable logic of numbers, investment, and profit had almost nothing to do with Communist ideology. It did, however, have much to with modern thinking based on purpose-made rationality and the pre-eminence of technological progress linked with economic growth. The restructuring of the land in the interest of progress, together with the absolute subordination of the land to economic interests, was no longer merely one of several possibilities; it was the one and only rational route, which promised profit for every member of society.

CITY OF THE SUN

> 'Henceforth, residential districts must occupy the best locations within the urban space, using the topography to advantage, taking the climate into account, and having the best exposure to sunshine with accessible verdant areas at their disposal.'
> Le Corbusier, 'The Athens Charter', 1933[24]

> 'Why not go to Most, when today's part of the new town is surrounded by woods, woven through with orchards, gardens, and parks, the likes of which the residents of a big city can only dream of [...]! We no longer look with sympathetic sadness at houses on their last legs. Everyone and everything has to go into retirement one day. And this old revolutionary town, forever written into the history of the struggles, must make way for new life, progress, and green.'
> *Květy* [a woman's weekly], 1958[25]

The pressure for increased coal mining, together with the arguments that accompanied it in the form of 'incontestable' numbers, constituted the decisive discourse of the people in power, from the local administration to the SHD mining engineers and managers, all the way to the people at the government ministries of industry and of fuel and energy in Prague, who took the real decisions about the fate of Most. What

23 Ibid.

24 Le Corbusier, 'The Athens Charter', <http://microrayon.wikispaces.com/The+Athens+Charter>; see also Thilo Hilpert, Le Corbusiers 'Charta von Athen': Texte und Dokumente, Braunschweig 1984, p. 131.

25 Jura Sosnar, 'Ustup černé město městu zelenému', Květy, 30 October 1958, p. 8.

was of paramount importance from their point of view, however, was to persuade the public both in the town and throughout the country of the beneficial effects of the whole project. Despite the particularly weak environmental and historical consciousness in the borderlands, and despite the widespread consensus on the necessity of mining more and producing more, the clearance of the historic town was not received positively, especially in the town, at least until the second half of the 1950s. Clearance meant at the very least a radical intervention in everyday life, the temporary loss of home (even though a home that had only recently been adopted). The associated discomfort had to be compensated for with the prospect of better times, not only in the abstract numbers of the economic benefits of the whole project, but also in an actual offer of a better life for those who as result of the clearance would be losing their home. The new Most, praised in the quotation that opens this section of my article, clearly became the vanishing point of this promised picture — a city of the future, a city of social justice, a city of roses, which was meant to take the place of historic Most, which was earmarked for destruction.

Today new Most has the reputation of a giant concrete Communist housing estate drowning in social problems, a place, which no one wants to live in, and where, consequently, only the most needy people dwell, those who have no choice. Through this lens, the depiction of the beauties of the new city from the 1960s and 1970s (the new town allegedly being the only thing that would ensure the people of Most a dignified life), could seem like mere Communist propaganda concealing the true state of affairs, or even appear to be cynicism. But that is not the case.

We could reasonably call a number of contemporaneous descriptions part of the propaganda, but it was not one-sided propaganda. As the historian Stephen Kotkin has aptly put it: 'To be effective, propaganda must offer a story that people are prepared at some level to accept; one that retains the capacity to capture their imagination, and one that they can learn to express in their own words.'[26] The publicly accessible documents all report positively about the new town, especially in the 1960s, yet they are not mere propaganda in the more sophisticated sense — that is, only a credible offer from the powers that be to the majority of the population, because the actors who at this time entered into the still limited public space and left traces there in the form of historic sources, constituted a heterogeneous group. The 1960s in particular were a period when criticism frequently appeared in the press and also in speeches at a variety of meetings. Among other things, from the historian's point of view, that fact considerably increases the relevance of the publicly articulated attitudes.

The utopian vision, and to a large extent also the reality of the new Most, had in its day the opposite effect from how it may appear now, half a century later. With its emphasis on rational solutions, the improvement of hygiene, and the solution of the difficult social circumstances of tens of thousands of people, the vision fundamentally contributed to the justification for the clearance of the old town and generally raised hopes of a better life. Arguments of this kind and their reception were not limited solely to north Bohemia or even countries with State-socialist regimes. The

26 Stephen Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization, Berkeley 1997, p. 358.

vision was rooted in the long tradition of modern European thinking about society, housing, and architecture, which found inspiration in western Europe and in the intellectual tradition and actual practices of inter-war Czechoslovakia.

Particularly during the twenty-five years after the Second World War, the programme of inter-war modernist architecture, identified first and foremost with the name of Le Corbusier, not only finally gained considerable recognition, but was also carried out in practice and was transformed into generally binding rules, regulations, and other norms of modern urbanism, architecture, and building. In America, France, and Great Britain in this period, dozens of new towns were built. Urban planners and architects found self-realization working in the framework of these programmes. They did not necessarily consider themselves advocates of the radical left who sought to bring about socialism. But they did share the utopian socialist faith in the importance of a good natural environment, which forms the right society and enables individuals to lead happy lives. For example, as part of the British programme of new towns, which originated in the utopian dream about the building of islands of new civilization, twenty new towns, mostly of between 20,000 and 70,000 people, were built in the south of England alone.[27] These towns (including Stevenage, Crawley, Hemel, Hempstead, Harlow, and Hartfield) were built autocratically, without consulting the inhabitants, but in the firm belief that everyone would ultimately benefit from the results.[28]

The spirit of planning and modernization, if we remain with the example of post-war Great Britain, was hardly limited to the building of new settlements. The vision of a modern city, dominant in the 1950s and 1960s, required enough space for grand buildings, public areas, and mainly a transportation infrastructure. Besides the clearing of old slums, which met with a highly positive response, especially in the industrial towns of the Midlands, the projects of reconstruction in the spirit of modernism, particularly in Birmingham and Newcastle, required the demolition of valuable and compact historic buildings, whereby social ties of former districts of craftsmen and small shopkeepers also vanished.[29] The vision of the future, under the influence of the post-war enthusiasm for the clean modern city accessible by motor traffic, and thanks to close collaboration between architects and powerful heads of town-planning departments, changed from utopia into reality. The historic appearance of the oldest industrial towns in the world, living milieux of the past, had been irrevocably destroyed even before the wave of resistance to this mode of town planning and reconstruction appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In Czechoslovakia, modern architecture has had a strong tradition since the early 1920s when Le Corbusier (1887–1965) visited Prague several times, and many of his writings were translated into Czech just months after they had appeared in the original. In this period, the Moravian town of Zlín was rationally developed at the

27 Carol Gordon, Planned Cities: New Towns in Britain and America, Beverly Hills and London 1977, pp. 86 and 107.

28 For more on this, see Helen Meller, European Cities, 1890–1930s: History, Culture, and the Built Environment, Chichester 2001, pp. 70–75.

29 Meller, European Cities, pp. 80–81.

wishes of the Baťas as an industrial city, and the main Czech discourse about architecture was largely dominated by figures like Karel Teige (1900–1951), Karel Honzík (1900–1966), and members of the Progressive Architecture Group (Pokroková architektonická skupina — PAS), Jiří Voženílek (1909–1986), Karel Janů (1910–1995), and Jiří Štursa (1910–1995).

As in western Europe, the modernist tradition in Czechoslovakia was linked with the political left and social questions. To a large extent, it was driven by the wretched living conditions not only of the urban poor but also of some members of the middle classes, even in comparison with the contemporaneous standards in other European countries. Twenty per cent of the population of Prague (including half of all working-class families), for example, lived in one-room flats. By contrast, in Berlin in the same period, only two per cent of the population had to be satisfied with one-room flats.[30] The vast majority of Prague working-class flats had no bathrooms and often even lacked a common lavatory on the same floor. In Prague alone, however, tens of thousands of unemployed people, single mothers, and recent arrivals lived in even more striking squalor, and not only in slums on the outskirts. Shocking conditions also prevailed in built-up parts of other cities. Cellars, attics, or individual rooms of larger flats were inhabited by several generations of one family. It was not unusual that a room designed for one or two people was lived in by as many as ten — the tenants took turns sleeping and the schedule of life in the flat was thus adapted to the times of the factory shifts.

Considering the reality of inter-war towns in the Bohemian Lands, the modern town was, for figures like Teige, therefore less a technical or artistic challenge than a pressing necessity to improve the living conditions of the urban poor: Our towns are too old [Teige wrote], whole quarters are about to tumble down, houses are decrepit and about to collapse: some have, by the way, already collapsed [...]. Throughout Europe, people are still living in hovels more than a hundred years old, which are so poorly built that they simply will not last much longer. In old houses that have been remodelled, everything falls apart if one simply touches the walls. Other houses are unclean and unhygienic, lacking light and air, unfit for living. In certain quarters, tuberculosis has become deep rooted; here, just demolishing the houses would probably not suffice: doctors assume that only fire would disinfect these hotbeds of germs; perhaps one day they will be cleared with bombs and gas.[31]

The strong social mission and left-wing identity, together with the great number of experienced architects and influential writers on architecture, thus ensured that Czech modern architecture would play the dominant role after the Second World War. Despite the brief stage of imposed Stalinist 'socialist realism', it was this modernist trend of thinking about the rebuilding and building of cities, which shaped the transformations of urban space in Czechoslovakia for most of the 1950s and all of the 1960s. When, in the late 1950s, a competition for the urban design of the centre

30 Stanislav Holubec, Lidé periferie: Sociální postavení a každodennost pražského dělnictva v meziválečné době, Pilsen 2009, pp. 121–23.

31 Karel Teige, Nejmenší byt, Prague 1932, p. 58; for an English trans., see idem, The Minimum Dwelling, trans. Eric Dluhosch, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

of new Most was held, practically all the submitted designs drew on this Czechoslovak tradition as well as current west European discussions about Functionalism and Constructivism.[32]

A committee of leading Czechoslovak architects of several generations eventually chose the plan of the recently established architectural studio of Václav Krejčí (b. 1928). These people drew inspiration from their teachers, who had been actively involved in designing the modernist Czechoslovak architecture of the inter-war years. They rejected the socialist realism of the Stalinist years and drew instead on leading French architecture and urban-planning periodicals.[33] Although in the plan for the centre of new Most they had to follow on from the socialist- realist blocks of the Podžatecká housing estate built in the 1950s, they could seize the excellent opportunity that arose during the renewed collaboration with west European Constructivists and Functionalists, beginning with the mass production of standardized prefab concrete block or panel houses to build a whole new city on a 'green field'.

The plan, the nature of the actual buildings, and the ideas explained by the architects of the new town of Most bear a strikingly resemblance to some of Le Corbusier's ideas and plans (for instance, for Chandigarh, North India). The new city had to include different (and separated) sectors, which were considered important and able to generate a good quality of life. As Krejčí himself put it: 'The town was designed as a complete residential area with further functional zones for medical clinics, sports and recreation facilities, schools, two zones for local industry and services, and the new town centre.'[34]

For the majority of the inhabitants of old Most, modern housing in which every flat had central heating, a flush toilet, and a bathroom with hot and cold running water was the most convincing argument to put nostalgia aside and move willingly to the new city. After the first housing estate accommodated the new inhabitants, the lack of infrastructure became an urgent problem. In the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the promised transformation the incomplete 'housing estate' into a real city by establishing and providing a full range of public facilities became the chief aim of the Most authorities. Here, the modern hospital, department store, stadium and theatre came to represent the perceived tasks of the modern State (medical care) and aspects of modern life (consumer goods and leisure activities).

What also had great resonance both amongst experts and amongst the general public was the question of public hygiene. The accent on the airy character of the new city may seem puzzling in view of the polluted air of northern Bohemia. But planners operated with meteorological measurements demonstrating the considerably lower number of foggy days (and thus the lower risk of serious air pollution) in the new city, compared with the old town situated lower in the coal basin. This was also to be supported by large parks and other green spaces; new Most officially became the 'City of Roses'.

32 Krejčí, Most, pp. 28–31.
33 Ibid., p. 19.
34 Ibid., p. 256.

Hygiene, however, also became a topic in a 'Foucaultian' context. It was expected that the clean new city would have an impact on the daily life of its inhabitants. Environment, which was shaped by people, was also believed to shape their souls. As an antithetical image of the dirty crime-ridden old town, new Most was portrayed as the home of upstanding citizens who cared for their environment.

The vision of a rationally ordered, functioning, clean, and just city of the future was not simply a matter of expert proposals and discussions. Dozens of articles in Czech newspapers and magazines, especially from the early 1960s, reproduced those images. Definitely the most convincing argument for substituting the modern city for the old town of Most was pithily expressed in a newspaper headline of the weekly *Květy* (Flowers) as early as in 1958: 'Black town, make way for the green town!'[35] By this account, old Most was a bad place to live — ugly, run down, and with polluted air. It was seen as a testimony to the former social oppression of capitalism and bourgeois democracy; a city of rich coal barons and impoverished miners. New Most, however, was the precondition of a comfortable life in a better environment for its inhabitants. Portrayed as a clean green city with enough space for all and a place of social equality, new Most was supposed to make utopia a reality.

The vision of the new city, as it was presented in the mass media especially in the first half of the 1960s, was the opposite image of the old town, which was perceived as problematic. At the same time, it made the technocratic vision of all-embracing care for society and each of its members a reality.

The egalitarian tone of the plans (arguing for the same standard of living for everyone) and the public images and also the final shape of the new city in reality can of course be regarded as a special feature of Communist ideology and politics in practice. At the same time, the highly technocratic discourse of the experts and the rational solution of every social task (connected with making the inhabitants behave in a disciplined way) can usefully be put into the context of the scientific and technical revolution and an expert-led State capable of finding the best solutions, which lead everyone to the best of all possible futures. This idea had a great tradition in modern European thought, politics, and the practice of reconstructing the environment; particularly in the Bohemian Lands, going back to the inter-war urban plans and industrial projects, such as those of the famous Baťa shoe company, which gave birth to modern rationally organized towns like Zlín.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE

It is always tricky to write about public debate and criticism in a dictatorship. How, for example, can we know what ordinary people, journalists, or experts really thought in times of censorship and fear? Except for the few years of Stalinism in the early 1950s and the early 1970s, however, a closer look reveals various forms of criticism and public discussion as a part of the special public space in State socialism, even though the language was highly coded.

35 Sosnar, 'Ustup černé město městu zelenému'.

The fate of old Most was, moreover, decided and carried out in the 1960s, the least repressive time of the Czechoslovak Communist dictatorship. During the first half of the decade, readers of and listeners to the official mass media were regularly confronted with social and environmentalist criticism, at least in the more independent periodicals such as *Literární noviny* [Literary News], *Kultúrny život* [The Arts Scene], *Plamen* [Flame], *Tvář* [Face], and *Dějiny a současnost* [History and the Present].[36]

By the middle of the decade, a plurality of discourse was typical also of mainstream magazines and newspapers. Various forms of public protest became typical of the spirit of the times. Censorship was eventually lifted completely in 1968, and was not reinstated again till 1969, a year after the Soviet-led occupation in late August. Correspondence between institutions, as well as complaints by ordinary people mainly by means of newspapers, constitutes primary sources in which scholars can now trace the opinions and wishes of these people.

Environmental matters began to be discussed in the early 1960s. In the countrywide mass media, as well as in local north Bohemian periodicals, people were complaining about water and air pollution. The literary critic and historian Vladimír Karfík (b. 1931), for example, remarked: "I have read quite a bit about destroyed land, dying forests, vanishing waters, industrial emissions, and smog. I am afraid that that these things are read more out of curiosity about the pathology of civilization than as a defence of a living organism. And it seems not to upset people very much. They will calmly walk the streets until they suffocate. I am interested in how human beings live in a dying land. Live? [...] The idea that a single species — although admittedly the human species — could flourish in a dying natural organism is beyond logic."[37]

In this light, the feebleness or long absence of the criticism of what was going to happen to old Most may be surprising. And whenever there was serious discontent, it never came from Most citizens. Many of them were keen on writing letters to the authorities or writing critical articles for local newspapers, but they never criticized the idea of destroying the historic town. Instead, they were upset about how long it was taking to build new housing blocks and about the absence of leisure-time infrastructure and shops in the new Most.

After 1966, the silence and the enthusiasm concerning the transformation of Most were challenged several times: first in intellectual magazines such as *Literární noviny*, then also in the daily newspapers. Step by step, humanism and thoughtfulness were rediscovered as alternative socialist virtues. Socialism, according to these authors, had been identified with material development, economic growth, and technical solutions to any human problem since 1948.

Thanks to this new way of thinking (which was new not only in the socialist countries), critical of idolizing productivity and technological progress, rare voices were heard criticizing not just the way Most had been transformed into a modern city but

36 These, however, played an important role, since, for example, only periodicals published by the Writers' Union [Svaz spisovatelů], led by *Literární noviny*, were publishied in 120,000 copies and had about half a million readers.

37 Vladimír Karfík, 'Most — obležené město' (Most — a town besieged), Literární noviny, 25 June 1966.

also the very principle of modernization. In a 1968 edition of *Mladá fronta* [Youth Front], a popular daily, we can read: "The human [aspect] kept giving way to the economic, and the result was neither human nor economic. Nevertheless, everything was properly justified; there were precise numbers for everything. We have no doubt that even the numbers about Most coal were justified. They seemed to us to be unusually precise, thorough, and simple, as plain as day. When we looked at that in Most, we saw that we did not stand the slightest chance against it. We did not have any calculations for ourselves. We were unable to calculate the cost of human life, how many litres of fresh air, and how many months of health would need to be paid for one tonne of cheap coal, and the cost of social uncertainty. We were unable to express in numbers the extent to which the officially approved devastation of the land, old farmsteads, and churches influences the character of people and their increasingly devastating relationship to this country. We did not calculate in what percentages the desolate state of the community was projected into the desolate state of the thinking of its inhabitants [...]. We were unable to multiply the unit of beauty by the factor of centuries. We did not know how to calculate the module of the agreeableness of the environment. We used emotions, relationships, and the future of coming generations as our arguments. That evoked laughter, grimaces, and impatience. We lacked numbers, a set of tangible pieces of evidence, plain facts. Nevertheless, we left with the feeling, the very strong feeling, that the truth was on our side, and that we had to fight for the dirty, old, derelict town."[38]

Words similar to the preceding ones, by other journalists, professional writers, and experts, did not change what was already underway. Although important evidence of an anti-technocratic discourse, such criticism remained marginal in its day.

After the suppression of the reform movement of the Prague Spring of 1968 and the re-establishment of censorship, straightforward criticism such as what had appeared in *Literární noviny* and other periodicals in the second half of the 1960s was no longer possible. The public space became much more homogenous, and alternative ideas, at least those articulated in an open form, were forced underground. The era of 'normalization' began in 1969, and lasted until the collapse of the regime in late 1989.

The official discourse was not, however, the same as the one in Stalinist or post-Stalinist times. In many respects, the former criticism or alternatives were partly integrated into what now dominated the public space. The rescue of the Church of the Assumption, a work of Late Gothic architecture, in old Most is an excellent example of how the mentality of engineering the landscape encountered the humanistic discourse of heritage preservation.

A MOVEABLE CHURCH AND A PARADIGM SHIFT

Few Czechs know that Most was once a valuable historic town of 30,000 inhabitants. One Most story, however, made its mark in history. When speaking about Most in Communist times, most people probably remember the moving of the church. To say that

38 Olga Hníková and Ludvík Losos, 'Odepsané město', Mladá fronta, 21 June 1968.

the town was 'moved' is of course a metaphor. The town was not actually moved; it was demolished and another town of the same name was built nearby. The church was, however, literally moved. In autumn 1975, the historically most valuable monument of old Most — the unique Late Gothic Church of the Assumption — was moved from the centre of old Most to a safe place without lignite underneath it, 850 metres to the east. The 10,000-tonne church was successfully transported on custom-built rails in an operation the likes of which had never before been undertaken anywhere else in the world.

What is of interest to us, however, is not the transportation of the church itself, but the role it played in public discourse and propaganda. Preservationists called for the rescue of the church immediately after the Central Committee of the Communist Party had given the green light for the destruction of the whole town in 1962. The Communist elite adopted the idea quite quickly. In the early 1960s, setting aside some 90 million Kčs to rescue an old church was not necessarily something that made the people in power popular.[39] During the early 1960s, preparing the whole operation was discussed by experts and was not part of official propaganda. Progress, it was argued, demanded obtaining coal, 'black gold', and removing things considered old and unproductive.

The late 1960s in Czechoslovakia changed the way many people there thought about the past and its traces. The reformist movement and the broadening of public discussion between about 1963 and 1968 played a role in this, but the international context was probably a more important factor than that. The question of cultural heritage had developed from being a topic solely of experts to one of the most important counterparts to the way Europeans thought about shaping and reshaping their environment. It is fair to see the 1972 International Heritage Convention as a milestone in these developments.[40] Although it was not ratified in Czechoslovakia until 1990, the convention did play a role in the internal discussions during the 1970s.

Those who wrote about what was happening in Most in the early 1970s (and those whom they worked for) were aware of this change. The moving of the Church of the Assumption suddenly became a staple of news about Most. A great opportunity to combine an engineering dream with the preservation of the national heritage was seized.

On the one hand, moving the church was presented as a 'technical event of global importance'[41] and journalists were enthusing about a 'technique that bridges the gap between the centuries'.[42] The project provided an 'example of the technical progress

39 The inhabitants and the workers perceived the investment of huge sums in the preservation of the church, which from their standpoint was a relic of the outmoded past, an unnecessary expenditure at a time when it was necessary to build roads and factories, hospitals and sporting grounds, housing estates and cities. See, for example, the 1966 letter from workers in the steel town of Kladno, central Bohemia, protesting the preservation of the church in the NA Prague, Úřad předsednictva vlády—běžná spisovna, file 167–356/1/12, II.

40 Francesco Francioni — Federico Lenzerini (eds), The 1972 World Heritage Convention: A Commentary, Oxford 2008.

41 'Kostel versus uhlí', Československý horník, 11 June 1970.

42 'Kostel na kolech', Svět práce, 8 October 1975.

of our republic'.[43] On the other hand, dozens of articles in all the important national and regional newspapers in the 1970s presented the preservation of the church as evidence that the socialist State was taking care of the monuments of the past and that 'our society' was 'concerned with the preservation of historic values'. Many journalists compared the thoughtfulness of the Czechoslovak authorities with the thoughtlessness of Western capitalist concerns, as in the following typical article in *Zemědělské noviny* [Agriculture News]: "Because it is an extremely valuable heritage site, the socialist State does not hesitate to spend money for its preservation, even though it is a church building. In the capitalist world, a coal-mining business would definitely not set aside funds to save a piece of church architecture. Nor would a bourgeois State have enough money for such an operation [...]. Though this is an operation exceptional by any standard in the world [...], our efforts to save heritage sites in general are not exceptional. These efforts are typical of socialism; they are systematic. By moving a church that stood in the way of the necessary development of the economy, we are therefore demonstrating not only our advanced technology and the level of our scientists, engineers, and workers, but also the advanced state of our culture, which we can demonstrate with more than just ideas."[44]

CONCLUSION

The transformation of Most can reasonably be interpreted as a triumph of Communist technocratic thinking. In consequence of the post-war expulsion of most of the former inhabitants of Most, the natural bonds between the people and their environment were torn apart. The new inhabitants of old Most had more understanding for the approach that turned the landscape into a servant of heavy industry than people elsewhere had at the time. The engineers became the new elite in the State, who decided what the environment (and, in consequence, human life) was going to look like. Economic growth and production allegedly justified the destruction of the land and the loss of a whole, compact, late medieval town together with its valuable historic monuments.

All of that may be true, but the story is not actually only about the up-rooting of the natives of the border areas of the Bohemian Lands, which fell victim to a Communist experiment. As I have sought to demonstrate in this article, it is mainly a story about a particular aspect of modern thinking, the impact of which appeared to the east and the west of the Iron Curtain in the second half of the twentieth century. The central, and generally accepted, core of this idea (in both the west and the east) was the belief in the ability to anticipate the future and, consequently, rationally plan it. This conviction, which after the experiences of the Great Depression and the Second World War offered Europe the hope that one would not only overcome the current crisis, but also prevent future disasters, came in a variety of forms. The example of the Most experiment provides us with an opportunity to trace several of them — from

43 Ibid.

44 'Hmota v pohybu' (Matter in motion), Zemědělské noviny, 2 October 1975.

the economic reduction the world we live in to mere indicators, as practised by advocates of Communist productivism (but also several variants of economic liberalism in western Europe and North America), all the way to the more complex technocratic approaches appearing in town planning, architecture, and visions of restructuring the land. Even though these approaches originate in considerably different conceptions of the world, and were taken by various actors in the story that I have tried to relate, they have in common the idea of reducing the world and life to values that can be precisely calculated and whose trajectories towards the future can be dealt with as physicists or mathematicians might deal with them.

By the 1960s, the reduction of the world to economic indicators and technocratic forecasts, connected with the period of the scientific-technological revolution, evoked a distinctly critical reaction, again throughout Europe. Just as productivism and technocratic thought found support and inspiration in Marxism (including the humanistic argument that emphasized being considerate of the natural environment and preserving history and the cultural heritage as preconditions of a civilized society), so too did these alternative ways of thinking. A paradox of the socialist utopia is that it could accommodate contradictory discourses; it could end up thinking in numbers or, by contrast, emphasize the values of love and beauty.

Throughout Europe, the late 1960s and the early 1970s were a time of a marked change in values. The 'soft' factors of society, such as environmental protection, home as a lived-in (rather than as a rationally constructed) environment, and respect for cultural heritage and attempts to preserve it all gained in importance. In the liberal milieu of the countries west of the Iron Curtain, the change took place more quickly and its consequences were more profound, but the countries with State-socialist regimes were not isolated from this change in *Sinnwelt*. In this context, it might not come as a surprise that the grand finale of the destruction of old Most was later rarely presented as the victory of the progressive forces over the past. And if so, then it was presented in a distinctly less assertive form than back in the 1950s or early 1960s.

In the end, the narrative of the destruction of the town and construction of its substitute was overshadowed by the narrative of rescuing a Roman Catholic church. The authorities of post-1968 Communist Czechoslovakia found a brilliant way of connecting the technocratic and the humanistic discourses and of keeping in step with the times.[45] It was the discovery of a way to square the circle. Technocratic thought, based on the conviction that one can break the world down into small pieces and then reassemble it like a jigsaw puzzle somewhere else at some other time, proved to be extraordinarily flexible and viable. The rescue of an old church, originally a compromise with the preservationists and the church itself, became the greatest triumph of this way of thinking.

45 Eagle Glasheim expresses this synergy of two ideological frameworks in a similar way: "Though the church stands as a reminder of the lost old town, its miraculous journey has also rendered it a monument to modernity". See Glassheim, Most the Town that Moved, p. 448