



**THE FIRE AT THE PALACE OF  
INDUSTRY AT THE FORMER PARK  
OF CULTURE AND LEISURE  
IN PRAGUE IN OCTOBER 2008**

POŽIAR PRIEMYSELNÉHO PALÁČA  
V BÝVALOM PKOJF V OKTÓBRI 2008

Source Zdroj: Profimedia

# The Parks of Culture and Leisure in Prague and Bratislava: The Story of a Transition

## Parky kultúry a oddychu v Prahe a Bratislave: Príbeh tranzície

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V roku 2008 šokovali verejnosť fotografie horiaceho Priemyselného paláca v areáli bývalého Parku kultúry a oddychu J. Fučíka v Prahe. O rok neskôr zatajila bratislavská verejnosť dych pri pohľade na zábery buldozéra zahryzávajúceho sa do spoločenskej sály PKO. Tieto udalosti sú ikonickými obrazmi ilustrujúcimi v urbánnych mytológiách oboch miest divoké obdobie deväťdesiatych respektíve nultých rokov 21. storočia. Oba obrazy skazy vypovedajú o zložitom osude verejných inštitúcií po roku 1989, ale súčasne neprehrádzajú takmer nič o procese transformácie, ktorým tieto areály prechádzali. Pritom práve táto transformácia bola dôležitým zdrojom emócií, ktoré oba obrazy dodnes vyvolávajú. Park kultúry a oddychu, ako fenomén úzko spojený so socialistickým mestom, síce niesol negatívne konotácie spojené s autoritatívnym režimom, v osemdesiatych rokoch však čoraz viac prevažovalo vnímanie týchto zariadení ako ostrovov zábavy širokých vrstiev populácie, a teda verejného vlastníctva. Obavy verejnosti o osud týchto zariadení tak možno vnímať aj ako záujem o veci verejné a súčasne o zachovanie určitej miery kontinuity medzi socialistickým a postsocialistickým mestom. Parky kultúry ako verejné inštitúcie tak môžu fungovať ako exemplárne príklady problematizácie verejného v období tranzície od štátneho socializmu k trhovému hospodárstvu.

Parky kultúry a oddychu v Prahe a Bratislave však nespájajú len spomínané ikonické obrazy skazy, ale aj podobné vývojové trajektórie zachytávajúce ich vznik v podobe výstavných areálov, prosperitu vo forme miest socialistickej kultúry a oddychu aj úpadok na konci 20. storočia a nové využitie na prahu 21. storočia. Napriek tomu je ich podoba aj funkcia dnes úplne odlišná. Štúdia sa usiluje identifikovať, kedy a za akých okolností a s pričinením akých aktérov sa začala situácia na oboch miestach vyvíjať odlišne. Na problematiku nazerá zo širšej historickej perspektívy zahŕňajúcej celé obdobie ich existencie, ale aj z perspektívy odlišných a predsa príbuzných disciplín, historického výskumu a výskumu architektúry a urbanizmu.

Územia, kde v päťdesiatych rokoch minulého storočia vybudovali pražské a bratislavské PKO, mali v organizme oboch

miest špecifické postavenie. Na jednej strane ho ovplyvňovala vzdialenosť od historického jadra, ktorá sa v súvislosti s plošným rastom mesta a integráciou okolitých obcí do jednej entity relatívne skracovala. Na druhej strane obe územia predstavovali smer potenciálneho rastu kompaktného mesta. Avšak, zatiaľ čo v Prahe na území vtedajšieho PKO na seba narážali dva odlišné svety rekreácie a priemyslu, v Bratislave šlo o dovtedy prakticky neurbanizované územie medzi juhozápadným mestom a neďalekou obcou Karlova Ves. Obe miesta však spájala ambícia výstavby reprezentačného okrsku, kde mali k pôvodným výstaviskám neskôr pribudnúť aj ďalšie verejné budovy. Územie pražského výstaviska sa nachádzalo ďaleko za hranicou historického centra mesta na severovýchodnom predmestí, na pomedzí prírodného územia Trójskej kotliny s kráľovskou zvernicou Stromovka a industriálnej štvrte Holešovice. Išlo o strategickú lokalitu, atraktívnu malebnou prírodnou scenériou a dobrou dostupnosťou prostredníctvom železničnej, cestnej, ba aj vodnej dopravy. Bratislavské výstavisko bolo situované na okraji mestskej štruktúry v bezprostrednom susedstve podhradskej štvrte, ktorá sa ako tereziánske mesto stala v roku 1851 súčasťou dnešnej Bratislavy. Areál tak nadväzoval na existujúcu mestskú štruktúru a bol od konca 19. storočia súčasťou úvah o rozvoji mesta smerom na západ. Súčasnú svoju atraktivitu opieral o polohu na brehu len nedávno regulovanej časti Dunaja, nad ktorým sa príkro dvíhal výbežok Malých Karpát. Tieto dva prírodné elementy determinovali územie do úzkeho pozdĺžneho tvaru. Podstatnou súčasťou miestnej morfológie bola aj línia cestnej komunikácie s električkovou traťou spájajúca centrum mesta s obcami na jeho západnom okraji, ktorá viedla po celej dĺžke územia a limitovala rozvojové možnosti výstaviska.

Poloha oboch areálov PKO, v Prahe aj v Bratislave, na okraji urbanizovaného prostredia v blízkosti atraktívnej prírody, inšpirovala k posilneniu ich rekreačnej funkcie. Rozvíjaniu idey rozsiahlejšej rekreačnej zóny nestáli v tom čase v ceste ani širšie priestorové vzťahy či legislatívny rámec platných územných plánov. Práve naopak. Moderní urbanisti a priestoroví plánovači

v oboch mestách uvažovali o koncipovaní mestskej rekreačnej lokality práve v nadväznosti na existujúce areály PKO už od päťdesiatych rokov minulého storočia.

Zatiaľ čo pred rokom 1989 sa oba areály vyvíjali veľmi podobne, krátko po nežnej revolúcii sa ich cesty rozišli. Kým v Bratislave sa vďaka presťahovaniu veľtrhu Incheba rýchle vytvorili podmienky na radikálne riešenie, pražské PKOJF zabrdlo do dlhoročných sporov v dôsledku nepodarenej Všeobecnej výstavy v roku 1991. Bratislavský príbeh smeroval pomerne priamočiaro k privatizácii celého verejného priestoru, zatiaľ čo v Prahe bol verejný priestor zachovaný. Politické východiská pritom boli v oboch mestách podobné. Ani jedno z hlavných miest nehodlalo poskytovať svojim občanom „kultúru a oddych“ z verejných prostriedkov v rámci, ktorý im vytyčil predchádzajúci režim. Obe mestské reprezentácie boli v rukách pravicových vlád presvedčených o výhodách súkromného vlastníctva, aj keď v Prahe sa situácia pod rastúcim vplyvom sociálnej demokracie koncom deväťdesiatych rokov do určitej miery zmenila.

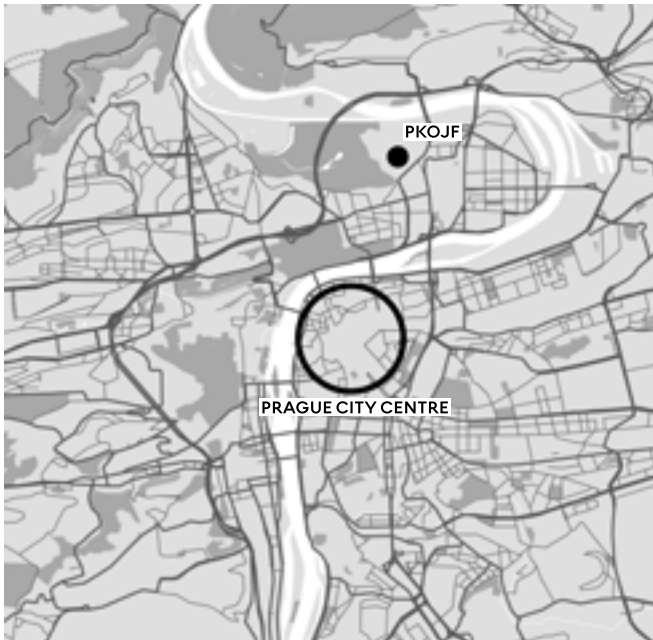
Súčasnú podobu niekdajších areálov PKO v Prahe a Bratislave ovplyvnilo odlišné rozhodovanie politických aktérov a ich poňmanie správy mestského majetku v prvých dvoch desaťročiach po roku 1989, majetkové spory, individuálne ambície finančných skupín, odlišný status budov v zmysle pamiatkovej ochrany, ale aj externé okolnosti, napríklad záujem zahraničných investorov o tieto územia. Praha bola ako miliónové hlavné mesto Československa atraktívna pre globálny trh už pred rokom 1989. Tomu zodpovedala aj ostražitosť miestnej spoločnosti k zahraničným investíciám. Bratislava, naopak, musela o zahraničné investície súperiť s neďalekou Viedňou a do hľadáčka globálneho trhu sa dostávala až postupne na prelome milénia. Odlišná ľudnatosť oboch miest mala vplyv aj na štruktúru aktérov voľného trhu v období dynamickej privatizácie mestských pozemkov. V Prahe bolo aktérov mnoho a ich vzájomná rivalita často viedla k zmareniu privatizačných procesov. Bratislavská scéna bola redukovanejšia a jednotliví aktéri navzájom prepojení, čo znamenalo, že sa v konečnom dôsledku navzájom skôr podporovali.

Diametrálne odlišný bol aj prístup inštitucionalizovanej pamiatkovej ochrany k oboj areálom. Podstatnú časť objektov pražského výstavniska tvorili budovy z konca 19. a začiatku 20. storočia, ktoré vyhlásili za kultúrne pamiatky už v roku 1958. Väčšina budov bratislavského areálu bola vnímaná skôr ako utilitárna výstavba a tak sa k nej počas druhej polovice 20. storočia aj pristupovalo. Podnet na vyhlásenie budov bratislavského PKO za pamiatku podali až aktivisti, ktorí bojovali za zachovanie areálu na začiatku 21. storočia. K vyhláseniu však nikdy nedošlo.

Ako sa teda dedičstvo socializmu, v zmysle akumulovaného kapitálu, ktorý sa po zániku predchádzajúceho režimu ocitol v rukách nových aktérov, prejavilo na odlišnom vývoji oboch areálov po roku 1989? Bratislavské PKO, na rozdiel od pražského bolo pre trhovou ekonomiku oveľa lepšie vybavené. Rozhodnutie umiestniť PKO v Bratislave blízko centra a dobudovať jeho protipovodňovú ochranu z neho urobilo po páde komunizmu neodolateľný investičný magnet. V Prahe vzdialenejšia lokalita a neexistujúca povodňová ochrana vytvorili podmienky pre úplne iný typ tvorby zisku. V podobnom smere pôsobila aj pamiatková ochrana, respektíve jej absencia, ktorá umožnila v Bratislave voľne nakladať s daným priestorom.

Po roku 1989 sa v oboch mestách urbánne prostredie rozšírilo do bezprostredného susedstva areálov. V Bratislave sa PKO stalo súčasťou mestskej štruktúry. Existujúce a plánované novostavby prepojili historické mesto s jeho západným predmestím, a tým úplne vymazali jeho pôvodnú stopu v urbanizme mesta. V Prahe nová výstavba integruje areál do mesta, kde ostáva prítomný ako urbánny verejný park. V Prahe tak toto dedičstvo socializmu nakoniec skončilo v rukách mestskej verejnosti. V Bratislave z toho dedičstva najviac profitovali sily, ktoré stáli v protiklade jeho ideologickej podstaty. Z verejného sa stalo prívátne. Z miesta pre všetkých, miesto pre vybraných. Dedičstvo sa v Bratislave dokonale skapitalizovalo, v Prahe došlo k sofistikovanejšiemu variantu, kde park slúži skôr ako atraktor pre gentrifikované obytné štvrte, ktoré vznikajú v okolí na mieste niekdajších priemyselných areálov.

In 2008, Prague's residents were shocked by media images of the fire in the Palace of Industry, a major exhibition venue located in the former "Julius Fučík Park of Culture and Leisure". One year later, their counterparts in Bratislava were no less taken aback viewing scenes of a bulldozer tearing into the Social Hall of that city's onetime parallel institution, also previously the "Park of Culture and Leisure" (PKO). These dramatic events and iconic images illustrate the urban mythology of both cities the chaotic period of the 1990s, if permuted into the subsequent decade of the 2000s. Both images of destruction testify to the complex fate of public institutions after the fall of Communism in 1989, yet nonetheless reveal almost nothing of the transformation that these public spaces underwent in the intervening years. And yet this transformation process was a major source for the emotions that these images call forth even today. The 'Park of Culture and Leisure' (Park kultúry a oddychu / Park kultury a oddechu), as a phenomenon intimately linked to the socialist city, may have borne certain negative connotations through association with the authoritarian political order, yet by the 1980s the prevailing tendency was to view these complexes as islands of amusement for the wider layers of society, and thus as public property. The reaction of the public to these images of destruction can thus be seen, no less, as an interest in a public matter and equally in preserving a certain level of continuity between the socialist and post-socialist city. These Parks of Culture and Leisure as public institutions can, essentially, serve as examples of the marginal position of public goods and public spaces in the period of transition from state socialism to a market economy.



**LOCATIONS OF THE PARKS OF CULTURE AND LEISURE IN PRAGUE AND BRATISLAVA**

UMIESTNENIE PARKOV KULTÚRY A ODDYCHU V RÁMCI PRAHY A BRATISLAVY

Author Autor: Monika Bočková

In both Prague and Bratislava, though, the Parks of Culture and Leisure are not only linked by these iconic scenes of destruction, but by similar developmental trajectories tracing their emergence in the form of exposition grounds, prosperity as sites of socialist culture, up to decline at the end of the 20th century and new uses at the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup>. Yet all the same, at present their appearance and functions are completely different.

In the following text we examine when, and under what circumstances, the fates of both sites began to transpire differently. We similarly enquire who were the historical actors in the unfolding drama of these parks and what were their motivations. We try to answer by employing a broader historical perspective, one including the entire period of the existence of both complexes, and also the perspective of two different (yet intimately related) disciplines, social history and history of architecture and urbanism.

**The Exhibition Grounds in Prague and Bratislava**

The sites where the Park of Culture and Leisure arose in Prague and Bratislava during the 1950s each had a specific status within the two urban organisms. On one side, they were marked by their distance from the historic core, which in a time of multidirectional urban growth and integration of surrounding settlements into a single entity had been relatively shortened. On the other, both sites offered an opportunity for the potential growth of a dense cityscape. While in Prague, the area of the present park formed an interface between the diverging worlds of leisure and industry, in Bratislava it formed an essentially un-urbanised area between the southwest edge of the city and the outlying village of Karlova Ves. Still, both cities had similar ambition to construct a prestigious district where, alongside the exhibition areas, other public buildings were planned. Prague's site lay far beyond the edge of the historic city centre in its northeastern suburb, between the natural terrain of the Troja Basin with the former royal game-park of Stromovka and the industrial district of Holešovice. This locality was strategic both for its attractive natural scenery and its accessibility by rail, or even by river. Bratislava's exhibition complex was situated at the edge of the urban fabric close to the 'Castle Foot' district (Podhradská štvrť), which became part of the city under the name of Tereziánske mesto (Theresienstadt) in 1851. As such, it was linked to one extant urban structure and, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was included in the proposals for the city's growth toward the west. Additionally, its attractiveness was strengthened by the position on the bank of the recently regulated Danube, above which the outcrop of the Lesser Carpathians rose steeply. These two natural elements gave the site its long narrow shape. The line of the roadway, containing the tram route linking the city centre with the settlements on its western edge, followed the entire length of the plot, hence limiting the growth potential of the exhibition complex.



**THE 1938 PRAGUE TRADE FAIR AT THE SITE OF THE FUTURE PARK OF CULTURE AND LEISURE IN PRAGUE**

PRAŽSKÝ VZORKOVÝ VELTRH NA VÝSTAVISKU V ROKU 1938

Source Zdroj: Park kultúry a oddychu Júliusa Fučíka, PKOJF 1983



**THE GROUND PLAN OF THE 1891 JUBILEE EXHIBITION IN PRAGUE**

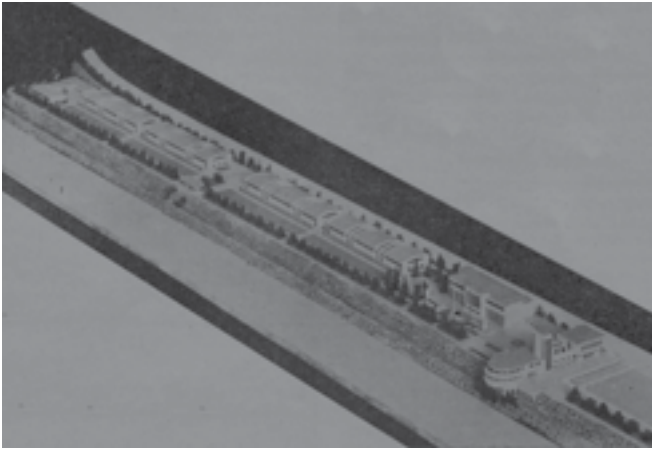
SITUAČNÝ PLÁN JUBILEJNEJ ZEMSKÉJ VÝSTAVY V PRAHE V ROKU 1891

Source Zdroj: Park kultúry a oddychu Júliusa Fučíka, PKOJF 1983

## The Prague Exposition Grounds before the PKO

The space where Prague's Julius Fučík Park of Culture and Leisure was founded in 1953 had, at that time, already been in use for exhibition purposes for over sixty years. The impetus for the transformation of the site, as well as the most significant event to occur on it, was the Jubilee Exposition in 1891 (celebrating the exposition in Prague's Klementium one century before). The exposition was intended to put Prague on the equal footing with other European cities, demonstrate the modernity of the Czech nationalist project, and confirm the economic strength of the Czech lands within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The municipal government of Prague, then firmly in ethnically Czech hands, selected for the Jubilee Exposition the eastern end of the former Royal Game Park (*Královská obora*), since the start of the 19th century a city park. Enclosed on two sides by rail lines, the one to the north separating it from the Vltava, this previously little-used land was the closest flat area where such an extensive event could be organised.<sup>1</sup> To connect it to the city centre, around 2 km distant, the famous inventor František Křižík designed Prague's first electric tram line. Dominating the grounds of over 30 hectares was the newly completed Palace of Industry (*Průmyslový palác*), then the largest steel structure in Prague with a width of nearly 240 m (Bedřich Münzberger, 1891). For the entrance court in front of the Palace, architect Antonín Wiehl designed two side pavilions, for History and Art, in historicist styles, later to serve as the sculpture galleries for the National Museum and the Academy of Fine Arts. On the other side of the Palace, to the north, František Křižík constructed a sophisticated illuminated fountain with water-jets rising several dozen metres into the air; visible even from the Old Town, it became the chief attraction for the nearly two and a half million visitors to the exposition.

The main entrance to the grounds was situated at the axis of the historic roadway connecting the districts of Bubny and Holešovice. Later, at the start of the 20th century, this road was shaped into a 25-m-wide urban boulevard (*Bělského třída*, after 1950 *Dukelských hrdinů*), ending right at the complex's entrance court. In this way, the Palace of Industry represented – and still represents – the visual culmination of the compositional axis. The Jubilee Exposition and the buildings it left behind formed the decisive shift in the development of the territory. The industrial complexes alongside today's *Dukelských hrdinů* street began to give way to traditional residential blocks. In parallel, the 1920s witnessed the regulation of this part of the city and the construction of representative commercial palaces, such as the Electric Company building or the Trade Fair Palace (*Veletržní palác*), then the largest functionalist building in Europe (Josef Fuchs and Oldřich Tyl).



**WINNING COMPETITION  
DESIGN FOR THE BRATISLAVA  
INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION,  
MODEL, 1941**

VÍŤAZNÝ SÚŤAŽNÝ NÁVRH NA  
BRATISLAVSKÉ VÝSTAVISKO,  
MODEL, 1941

Source Zdroj: Elán, 1941, 11(5), p. 9

These structures set and stabilised the basic urban structure of the area, including the position of the entrance into the exhibition complex.

Along the same street axis, there gradually began to emerge after World War I a new exhibition complex, based on the ambitious project of the Prague Trade Fairs company (*Pražské vzorkové veletrhy*).<sup>2</sup> The site of the future PKO, then already known as the “Old Exposition Grounds”, began slowly losing its role as Prague’s main exhibition space. Its future prospects were also cast into doubt by the plans for road construction that would address the challenging profile of the narrow Troja basin and create links from the centre to the north, as well as westward to the newly growing district of Dejvice.<sup>3</sup> No less, the future existence of the Exposition Grounds was questioned by the long-term visions of modernist urban planners, who saw in Holešovice a space for creating a new, modern centre for Prague.<sup>4</sup>

### The International Exposition in Bratislava

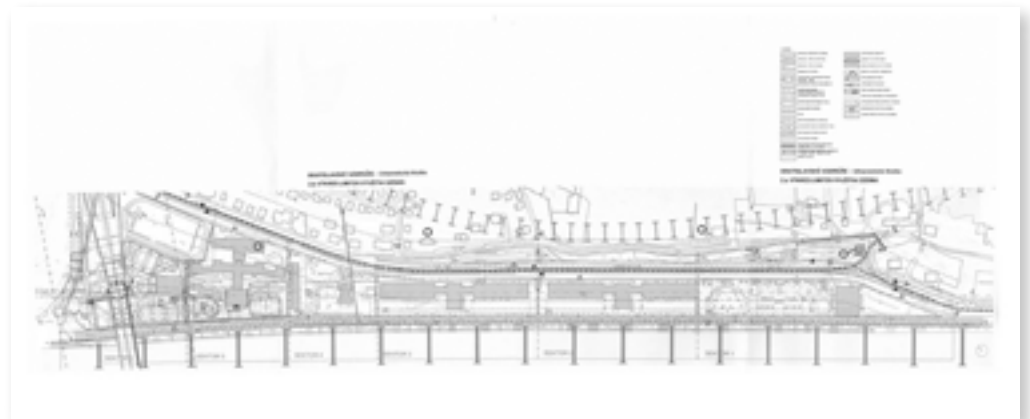
Bratislava’s Park of Culture and Leisure was created on a site that had been planned, at the start of the 1930s, for the construction of a complex for the International Danube Trade Fair.<sup>5</sup> It was a narrow strip of land that the city acquired during the regulation of the Danube through filling in part of the river channel and reinforcing the bank, stretching from the foot of Bratislava Castle up to the Karlova Ves inlet. In the intentions of the then-effective regulatory plan, the exposition grounds would have been joined by a university complex. During the interwar period, though, the relocation of the exhibition grounds never took place and all that was realised of the university was a group of dormitories.

The idea of building a new exhibition space, stressing the public representation of the new Slovak state, revived only during World War II. In November 1940, the Assembly of the Slovak Republic approved a law for construction of an exhibition area in the capital. In succession, the Slovak Trade Fairs company (*Slovenské veľtrhy*) was founded, with its shareholders being the national

**URBAN-PLANNING STUDY  
FOR THE BRATISLAVA  
EMBANKMENT, DRAWING OF  
THE EXHIBITION'S ORIGINAL  
STRUCTURE,  
AUKETT 2002**

URBANISTICKÁ ŠTÚDIA  
BRATISLAVSKÉ NÁBREŽIE, VÝKRES  
PŮVODNEJ ZÁSTAVBY VÝSTAVISKA,  
AUKETT 2002

Source Zdroj: Archive of the  
Municipality of Bratislava





**PKO BRATISLAVA,  
SPORTS HALL DURING THE  
WORLD JUNIOR PENTATHLON  
CHAMPIONSHIPS, 1966**

PKO BRATISLAVA,  
ŠPORTOVÁ HALA POČAS MS  
MLADÝCH V PÄŤBOJI, 1966

Source Zdroj: TASR, photo by J. Bakala



**PKO BRATISLAVA,  
VIEW FROM THE RIVER, 1966**

PKO BRATISLAVA,  
POHLAD OD RIEKY, 1966

Source Zdroj: TASR, photo by J. Bakala

government, the city of Bratislava, and several interested economic entities.<sup>6</sup> In December of the same year, the company held a public anonymous competition for preparing a construction plan and exhibition pavilions. The jury evaluated the designs at the start of 1941: no first prize was awarded, while the highest honour, second prize, went to architects Pavol Andrík and Ján Štefanec, then holding the position of technical councillor in the Bratislava city government.

The architects proposed the complex as a chain of successively positioned exhibition halls, linked into two larger complexes running parallel to the river. As a supplement, there were two freestanding volumes: the entrance building and the 'Pavilion of the State'.<sup>7</sup> The architectural form of these pavilions took its simplicity from the principles of interwar Functionalism.

In the process of preparing the realisation project, though, the architectural expression of the buildings changed. Abstract, ornament-free forms and flat roofs were replaced by classicist elements, realistic statues, and pitched roofs – corresponding to the contemporary idea that Slovak architecture should follow Italian models. Construction of the exposition grounds began during wartime yet was never completed: only the exhibition halls were built, with neither the entrance nor the 'state' pavilions ever started. Yet the planned function remained unaltered. Even the first post-war city masterplan, prepared by architect Kamil Gross in 1949, still assumed the use of the land for commercial exhibitions. However, nationalisations and the system of a planned economy diminished the importance of economic competition and shifted the idea of a trade fair into the background for several decades. To the forefront came ideas of building socialism and care for its key protagonists – the working masses.

### **Parks of Culture and Leisure**

The idea of the Park of Culture and Leisure emerged in the Soviet Union in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as an alternative to the “decadent” culture of bourgeois amusement parks.<sup>8</sup> At the start of the 1950s, the idea made its way through Communist-backed Sovietization to socialist Czechoslovakia, where it merged with local traditions of public fairgrounds.

In the cases of Prague and Bratislava, which both created their PKOs in 1953, it literally meant the physical reshaping of earlier exhibition complexes of national importance. And these circumstances later shaped the fate of the same formations under conditions of post-socialist transformation.

### **The PKO in Bratislava**

The change in purpose for the Bratislava site from a commercial exhibition complex to a Park of Culture and Leisure was announced in 1953. While the original pavilions were to be retained, a plan for their adaptation was drawn up by architects Karol Rosmány and František Záriš. The first three buildings were planned for cultural-social functions and the remainder for sports use. The cultural-social pavilions consisted of a performance hall, a social hall, and a connecting entrance object.



**PKO BRATISLAVA,  
MAIN PERFORMANCE HALL  
DURING THE CONGRESS  
OF THE ETHNIC HUNGARIAN  
ASSOCIATION CSEMADOK, 1966**

PKO BRATISLAVA, HLAVNÁ  
SPOLOČENSKÁ SÁLA POČAS  
KONGRESU ETNICKO-MAĎARSKÉHO  
SPOLKU CSEMADOK, 1966

**Source** Zdroj: TASR,  
**Photo** Foto: J. Bakala



**PKO BRATISLAVA,  
MAIN ENTRANCE TO THE  
SOCIAL PAVILION, 1966**

PKO BRATISLAVA,  
HLAVNÝ VSTUP DO  
SPOLOČENSKÉHO PAVILÓNU, 1966

**Source** Zdroj: TASR,  
**Photo** Foto: M. Borodáčová



**PKO BRATISLAVA,  
THE BALL ROOM HOSTING  
A YOUTH DANCE EVENT, 1963**

PKO BRATISLAVA,  
ESTRÁDNA SÁLA POČAS  
TANEČNÉHO PODUJATIA MLADÝCH,  
1963

**Source** Zdroj: TASR,  
**Photo** Foto: A. Prakeš



**PKO BRATISLAVA,  
PHOTO EXHIBITION IN THE  
ENTRANCE HALL, 1972**

PKO BRATISLAVA,  
VÝSTAVA FOTOGRAFÍÍ  
VO FOYERI, 1972

**Source** Zdroj: TASR,  
**Photo** Foto: M. Vojtek



In April 1954, the stepped seating for 3,000 spectators in the performance hall was completed, with various cultural and entertainment events being staged straight away. Indeed, there were 84 performances throughout 1954, with “attendance of over 73,000 visitors”. By 1955, the entrance structure connecting the two pavilions was completed. It featured a foyer with a centrally placed fountain; on the upper gallery were reading rooms, clubrooms and other social spaces. Later, the social hall with a podium was added for smaller-scale “cabaret and music-hall programs” along with a dance floor for 400 couples and seating areas for up to 1,600 persons. The buildings were also given new decoration in the form of socialist-realist reliefs and stained-glass windows celebrating the working masses. Two of the second group of pavilions were adapted for the needs of various sports events. Further planned for the complex was either a ‘floating pool on the Danube’ or a swimming area in the nearby quarry, originally excavated to provide material for the river regulation.<sup>9</sup> Construction of the Park of Culture and Leisure relied from the very start on purportedly voluntary public labour, reflected in the participation of “35 thousand volunteers who contributed a total of 135 thousand working hours”.<sup>10</sup>

Another component of the new cultural and leisure environment was the riverbank promenade, which was to connect the new Park with the historic city centre. The competition for its architectonic conception was held in 1953. The winning design by architects Ivan Matušík and Ivan Szalay proposed, despite the already high banks of the regulated Danube, a relatively heavy (though perforated) masonry wall. This physically and visually firm boundary was, in turn, lightened by the architects’ insertion of regularly repeating semicircular spaces for viewing terraces, sided with prefabricated metal railings. Stretching from the present-day New Bridge (*Nový most*) to the city botanical garden, the promenade was finished in 1958.

In parallel with the emergence of discussions on the cultural-social or sports functions for the Danube embankment, the idea arose of using the spatial potential of the former exposition grounds for the newly founded Research Institute of Water Management. Its hydraulics laboratory occupied the last of the six former exhibition pavilions, with a new office block close by. This complex was completed in 1958, adding to the strip of freestanding volumes – the cultural-social section with its two halls, the sports hall and its connecting building – a scientific institution as well.

The relaxation of political control and changes in the legal arrangement of the Czechoslovak federation during the 1960s, however, brought major changes to the concept of the PKO, several of which directly affected the situation on the Danube embankment. The first was the founding of the ‘Bratislava Lyre’ international music festival, held in the performance hall of the PKO starting in 1966. This event increased the social prestige of the complex, while necessitating improvements in the technical facilities of the cultural buildings. Regarding the organisation and use of the site, though, far more significant was the creation of the international trade fair Incheba (International Chemical Bratislava) in 1967 and the decision to hold it on the very site of the PKO. From the start, it was clear that the spaces of the original halls would not suffice for such an ambitious program. Already by 1969, there was a design for four new exhibition pavilions, created by Ferdinand Milučký, who by then already successfully designed several other exhibition spaces. These pavilions were completed in 1975, standing in front of the earlier construction when viewed from the river. Though they were conceived as light, transparent steel frames, they greatly reduced the public space of the embankment previously set aside for the free movement of visitors of the PKO.

The functional use and programming of the Bratislava PKO was, from the outset, highly varied. In addition to cultural events like concerts and theatre performances, international expositions, public entertainment, or sports matches, it was also the site for assemblies of the institutions of state power, such as congresses of the Slovak Communist Party (KSS). In fact, in the dramatic days of 27-29 August 1968, the PKO performance hall hosted the exceptional KSS congress right after the occupation of the country by Warsaw Pact troops.

### The PKOJF in Prague

Prague’s Julius Fučík Park of Culture and Leisure (PKOJF) launched its first season at the end of June 1954.<sup>11</sup> It was marked by a lavish ceremony, attended no less by the president of the republic, for the transfer of the reconstructed Palace of Industry, now the Palace of Congresses (i.e., those of the Communist Party) to the authority of the Prague National Committee (arch. Pavel Smetana, 1954).<sup>12</sup> This “gift by the Party to Prague’s citizens”, to cite the description in the official newspaper *Rudé právo*,<sup>13</sup> fully covered for several future years the spatial needs of the institution, now named after



**THE 1946 PRAGUE TRADE FAIR AT THE SITE OF THE FUTURE PARK OF CULTURE AND LEISURE IN PRAGUE**

PRAŽSKÝ VZORKOVÝ VELTRH NA VÝSTAVISKU V ROKU 1946

Source Zdroj: ČTK



**THE BRUSSELS PAVILION AT THE PKOJF DURING THE NATIONWIDE EXPOSITION OF SMALL ANIMAL HUSBANDRY IN 1968**

CELOŠTÁTNA VÝSTAVA CHOVATELOV DROBNÝCH HOSPODÁRSKYCH ZVIERAT V BRUSELSKOM PAVILÓNE PKOJF V ROKU 1968

Source Zdroj: ČTK, photo by J. Karas



**FASHION SHOW IN THE PALACE OF INDUSTRY OF THE PKOJF IN 1953**

MEDZINÁRODNÁ SÚŤAŽ V ODIEVANÍ V PRIEMYSELNOM PALÁCI PKOJF V ROKU 1953

Source Zdroj: ČTK, photo by L. Nebor



**ST. MATTHEW'S FAIR AT THE PKOJF, LATE 1970S**

MATEJSKÁ PŮŤ V PKOJF, KONIEC SEDEMDESIATYCH ROKOV

Source Zdroj: Park kultúry a oddychu Júliusa Fučíka, PKOJF 1983

the Czech Communist journalist executed under the Nazi occupation but more colloquially termed 'Fučíkárna' or 'Julda-Fulda'. While the central hall of the Palace was used, in addition to the Party congresses, mostly for concerts, the two side wings held the role of multipurpose halls suitable for theatre performances, fashion shows, film screenings, or even ballroom dancing. Following the Soviet model, another series of programs focusing on children and youth was prepared outside the Palace of Congresses, either in the open or in the improvised setting of temporary wooden structures.<sup>14</sup>

The grandiose political proclamations of the PKOJF as a focal point for cultivating the masses and raising them to the level of the New Socialist Man clashed throughout the 1950s with the reality of Prague's largely underfinanced development, with the city at the tail end of the regime's investment priorities. The real growth of the park, which (again after the Soviet model) was officially an independent educational organisation, came in the 1960s, mostly appearing in its northern reaches. Most significant in architectural terms was the installation of the Brussels Pavilion, rebuilt here after its great success at Expo 1958, serving as the main exhibition space for the imposing program 'Czechoslovakia 1960' (libretto by Adolf Hoffmeister, design by František Tröster, exhibition architect František Cubr). A broad park boulevard, known as the 'Brussels Path', linked the Brussels Pavilion to another significant building, the planetarium by Jaroslav Fragner, situated physically outside the actual PKOJF complex but sharing its organisational structure and cultural program. Another building, created as part of the celebrations of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II, was the circular panoramic cinema Cirkorama, using 11 projectors turned toward a screen of 264 m<sup>2</sup> to show panoramic scenes of exclusively Soviet provenience. The broader public, from Prague and beyond, most associated PKOJF with the springtime St. Matthew's Fair (Matějská pout) with its spectacular carnival rides – a former Catholic festivity now entirely emptied of any religious connotations that took up residence here in 1963.

### **The PKO and Urban Recreation Zones**

In both Prague and Bratislava, the positions of the respective PKO complexes, at the edge of urban areas close to attractive natural surroundings, worked to strengthen their recreational function. Indeed, even the influence of the Moscow example had an effect here. Expanding the idea of an extensive zone for recreation was, at this time, hardly hindered by the wider spatial relations or the legislative framework of effective urban plans – quite the reverse. From the 1950s on, modernist urban and spatial planners in both cities planned the creation of a large recreational area as an extension of the PKO complexes.

### **The PKOJF as Part of the Recreational Zone of the Troja Basin**

The siting of the PKOJF at the eastern edge of Stromovka matched, from the outset, the ambitious plan for creating a large-scale recreational complex in the Troja Basin alongside the Vltava river, shaped by the steep cliffs on the right bank and the gentler slopes and riparian meadows on the left. In the proposal of the Prague urban plan from 1953, the PKOJF was expected to expand gradually beyond the Old Exposition Grounds, not only to the site of Emperors' Island (Císařský ostrov), the largest of Prague's river islands, which would be the site of the sports facilities, but also the newly planned (yet not opened until after 1989) botanical garden on the opposite bank.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, the first officially approved socialist city plan from 1964 assumed a similar area for recreational terrain serving the entire city, stressing its importance both in terms of the generally rising living standards and shortened working hours and, more directly, with the development of North Town (Severní město), the first high-rise housing estate directly to the north at the Troja Basin's edge.

Bringing these plans for the Troja Basin to an entirely new level was the project of the International Gardening Exposition, prepared at the behest of the federal cabinet by the team of architect Jan Šrámek (Design Institute of Prague City Construction, 1976). The project worked with three basic spaces in mutual contrast. The actual complex of the PKOJF represented the main entrance to the exposition grounds of 320 hectares in total, while also providing most of the exhibition halls. The Palace of Congresses was to be expanded on its rear (northern) side by several pavilions, the roofs of which would form green terraces linking the monumental volume of the Palace with the natural environment of the park.<sup>16</sup> Contrasting with the strict geometric planning of the PKOJF space would be the 'landscape of islands' in the lower section of Stromovka, which would freely merge with the PKOJF: from the Brussels Pavilion onwards, there would be a system of canals and

lakes, unifying the complex while creating separate spaces for the exhibition complexes of the individual national displays. Along this interweaving system of waterways, visitors would move using regular “boat-trams”, departing from a dock directly beside the Brussels Pavilion. Contrasting in turn with the wider area of Stromovka, thematically focused on natural and architectural preservation, was the third, far more futuristic area of Emperors’ Island, including a natural amphitheatre and stage in an artificial lagoon shaped into the outline of a flower.<sup>17</sup> The broader concept of the transformation of the Troja Basin would not only create the space for the International Gardening Exposition, the first to be held in the Soviet Bloc, but itself serve as an exhibit to display the “cultural and civilisational level of the hosting state”, as well as becoming an “intellectual and physical contribution to the environmental problem facing humanity”<sup>18</sup>

After the exposition’s closing, the “landscape of islands” and the boat-trams, along with the Emperors’ Island, would become part of a larger PKOJF, which would also be permanently cleared of its “popular-technical entertainment”, i.e., the fairground rides, for their incompatibility with the aesthetics of Šrámek’s project. Diplomatic and financial complications, in the end, caused the project of the International Gardening Exposition to remain solely on paper. However, later plans for the Troja Basin continued to assume the connection of both Vltava banks and the use of Emperors’ Island for the PKOJF, under the assumption that the section of the island occupied by the city sewage-treatment plant would be freed up and the plant moved outside the city by the year 2000.<sup>19</sup>

Of the extravagant integration projects, the only one to come into reality in the 1980s was the construction of a single footbridge across the Vltava to Troja in 1984 (which in 2017 collapsed with pedestrians on it). The long neglect of the actual PKOJF complex, along with the reduced usage of the Palace of Industry after the completion of the Palace of Culture in Pankrác and, no less, the approaching centenary of the structures led the city administration by the mid-1980s to attempt its revival. The Prague National Committee in 1986 appointed as the director young and ambitious Karel Klíma. He rapidly submitted a plan for the long-term concept of the growth of the PKOJF, which was also approved the same year. Part of the concept was the idea of holding in 1991 a general exposition to commemorate the Jubilee Exposition of 1891, including the creation of a permanent display of scientific-technical progress, under the working title of “Museum of the Future”.<sup>20</sup> The “popular-technical entertainment” would not only be retained but should even be allotted hard-currency funding to purchase new attractions. By this time, the amusement-park section was firmly in the hands of the exceptionally agile Václav Kočka, who smoothly moved between the official Czechoslovak popular culture and highly mobile and internationally connected world of “showman”, travellers, or Roma fair owners.

### **Bratislava’s PKO as the Focus of a New Recreational Zone**

The builders of the Bratislava Park of Culture and Leisure, following Soviet examples, stressed from the outset the integration of the park into its natural setting, more precisely the “use of natural conditions for the recreation and cultivated entertainment of the people”.<sup>21</sup> With this in mind, they even prepared a plan for its further expansion: “Bratislava’s park of culture should reach from the Danube (from the pavilions of the Slovak Trade Fairs) through Bôrik, Vinárky, Mlynská dolina, Slávičie údolie, Bubnovka and Horský Park up to Slavín.”<sup>22</sup> “On this land, there should be constructed over time various facilities and attractions of the Park of Culture and Leisure”, such as a “zoo, public observatory, planetarium, Young Pioneer camp, large natural amphitheatre”.<sup>23</sup> A general plan for the future construction of the PKO was proposed for preparation by the end of 1955 with construction expected to last 10 to 15 years. In the first stage (1955-1956), it would focus on the Danube embankment, then on the ‘Hill Park’ (Horský park) and its surroundings, and finally Mlynská dolina.

For all its grandiosity, the vision of the Park of Culture and Leisure reaching from the Danube to the Lesser Carpathians had a quite realistic basis. The land then occupied by the PKO, which belonged to the city, directly adjoined tracts owned by Comenius University, which already in the 1920s had planned their use for a university campus. The first buildings, a group of dormitories, were built in 1929 (Klement Šilinger). Further construction, however, was first hindered by the Great Depression and then, during World War II, ended by the new proposal assuming a “university city” atop the Castle Hill. In 1942, therefore, this plot with an area of 6.6 hectares, close by the Vydrica stream’s confluence with the Danube, became the site of a botanical garden. It was joined in 1948 with further plots on its northern edge, covering an area of 11 hectares; this section now covered the south-facing slopes above Botanická Street and received the name Mičurinské sady<sup>24</sup>. Hence the

land intended for public cultural-recreational use now had expanded northwards, deeper into the valley of Mlynská dolina. When the brochure *Budujeme park kultúry a oddychu* (We Build the Park of Culture and Leisure) appeared in 1955, work was being finished at its northeastern edge, directly adjoining Horský park, another potential focus for this extensive planned area – the Station of Young Naturalists (Stanica mladých prírodovedcov, Miloš Chorvát, 1955). The first centre for scientific or naturalist-oriented youth groups organised by the Young Pioneers in Slovakia, it included greenhouses, stables, and various other buildings for animal husbandry, along with an amphitheatre and an outdoor swimming pool. Dominating the sizeable campus is the main building, atop a small hill, designed in classicist forms proudly adhering to Socialist Realism.

The same idea of a large cultural-recreational zone was also echoed in the city regulatory plan prepared by the team of Milan Hladký in 1956. However, there were already dissenting voices appearing in the discussion stressing that the “Slávičie údolie and other prospective sites in this area represent hilly terrain not suitable for human comfort and recreation”.<sup>25</sup> Yet the construction of individual facilities in the zone continued. In 1959, work began in Mlynská dolina on the city zoo, loosely connected to the Botanical Garden; it opened for the public on 9 May 1960.

The idea of the larger cultural-recreational zone received its first major setback in the mid-1960s, when Comenius University managed to acquire the funds for constructing its own campus, planned for an area of 56 hectares and running from Botanická Street through Slávičie údolie up to the border of the zoo. Construction began in spring 1966, from the design of architect Vladimír Dedeček. One year later, the administration of the Botanical Garden had to relinquish ownership of Mičurinské sady, thus shrinking the garden back to its original 6 hectares.

A further blow to the functionally and territorially integrated park area was the plan for the city transport system from 1966 assuming the construction of three main ring-roads. One, the highway bypass, was routed directly through Mlynská dolina. Construction of this road began in the 1980s. Connected to this project was the construction of a motorway bridge and its access route, running directly inside the valley and crossing the Danube to the suburb of Petržalka immediately beside the Botanical Garden and the university dormitories. With it, all plans for a recreational zone through Mlynská dolina came to a definitive end.<sup>26</sup> The last proposed idea realised from the original plans was the building of the amphitheatre (Štefan Svetko, Boris Džadoň, 1984) at the side of Machnáč hill near the Station of Young Naturalists.

Further disruption involved not only the ending of the idea of a much larger cultural-recreational zone but also the functional integrity of the PKO on the Danube bank. Along with the completion of the Research Institute of Water Management, which took over one of the original exhibition pavilions, it was weakened by the return of the complex's display functions. Already by 1968, the site hosted the first international exhibition 'Flóra' for flowers and gardening. One year later, it was joined by the international chemical trade fair Incheba, followed later by another such event, the trade fair Coneco. The new buildings required for these exhibitions were planned for seasonal use, usually remaining empty for the rest of the year. Further mixing the park's functions was the addition in the late 1960s of a building for the Office of the Chief Architect of Bratislava (Imrich Barta, 1970), on the site originally planned for the entrance pavilion of the International Danube Trade Fair.

All the same, the entire area of the original cultural-recreational zone was developed and used, up until the very end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in accordance with the City Masterplan by Milan Beňuška from 1963. This plan assumed the priority use of the specific area for city- and national-level public facilities, dispersed construction, and extensive vegetation. The riverbanks were intended for other facilities of citywide importance. The same treatment of the locality was also invoked by the authors of the urban plan from 1988.<sup>27</sup>

### **The PKOs after 1989: Between Neoliberalization and Neroization**

If before 1989 the trajectories of both park complexes remained highly similar, at times even identical, right after the Velvet Revolution their paths separated. While in Bratislava, the relocation of the trade fairs rapidly created the conditions for radical solutions, Prague's PKOJF became entangled in long-lasting disputes arising from the unsuccessful General Exposition of 1991. Bratislava's story moved relatively directly towards the privatisation of the entire public space, while in Prague the public space, despite all the often-bizarre twists, managed to be retained. However, the political



**PKO BRATISLAVA, VIEW OF THE WHOLE AREA, 1966**

PKO BRATISLAVA, POHLAD NA CELÉ ÚZEMIE, 1966

Source Zdroj: TASR,  
Photo Foto: J. Bakala

conditions in both cities were analogous. Neither of the capitals intended to provide their citizens with “culture and leisure” from the public purse to the extent outlined by the previous regime. Similarly, both municipal governments were firmly in the hands of right-wing parties convinced of the superiority of private ownership, if in Prague the situation began to moderate to an extent at the end of the 1990s with the growing success of the Social Democrats.

### **The PKOJF in Prague: The Rebirth of Expositions and Popular Entertainment**

The fate of the PKOJF after the fall of Communism was deeply marked by the project of the General Exposition, planned as a continuation of the exhibitions held in 1791 and 1891. The decision to hold the General Exposition was approved shortly before November 1989 and confirmed by the first democratically elected federal government in spring 1990.<sup>28</sup> The new government also established a 'Company for the General Exposition' and entrusted its guidance to Radim Menšík, a functionary of the Socialist Party, who had promoted the idea even before 1989.<sup>29</sup> As noted by historian Adéla Gjuríčová, the exposition was accompanied from the start by opposition from municipal bodies, not only stimulated by disagreements over the conception but also a material struggle for control of the PKOJF, now renamed simply the Exposition Grounds (Výstaviště).<sup>30</sup> Conceptually, the celebratory retrospective exposition conflicted with the political program of radical anti-Communism dominant in Prague urban politics of the early 1990s, grounded in the idea of a 'scorched earth' from which the phoenix of a new democratic society would arise. In practical terms, no small factor was the reality that the Company for the General Exposition did not contain the 'old-new' management of the Výstaviště under Karel Klíma, who, as mentioned previously, had its own ideas for the use of the site and had been the one who originally prepared the jubilee celebration.<sup>31</sup>

Though the preparation for the General Exposition took place chaotically and under great time pressure, it nonetheless managed to expand the built-up area of the Výstaviště nearly twice over and create – unusually for the Czechoslovak context – an intriguing ensemble of postmodern architecture that met the approval of the era’s professional critics. Alongside several smaller structures and reconstructions, the new Křižík Pavilions arose surrounding the rebuilt Křižík Fountain, along with the Pavilion for Machinery, Aviation, and Astronautics (later the Pyramida Theatre) and even more notably, the rebuilding of the old panoramic cinema as a theatre space. The author of the Křižík Pavilions, Michal Brix, adapted himself, in the somewhat sarcastic words of Rostislav Švácha, to the “Křižík-Cimrman aesthetics”<sup>32</sup> of the original Palace of Industry rather than designing the pavilions as an independent modern work. For Brix, a member of the “Středotlaci” (Moderate Pressure) group and one of the most prominent and most radical postmodernists of the



**CONSTRUCTION OF THE BUILDING  
OF THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF  
ARCHITECT OF BRATISLAVA, 1968**

VÝSTAVBA BUDOVY ÚTVARU  
HLAVNÉHO ARCHITEKTA  
BRATISLAVY, 1968

Source Zdroj: TASR,  
Photo Foto: Š. Petráš



**PKO BRATISLAVA DURING  
THE INCHEBA FAIR, 1980**

PKO BRATISLAVA POČAS  
VELTRHU INCHEBA, 1980

Source Zdroj: TASR,  
Photo Foto: M. Vojtek

1980s, it was nonetheless logical to start an architectural dialogue with the dominant landmark. The pavilions, as the conclusion of a long series of architectural proposals for the northern additions to the Palace of Industry, are arranged according to its central axis. Their terraced roofs and walkways serve a dual purpose: as extended pedestrian areas behind the Palace yet also as part of the seating for the new Křížík Fountain, occupying the site of the original. Directly quoting the visual motifs of the Palace are the industrially conceived freestanding turrets with spiral staircases on the pavilion terraces. A notably different element is the 'Pyramida' of architect Josef Matyáš, emphasising the contrast with the ostentatious decorativeness of the Belle Epoque pavilions and thus, according to the critics of the time, fitting with the overall appearance of the Výstaviště.<sup>33</sup> The same critics also praised the realisation of Theatre Spirála 91, from the workshop of another late-socialist postmodernist team, the architects of the atelier LO TECH (an ironic/self-ironic reference to "high-tech" architecture). Spirála 91 was the radical rebuilding of the old panoramic cinema, with a circular frame for seating installed inside it but retaining the imposing structure of the cupola (Ferdinand Lederer). The gridwork on the façade of the simple vertical cylinder was planned for gradual adaptation through climbing vines and nesting birds. The main architect of Spirála 91, Jindřich Smetana (son of Pavel Smetana, who authored the adaptation of the Palace of Industry for the Communist Party congresses in 1954), later worked on over-all designs for the entire area of the former PKOJF.<sup>34</sup>

The interest expected from exhibitors and visitors in the General Exposition never materialised, in part from the disapproval of most of the news media and Prague's municipal government, which for the entire preparation period warned against its unrealistic plans and economic risks.<sup>35</sup> At the exposition's end, the result was a debt to the Czechoslovak Commercial Bank of nearly one and a half billion crowns and a tangled web of property claims that burdened the Výstaviště for the next two decades. To crown it all, at the event's end the Brussels Pavilion completely burned down, forming the first in a series of never-explained fires that broke out in the complex (the Children's Pavilion in 2002; the wooden replica of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre from 1999 in 2005, finally the left wing of the Palace of Industry in 2008).

The city government of Prague, specifically its department of cultural affairs then headed by deputy mayor and former activist of the semi-dissident group Jazz Section, Jiří Exner, wished to have the ownership of the Exposition Grounds complex transferred from the national government to the city. An act by the Czech National Council on the transfer of state property to municipalities, passed in May 1991, assumed that the property of publicly financed organisations such as the former PKOJF would be assigned to the ownership of the municipal body that financed them.<sup>36</sup> However, the law made the transfer conditional on the agreement of the Finance Ministry – which in this case refused. Transferring the Exposition Grounds to Prague would have thwarted the Ministry's plans for debt relief and subsequent

CONCEPTUAL URBANISTIC  
STUDY OF VÝSTAVIŠTĚ PRAHA  
DEVELOPMENT; LO-TECH DESIGN,  
TOMÁŠ KULÍK A JINDŘICH  
SMETANA, 1998

IDEOVÝ KONCEPT URBANISTICKEJ  
ŠTÚDIE K ROZVOJU VÝSTAVISKA  
PRAHA; LO-TECH DESIGN, TOMÁŠ  
KULÍK A JINDŘICH SMETANA, 1998

Source Zdroj: private archive of J. Exner



privatisation of the Czechoslovak Commercial Bank as the complex's creditor. The newly built pavilions, which were in escrow with the bank, would have been included with the entire complex as part of a privatisation project that would relieve the bank of its outstanding obligations. The city did not wish to concede and invoked another paragraph of the same law that would allow the Ministry of Culture to transfer registered landmarks to the municipality. And so, the cultural board of the city requested that the entire Exposition Grounds be declared a heritage site, appealing to the status of the Jubilee Exposition of 1891. At the moment when the Minister of Culture gave approval, the municipality requested the transfer of the newly protected monument to the city – which the minister promptly did without even informing anyone else in the cabinet. It was to the other ministers' surprise that they learned of the new property relations of the Exposition Grounds, directly from the incumbent mayor Jaroslav Kořán during a cabinet meeting, which brought to an end any attempts at the complex's full privatisation.<sup>37</sup>

With privatisation firmly blocked, the path was now open for a wide range of mutually conflicting players and profit-making strategies, which gradually formed themselves into two essential variants. The first concentrated on the use of the Exposition Grounds as a space for commercial fairs, which would allow for use of its extant capacity without extensive demands for investment, thanks to its significant expansion for the General Exposition. The former director of PKOJF and now head of the grounds as a publicly funded institution, Karel Klíma, used his extensive team, his knowledge of the complex, and his previous contacts in municipal government and the state-enterprise sector to become an irreplaceable figure. The use for the complex as exhibition grounds also suited Václav Kočka, who had run the St. Matthew's Fair during the Communist era under the heading of 'popular technical entertainment'. Through the wide-reaching network of the Czech 'showman' or travellers community, i.e., the operators of carnival entertainment, Kočka managed during the 1990s to run weeks-long events with hundreds of fairground rides, each year bringing in over a million visitors. During the period of the St. Matthew's Fair, it was practically impossible to use the outdoor space of the Exposition Grounds for any other purpose, a situation which could allow for the exposition function but much less so for a cultural-recreational one. Political support for both Klíma and Kočka was offered by Prague's Social Democrats, first the strongest party in the opposition and soon after part of the governing coalition. Klíma became head of the party's district organisation for Prague 7, the district immediately adjoining the Exposition Grounds, and eventually chair of the Prague branch. Kočka, in turn, was the employer of the wife of the party's national head, Miloš Zeman, even during his term as prime minister. He was also an advisor to the deputy mayor for finances Jiří Paroubek, who himself later became a social-democratic prime minister.<sup>38</sup>





**THE KŘIŽÍK PAVILIONS AND THE PALACE OF INDUSTRY DURING THE 1991 GENERAL EXPOSITION**

KŘIŽÍKOVE PAVILÓNY  
A PRIEMYSELNÝ PALÁC POČAS  
VŠEOBECNEJ VÝSTAVY V ROKU 1991

Source Zdroj: ČTK,  
Photo Foto: J. Černý



**PHOTO TAKEN THE DAY AFTER THE FIRE OF THE PALACE OF INDUSTRY AT THE VÝSTAVIŠTĚ PRAHA IN 2008**

FOTOGRAFIA PRIEMYSELNÉHO  
PALÁČA DEŇ PO POŽIARI  
V ROKU 2008

Source Zdroj: Profimedia,  
Photo Foto: M. Růžička

The second profit-making strategy focused on the use of the former PKO as an cultural-recreational centre – one that did not have any links to the earlier uses of the complex or to Communist-era social capital, but instead stood upon the surprising success of popular musicals. In 1993, actor and producer Stanislav Aubrecht launched a Czech-language version of the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* in the Spirála Theatre, watched by 850,000 spectators in nearly 1,300 stagings. This commercial hit, followed by many similar musicals, both adaptations and Czech originals, encouraged Aubrecht and his company *Musicals* to hope for rights to the entire former PKOJF and its operation it as a cultural-recreational facility.<sup>39</sup> This management would have taken the form of a long-term lease with relatively low rent, but with the obligation to redress the debt left by the General Exposition and make intensive investments in its structures. For this project, architect Jindřich Smetana (the author of the Spirála Theatre) and several colleagues from the now dissolved studio *Lo-tech* drew up several architectural studies, including an extensive multiplex cinema on the site of the fire-destroyed Brussels Pavilion and a new structure for a permanent display of Alfons Mucha's enormous painting-cycle 'The Slav Epic'.<sup>40</sup> Though this plan lacked institutional political support, it was helped significantly by its congruity with the interests of the newly emerging (and politically well-backed) Letňany Exposition Grounds, on Prague's far northern edge, with a strong interest in shifting the commercial expositions from the former PKOJF to its own complex.

However, before Aubrecht's firm *Musicals* could reach agreement on financing its project, there entered into the picture in 2001 the company *Incheba*, which had purchased the bankruptcy estate of General Exposition Company, i.e. all the pavilions built for the General Exposition of 1991 from the bankruptcy trustee at a fraction of its value.<sup>41</sup> *Incheba* thus gained a major trump card in its negotiations with the city. In the end – against the will of mayor Jan Kasl and agreed while he was abroad on official business – the municipality concluded with *Incheba* a strikingly disadvantageous leasing contract, allegedly partially brokered by Václav Kočka, who in turn was appointed assistant to *Incheba*'s Russian-born director Alexander Rozin.<sup>42</sup> According to this contract, Prague would buy back the pavilions from *Incheba* at a nearly fifty-percent markup; the purchase price would be rendered to *Incheba* through a twenty-year lease for an annual rent of 60 million crowns, with a five-year payment holiday at the outset. One year later, the Exposition Grounds were struck by the devastating flood of August 2002, which completely destroyed most of the relevant pavilions and severely damaged the underground sections of the sports facilities in the upper half of the area. Citing the flood damage, *Incheba* then signed an amendment to the contract with the city, reducing the annual lease payments to ten million crowns and extending the lease period to sixty years. Additionally, the instalment plan was itself altered to ensure that *Incheba* would have the use of the

Exposition Grounds free of charge for the next thirty years, as opposed to five. The city's leasing contract with Incheba copied to a significant extent the prepared yet never concluded contract with Aubrecht's Musicals, with the difference that while Incheba's commercial trade fairs did not require any major investments into the former PKO, the plan for Musicals would have made such funds inevitable. Another similarity with the Musicals project was that Incheba also aimed at acquiring Mucha's Slav Epic and exhibiting it in the Palace of Industry. Toward this end, Incheba's owner Alexander Rozin used the funds from the flood insurance to purchase the chateau in Moravský Krumlov where the Slav Epic was on display. As such, the city government, the formal owner of the paintings, was again confronted with a done deal and forced, under pressure from Incheba, to arrive at a compromise.

Another dramatic shift in the fate of the Exposition Grounds came in 2008, when a fire broke out in the Palace of Industry, causing the entire left wing to be consumed by flames within an hour after the first alarm. Its central section, though, survived intact without collapsing, in part because the two wings of the Palace were structurally independent, since the original plan had been to rebuild the structure elsewhere after the Jubilee Exposition. The fire was followed by a sharp dispute of who should receive the insurance payment of nearly two billion crowns, which was claimed both by the city government as the building's owner, and by Incheba, which had arranged the insurance policy as the tenant. In the end, the disagreement was resolved by another contract between Incheba and the city, in which Incheba kept the insurance money and agreed to the obligation to assist in the building's reconstruction.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, the poor electoral showing of the Social Democrats in Prague's municipal elections, losing their position in the governing coalition already by 2006, was starting to undermine the extant power relations at the Exposition Grounds. In fact, the "Kubice Report" from the police organised-crime unit, published shortly before the 2006 elections, indicated a direct connection between the business activities of the Kočka family at the Exposition Grounds with the leadership of the social democrats on one side and international criminal networks on the other. One week before the fire in the Palace of Industry, at a book launch for the current Social Democratic prime minister Jiří Paroubek, businessman Bohumír Ďuričko shot and killed Václav Kočka junior, in line to take over the fairground empire from his father. In the next Prague city council elections in 2010, the clear winner was the oppositional centre-right party TOP 09, on a program explicitly attacking the corruption present in the previous councils both under the right-wing Civic Democrats (ODS) and the social democrats. Punning on Kočka's surname, one of the slogans of the new council was "The Exposition Ground is not for cats". The weakened position of Václav Kočka eventually led, two years later, to the abrogation of the contract with Incheba, when the council – where there no longer was any Social Democratic representation – successfully cited Incheba's failure to meet contractual obligations, having promised to invest tens of millions of crowns into the site's reconstruction.<sup>44</sup>

The loss of power for the Exposition Grounds' previous management was not universal: among the managers of the new city body assigned control of the complex was Karel Klíma, purportedly for his organisational capabilities and longstanding knowledge of the site, yet after 2010 the Exposition Grounds were relieved both of Incheba and the fairground empire of Václav Kočka.

### **The PKO in Bratislava: Dampening of Activity, Sale, Liquidation**

Right in the first months after November 1989, the Bratislava city council began work on rationalising its administration and verifying the financial sustainability of individual municipal institutions. Its actions were significantly influenced by the then-prevalent idealistic conviction of the beneficial force of private ownership and its ensuing obligations of responsibility.<sup>45</sup> As a result, the city began to divest itself of properties and institutions that it could not (or rather would not) keep operating. This trend gained in force after the local elections of 1994. The position of mayor was won by a member of the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) Peter Kresánek (1951), an art historian and former heritage activist, while the city council was dominated by a range of parties on the right (KDH, DS and DÚ, with support of the SDL). As such, the intensity of the privatisation and deregulation forces only increased. Among the most closely followed institutions was the PKO as a budgetary institution of the city. In parallel, preparations were underway for the move of the PKO's primary leaseholder, the international trade fair company Incheba. The new exposition grounds on the opposite bank of the Danube (Vladimír Dedeček) were finished in 1995 and Incheba

moved in during the same year. Shortly after, the subject of the PKO became a regular item in the city council sessions for Bratislava.

In September 1995, the councillors debated a proposal for resolving the PKO question that listed three possibilities: transformation, privatisation, or long-term leasing.<sup>46</sup> Two months later, in November 1995, a further document was submitted to the council: “Transformation of the PKO Bratislava, first phase: transition to shutdown program”. Practically speaking, this process would have meant ending all activities in the performance hall and firing 50% of the staff. Another point of emphasis was the “final rectification of land rights”. However, the council did not approve the materials and entrusted the mayor with “ensuring the preparation of documents for further decisions on the PKO” and “submitting to the city council a draft for a business project”.<sup>47</sup> In the spring of 1996, the municipality assigned the preparation of an urbanistic-architectural study for the rebuilding of the PKO to the architecture studio AOCR. The development study, drawn up by architect Vladimír Zigo, represented the first formulation of the idea that the extant buildings of the PKO would be replaced by a new construction.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, the municipality prepared its own “Proposal for the Use of the PKO Complex in Bratislava”, which assumed the division of the complex into two parts. The first part, closer to the city centre and occupied at the time by the headquarters of the Office of Chief Architect, a miniature golf course, and a rose garden, would be the basis for the new joint-stock company “Commercial and Social Centre” (*Obchodné a spoločenské centrum, a.s.* – OSC a.s.). The second part with the performance, social and entrance halls would continue to function as a budgetary organisation of the city. While the proposal sparked strong objections from several councillors, it was nonetheless approved in November 1996.<sup>49</sup> With this step, the route was open to the future sale of the first part of the PKO.

At the start of 1997, two attempts were made during council meetings to submitting materials for the formation of a joint-stock company. Before the second attempt, scheduled for 20 February 1997, councillors Jozef Házy and Jozef Košta sent their colleagues a letter requesting that they “save the PKO complex for the residents of our city”.<sup>50</sup> Doubting the good intentions of the municipal government in handling the PKO, they noted that the subject of business for the new OSC a.s. was almost identical to that of the PKO – implying that the city, in their view, was creating a competitor for its own organisation. At the letter’s end, they proposed bringing the matter to a conclusion through five specific points: preserving the PKO status quo through the rest of the electoral term, clarifying the land situation, creating a limited-liability corporation for rebuilding and enlarging the complex, and reevaluating the architectural-urban intentions on the PKO grounds and the conditions of the city set by the creators of the study.<sup>51</sup>

However, the councillors nonetheless approved the founding of OSC a.s. in April 1997. At the same time, they approved its founding capital as the sum of 118,596,000 crowns, provided by the real estate situated in the cadastral district of Bratislava-Old Town. These properties were the first part of the PKO complex, total area 23,849 m<sup>2</sup> and the building housing the Office of the Chief Architect.<sup>52</sup> The company OSC a.s. was entered into the Commercial Register in August 1998. Its board contained several individuals close to the dominant parties in the council: businessman and later council member (for SDKÚ-DS) Pavel Blažej, businessman and later board member of the National Property Fund Igor Grošaft, who entered politics through the Christian Democratic Youth Movement and was nominated by SDKÚ, and Ivan Šulko, businessman and later chair of the Bratislava 1 District Office. All three were also later connected to various suspicious activities with municipal public property and non-transparent acquisition of their own wealth.<sup>53</sup> Members of the governing commission were businessmen Miroslav Čutka and Ivan Krajniak, along with member of the Commission for Urban and Strategic Planning, Environment and Construction of Bratislava Peter Ďuračka, who was later convicted of fraudulent VAT deductions. The joint-stock company stated as its subject of activity first of all “completion of residential and public buildings”, with the organisation and performance of cultural events listed only in fifth place.

During 2000, the elected officials found for this new company a “strategic partner”, this being J&T Global a.s.<sup>54</sup> A proposal for the sale of 118 596 shares, i.e., all the shares in OSC a.s. to J&T Global for 118,596,000 crowns was approved by the council on 8 February 2001. In turn, the new owner agreed to the obligation of organising an urban-architectural competition for the relevant site that would be grounded in the conditions set by the municipal authorities.<sup>55</sup>

The open conceptual urban-architectural competition “Bratislavské nábrežie” (Bratislava Embankment) was launched by J&T Global in March 2001. The land addressed by the competition



**BRATISLAVA EMBANKMENT,  
WINNING COMPETITION DESIGN,  
2003**

BRATISLAVSKÉ NÁBREŽIE, VÍŤAZNÝ  
SŮŤAŽNÝ NÁVRH, 2003

**Source** Zdroj: J&T Global – katalóg  
verejnej urbanistickej-architektonickej  
súťaže Bratislavské nábrežie, 2001



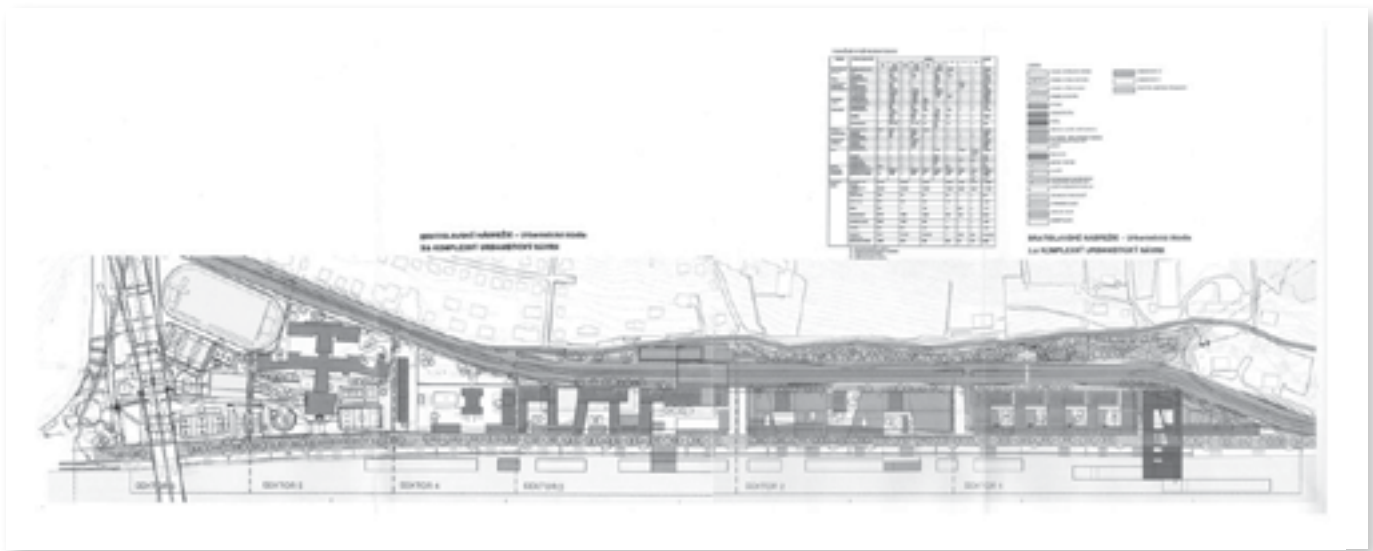
**PKO BRATISLAVA, VIEW OF THE  
RIVERFRONT PROMENADE, 2009**

PKO BRATISLAVA, POHLAD NA  
NÁBREŽNÚ PROMENÁDU, 2009

**Photo** Foto: Henrieta Moravčíková

reached from the Office of the Chief Architect building up to the Lafranconi Bridge, containing the entire complex of the PKO. The localisation program of the competition listed a series of public functions such as a congress centre or sports facilities. Heading the competition jury was the prominent Prague architect Miroslav Masák. When the jury held its meeting on 4 and 5 October 2001, though, a problem became clear right on the first day. Two jury members from the governmental sector cast doubt on the ethics of the competition, stating that its conditions did not match the requirements of the municipality, and walked out of the discussion. Later, one of the jurors cited as the source of the conflict precisely the demolition of the buildings of the PKO.<sup>56</sup> All the same, the evaluation continued uninterrupted, with the unoccupied positions soon taken by two other municipal employees. The jurors examined ten competition designs, each of which considered the removal of all extant buildings on the site and their replacement with new compact construction. Individual designs diverged only in the form of the new-built structure, where the main variant was the extent to which they exceeded the height limit set by the urbanistic study, the placement of the vertical accent, and the overall level of enclosure. In the end, the jury awarded no first prize, offering second prize as the highest award to the team of Miroslav Frecer, Ján Kostrian, Tadeáš Matoušek, Paul Philips and their assistants from the studio Aukett. Then, the winning atelier prepared an urbanistic study that again failed to respect the original guidelines issued by the city: increasing both height limits and density index so that the volume of construction grew in comparison to the previous study by nearly one-half.<sup>57</sup> This design was brought up for public debate on Monday, 14 April 2002. And, indeed, it did not win much public support, with participants in the discussion “voicing essentially the same fears as with the competition designs. The buildings were excessively high and hid the Castle Hill, thus changing the entire historic form of the city’s ancient landmarks; the project did not take sufficient care with the surroundings of a major Jewish monument, the tomb of Chatam Sofer.”<sup>58</sup> Other critiques were made by the councillors, which they presented at another discussion in June 2002 where they demanded the study be revised.<sup>59</sup> With the same intent, the city also issued in September 2002 a standpoint to J&T Global. The company, though, did not intend to surrender easily. Seizing the initiative was a new corporate entity, Bratislavské nábrežie s.r.o., founded in April 2001 and having as its partners J&T Global, Peter Korbačka and the former city company OSC a.s.. In October 2003, it sent the Department of Urban Development a proposal for changing the height zoning near the Bratislava embankment. At the same time, a public display opened showcasing a new design for construction on the riverbank, which J&T Global had ordered from the Dutch architect Erick van Egeraat.<sup>60</sup>

By November of the same year, Egeraat’s designs for new buildings on the Danube had been fully presented to the public. A multi-coloured model and realistic visualisations depicted the embankment lined with (essentially) enclosed city blocks, with an actual height ranging now from 8 to 14 floors. One contrast with the urbanistic study, however, was the proposal in the first sector for



**URBAN-PLANNING STUDY FOR THE BRATISLAVA EMBANKMENT, COMPLEX URBAN DESIGN, AUKETT 2002**

URBANISTICKÁ ŠTÚDIA  
BRATISLAVSKÉ NÁBREŽIE,  
KOMPLEXNÝ URBANISTICKÝ  
NÁVRH, AUKETT 2002

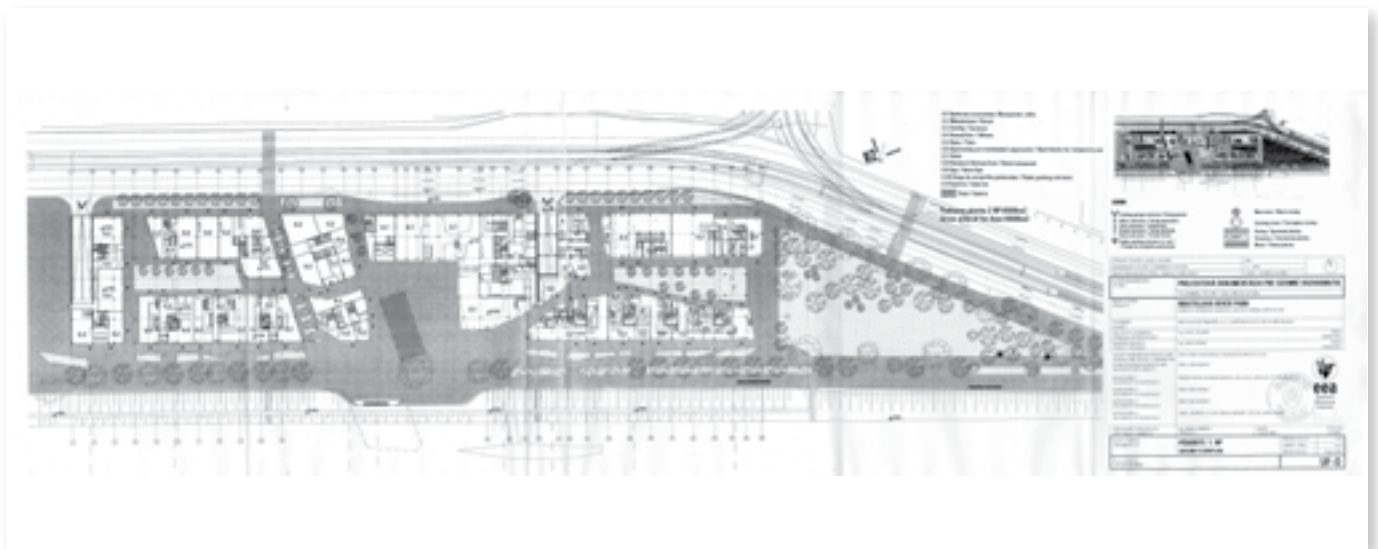
Source Zdroj: Archive of the Municipality of Bratislava

a relatively large share of housing alongside its offices, hotel, and shopping areas: a change not only in the volume of the construction but no less its function. Following Egeraat's impressive showmanship, it seemed by the end of 2003 that the council and the public were already on good terms with the idea of the new embankment. And so it proved. In December 2003, the council debated the "Proposal for a Change in the City Council Ruling no. 857/2002 dated 20. 6. 2002 and Supplement to the Statement on the Urbanistic Study 'Bratislavské nábrežie' ". They agreed to delete from section B paragraph 2, in other words precisely the paragraph that defined the volume and height limit for construction.<sup>64</sup> This approach, ignoring the competition outcomes and demanding a near-doubling of the construction volume was justified by the then head of OSC a.s., Peter Korbačka, as follows: "The original idea, in our view, did not create a true city, so we turned to an international architect who has experience with similar sites."<sup>62</sup>

In the meantime, the management of J&T, as the chief actor in transforming the embankment, began to consider the entire area of the former PKO. By spring 2004, it was clear that the plan involved the demolition of all the PKO buildings, provoking active opposition from Bratislava's environmentalist circles. In June 2005, the Bratislava committee of the Slovak Union for Nature and Landscape Protection (SZOPK) issued a declaration of its disagreement with the city's relinquishment of the land under the PKO, stressing that "an ethical city transfers property in a transparent competition".<sup>63</sup> Still, the council approved a resolution at its meeting on 30 June 2005 that approved the sale of the remaining land under the PKO buildings to the company Henbury Development.<sup>64</sup>

Hence, during the ensuing years the municipality of Bratislava gradually transferred the entire area of the PKO to Henbury Development, a company close to J&T. At the same time, though, public discussions began to note the links J&T had to city politicians from the centre-right coalition of KDH and SDKÚ-DS, most of all Andrej Ďurkovský, who had been mayor since 2002. After repeating his victory in the local elections in December 2006, he began to face speculations that his campaign, estimated at costing "somewhere between 20 and 30 million crowns" had been "getting contributions from people with J&T".<sup>65</sup> Supporting this conjecture was the knowledge that Mayor Ďurkovský had, shortly before the election in November 2006, sent the Bratislava-Old Town construction office a request for permission to demolish the buildings on the site of the PKO, which was then city property. The reason listed was that "their structural-technical state was unsuitable and in terms of their construction design did not meet the requirements of reconstruction" [sic!]. The approval for destruction of the PKO was granted in April 2007 by Andrej Petrek, the newly elected district mayor for the coalition SDKÚ-DS, OKS, DSS, DÚ, SZ. With this step, a new chapter began in the history of the PKO, including the preparation of the design for the multipurpose complex River Park II (2007), completing the similar complex River Park I (2010) and sweeping away all the buildings that once formed Bratislava's Park of Culture and Leisure.

Destruction of the PKO started on 14 April 2009. For Henbury Development, it was a demonstrative act, since the demolition permit was just about to expire. The act of demolition set in



**BRATISLAVA RIVER PARK,  
PLANNING PERMIT  
DOCUMENTATION, GROUND  
FLOOR, ERIC VAN EGERAAT 2004**

BRATISLAVA RIVER PARK,  
PROJEKTOVÁ DOKUMENTÁCIA  
PRE ÚZEMNÉ ROZHODNUTIE,  
PRÍZEMIE, ERIC VAN EGERAAT 2004

Source Zdroj: Archive of the  
Municipality of Bratislava

motion a wave of anger throughout the city's public. Most active here was the association "Bratislava otvorena" (Open Bratislava), which sent an open letter to the city council demanding the rescue of the PKO. Yet while the public made its support for preservation amply clear, the councillors themselves were anything but unified on the matter. In the end, the ambivalence within the council was shown by a resolution passed in December 2009, approving the "future long-term lease of part of the complex River Park II to the benefit of the city".<sup>66</sup> With this step, the councillors de facto admitted their acceptance of the destruction of the current buildings. And, in the words of a later council statement, "through the decision for the lease, the elected representatives of the city ended the controversy over the PKO on a practical note."<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, though, the council meeting where the latter statement was approved saw the absence of up to 34 councillors, among them the leading opponents of the PKO's destruction such as Jozef Házy or Peter Beňuška.<sup>68</sup>

Supported by further experts and activists, the 'Open Bratislava' initiative strove, all the same, to avert the dire fate awaiting the PKO. In February 2010, they submitted a second request to register the PKO buildings as national cultural monument. The Slovak Monuments Board, however, delayed judgment until the demolition process essentially rendered any protected status unrealistic. In parallel, a petition was circulated for preserving the PKO, supported by tens of thousands of signatories, among them leading cultural or scholarly figures or even the highest-level elected officials of the time, such as Iveta Radičová, Mikuláš Dzurinda or Ivan Mikloš. In turn, the petition's initiators were confronted with an offended reaction from the Bratislava city authorities, claiming that "the problem was significantly misused on a political level by the continual blame of the municipal representatives and the provision of untrue or distorted information to the media."<sup>69</sup>

Against these efforts, only a few months later in July 2010, Mayor Ďurkovský and Henbury Development signed "Amendment no. 2" to the Cooperation Contract concluded on 2.6.2006. The subject of the amendment was imposing the obligation on the seller, in other words the city, to "allow the purchaser demolition work", to "completely empty the buildings" and "transfer the buildings to the purchaser for the purpose of realising demolition work".<sup>70</sup> Fulfilment of this obligation took place in November 2010. Andrej Ďurkovský, as the outgoing mayor, sent on 26 November 2010, one day before municipal elections (in which he was no longer a candidate), a letter addressed to the Bratislava Cultural and Information Service (BKIS) – a city organisation in charge of cultural development and publicity, situated in the PKO buildings – ordering that they leave the spaces of the PKO by 10 December. Released to the media, the letter sparked more angry reaction from the public, including a personal intervention from the then prime minister, Iveta Radičová. A meeting held at the PKO, involving Je-T representative Peter Korbačka and the newly elected Bratislava mayor Milan Ftáčnik, reached agreement that for the moment, demolition would stop.<sup>71</sup>

Ftáčnik, who had won the municipal elections as an independent candidate with support from the ostensibly leftist party Smer, also began to examine the possibilities for preventing the destruction of the PKO shortly after assuming office. Protection for the PKO was also demanded by the





**PROMOTION OF THE RIVER PARK PROJECT IN THE BRATISLAVA NEWSPAPER, APRIL 2006**

PROPAGÁCIA PROJEKTU RIVER PARK V BRATISLAVSKÝCH NOVINÁCH, APRÍL 2006

Source Zdroj: Bratislavské noviny, 9(17), 2006

new district mayor for the Old Town, Tatiana Rosová, elected from the more conservative SDKÚ-DS and replacing Andrej Petrek in the post. Her argument was based on the effective city masterplan, where this area was reserved for public facilities of city-wide or nationwide significance. Support for Mayor Rosová was also forthcoming from the city council at its meeting on 15 February 2011. At this point, the municipal side still truly believed that Henbury Development would be willing to return ownership of the PKO buildings to the city. For Henbury Development, though, such a step would imply violation of the contract, and they insisted on its fulfilment.<sup>72</sup> Throughout 2011, a court dispute continued between Henbury Development and the city, with the latter party attacking the contract's validity along with other decisions made by the previous municipal governance. The verdict of the Bratislava 1 District Court, though, at the end of the year insisted that the contract was valid. The city, in turn, appealed to the Regional Court. And in defiance of the court ruling, Mayor Ftáčnik continued to work towards protecting the PKO both in its buildings and function. During 2012, he also launched a plan to exchange the land under the PKO for the adjoining land of the Research Institute for Water Management, which was owned by the national government.<sup>73</sup> Yet this attempt also failed. Meanwhile, the empty PKO buildings continued to decay, with a fire even breaking out in August 2013. By the last year of Ftáčnik's term as mayor, there were several further meetings between the city and Henbury Development, during which the council repeatedly backed the mayor; again, to no success. It was at the same time that the national anti-corruption office investigated charges against former mayor Andrej Ďurkovský for attempted breach of trust in property management; similarly, it remained impossible to prove Ďurkovský's own culpability in the matter.

Shortly after the next city elections, in which the (narrowly) victorious mayoral candidate was the independent lawyer Ivo Nesrovnal, Henbury Development addressed a communique to the city in November 2014. It stated that the company withdrew from the contract with the city concluded in 2006, thus placing the city under threat of ensuing financial sanctions as compensation for impaired investment. The incoming mayor addressed this challenge following his professional training. By December 2015, documents were presented at the council meeting providing a legal analysis of the problem, a draft resolution, and a 47-page Rectification Agreement between the city and Henbury Development. After a heated discussion, involving accusations of secret political deals and corruption, the councillors decided to assent to the sizeable document – even though they had received it only one hour before the meeting's start and without any prior discussion in the relevant municipal committees – and approved the rectification, including the sale of the PKO buildings, as a matter of special concern per Article § 9a, paragraph 8, subheading e) of Cabinet Ruling no. 138/1991 Coll., on municipal property as later amended.<sup>74</sup> With it, the city relinquished

## DEMOLITION OF THE BRATISLAVA PKO BUILDINGS, 2015

BÚRANIE BUDOVI BRATISLAVSKÉHO  
PKO, 2015

Photo Foto: Henrieta Moravčíková



the ownership rights to the buildings for the sum of 1 Euro, consented to a wide range of obligations that limited its possibilities of intervention in the planning process for the site, and gained only the promise for landscaping of the riverside promenade after completion of construction and the chance to use for public purposes only one building, the planetarium and mediatheque, for 30 years.<sup>75</sup> The Slovak author and journalist Martin M. Šimečka, then serving as editor of the Czech weekly *Respekt*, remarked in reference that “the scandal of demolishing the PKO would have started a revolution in Prague.”<sup>76</sup> In Bratislava, though, no revolution took place.

### The Current Situation of the Former PKOs in Bratislava and Prague

Behind the current situations of the former complexes of the Parks of Culture and Leisure in Prague and Bratislava lay diverging sequences of decisions by political actors and conceptions of administering public property in the first two decades after 1989, ownership disputes, individual ambitions of financial groups, differing statuses for the buildings in terms of heritage protection, or even external factors such as, for instance, interest from international investors in the given site. As the capital of Czechoslovakia with a population over a million, Prague was attractive for the global market even before 1989; correspondingly, its political elites were more cautious regarding outside investment. Bratislava, by contrast, had to fight for foreign investment with its near-neighbour Vienna, only coming into the scope of the global market slowly and by the turn of the millennium. The differing sizes of the cities, as well, determined the framework of the free-market agents during the dynamic privatisation of city land. In Prague, the range of actors was wider, and their mutual rivalries often led to the collapse of privatisation attempts. Bratislava’s business scene was more restricted and its participants mutually connected, meaning that in the end they tended to support each other. Another striking difference was the approach of institutional heritage protection towards both complexes. The major part of the buildings in Prague were completed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, being declared cultural heritage already by 1958. And by 1981, the entire area was covered by the protected zone of the Prague urban heritage district, reinforced in 1992 with the status of a “buffer zone for a world heritage site.”<sup>77</sup> Most of the buildings in Bratislava, however, were seen more as utilitarian construction, and throughout the later 20<sup>th</sup> century treated as such. The first proposal for heritage protection for Bratislava’s PKO came from the activists fighting for its preservation at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – which never arrived. And so, while the Prague complex was being restored, its counterpart in Bratislava was being demolished.



## Bratislava: Culmination of the Privatisation of Public Space

The multipurpose complex River Park I was completed in 2010. Its final appearance took the form of a technocratic variation of the lavish forms of Egeraat's "New Baroque". The complex consisted of a hotel, offices, and residential space. On the ground floor were several retail units, cafes, or restaurants; the latter businesses extending their seating areas into the exterior and thus shrinking the already narrow strip of public space along the Danube still further. After the completion of the massive anti-flood barrier, the river "promenade" was left as a confined corridor, divided into one lane for pedestrians and another for cyclists.

As for the form of the second part of the new Bratislava embankment, it was under continual change from 2003 onward. The ever-new variants reflected not only the state of negotiations between the city and the landowners, but equally the wider economic situation. In December 2006, there appeared an urbanistic study assuming the construction on the riverbank of 293 luxury flats, hotels and other accommodations with an increased capacity of 540 beds, office spaces with a floor area of 73,800 m<sup>2</sup>, shops with a floor area of 7400 m<sup>2</sup>, restaurants with a capacity of almost 1700 tables, cultural facilities with around 2650 seats, and finally a congress centre seating 2500. Up to 15,300 m<sup>2</sup> of the site would be reserved for sports. From this, the team of Almássy, Bouda, Čečetka, Masár, Zigo drew up a preliminary spatial-functional plan for River Park II.

Even in 2011, part of the architectural profession still believed that the original PKO buildings had a chance for integration into the future construction, thus creating a formally as well as functionally hybrid structure.<sup>78</sup> Even within Henbury Development, there were proposals for a range of alternatives, including one that assumed the preservation of the entrance hall to the cultural-social section of the PKO. In the words of the then chief architect Ingrid Konrad, it could serve as a public ballroom. Similarly stressing the need for a public function in the future development was her predecessor as chief architect, Štefan Šlachta.<sup>79</sup>

However, the condition for a public function in the form of a civic facility rapidly shifted. In December 2011, the city council approved changes and amendments to the urban plan that also affected the PKO. In this case, the key change was the site's characterisation, which practically speaking encouraged the reduction of its public use. The functional determination of the site, essentially, was shifted from "public facilities of city-wide and nationwide importance" (the highest possible level of public use) to "mixed construction" (housing with some public facilities, which could even be merely a hotel or restaurant). Henbury Development, in turn, adjusted its investment plan to match the new conditions, with a new design prepared by the architects from GFI. In December 2015, shortly before the city council approved the controversial rectification agreement between Bratislava and Henbury Development, the design was displayed to a selected audience in the Hall of Mirrors in the Primates' Palace.

At present, the assumed form of construction in the embankment section for River Park II aesthetically corresponds to the standard level of real estate production in the housing and office segments. Yet it matches the parameters set by the urban plan for this site to the maximum extent. In the first section, occupying the site of the demolished PKO social-cultural hall, the plans assume four 9-storey slab volumes arranged into a block. The second part, for the site of the former sports hall, has the character of semi-enclosed blocks, which range from five storeys on the embankment to terraces rising up to nine floors. In between the two sectors is a planned public space. At first, it was to be occupied by the planetarium and mediatheque. A city council resolution from summer 2023, though, proposes the creation of a park. Considering that the councillors decided on this alternative without any wider professional discussion is a telling encapsulation of the entire process of the 'de-publicizing' of the grounds of the former PKO.

## Prague: A Return to the PKO

As matters transpired, the situation in Prague recalls the diametric opposite of Bratislava. In 2013, the Institute of Planning and Development (IPR) prepared a new study, headed by architect Martin Stára, for the future of the Exposition Grounds, intended as a return to earlier concepts of integrating the complex into the wider spatial context.<sup>80</sup> Instead of turning northward to the Troja Basin, though, it would open primarily in the opposite direction, southward for better communication with the Trade Fair Palace and the adjoining residential neighbourhoods of Holešovice and Letná. The plan involved the removal of the fencing in front of and surrounding the Palace of Industry, which would itself form the new entrance element, providing direct access from the metro stations

**THE RIVER PARK DEVELOPMENT  
AFTER COMPLETION, 2013**

RIVER PARK KOMPLEX  
PO DOKONČENÍ, 2013

Photo Foto: Andrej Neuherz



to the south and east, and outlining thematic zones within the park that mirrored the historic methods of using the space. Tomáš Ctibor, the IPR director, remarked with reference to the plan that it would strengthen the diverse range of functions from sports through entertainment to culture; moreover, he added, it might be worth changing the name from the somewhat limiting 'Výstaviště', recommending with only slight exaggeration a return to the original Communist title of 'park of culture and leisure', which in his view more accurately matched its planned function.<sup>81</sup> Preservation and further development of the complex was also assumed by the city's Metropolitan Plan, completed in 2018. The Exposition Grounds are treated in the plan as a self-contained unit with city-wide cultural, exhibition, and recreational functions. Moreover, as the plan assumes the construction of an extensive residential district in the Nové Bubny brownfield close by the site, its recreational function is further strengthened. The area of the grounds is marked in the plan as a "recreational locality with construction allowed". In other words, the plan permits further building in the Exposition Grounds, though respecting the historical composition with the Palace of Industry as the central landmark, and exclusively for recreational and sports functions. The northern section of the park is, considering the risk of flooding, reserved for temporary pavilion-type structures only.

At the time of writing, an extensive and thorough restoration process is underway at the former PKOJF, directed by the newly established organisation Výstaviště Praha under Pavel Hübl, himself an employee of the Exposition Grounds in the early millennium but not involved in its more dubious power structures. The Palace of Industry is receiving a ground-up restoration, with its destroyed left wing being reconstructed to match its original appearance above ground and extensive facilities for the entire structure below. Also rebuilt at great cost are the structures from the 1990s: the Křížík Pavilions are now finished and work is underway on an ambitious adaptation of the Spirála Theatre in cooperation with the architects of the original 1991 design. The open northern section has been successfully landscaped as an open park; thanks to its current connection to Stromovka, it enjoys extensive use, particularly by families with small children. The permanent fairground installation, including the 1965-vintage rollercoaster, was removed, though the St. Matthew's Fair with its hundreds of carnival rides continues each year.<sup>82</sup>

### **Conclusion: Privatisation, Politics, Experts**

How, then, did the 'legacy' of socialism, understood in the sense of accumulated capital that unexpectedly turned up in the hands of new actors after the regime change, manifest itself in the diverging fates of both complexes after 1989? The Bratislava PKO, if compared to its Prague counterpart, actually seemed better prepared by the previous regime for the neoliberal order: while the decision to situate the PKO close to Bratislava's centre and build its extensive anti-flood protection made it an irresistible investment magnet once Communism collapsed, the more distant location and non-existent flood barriers in Prague laid the foundations for a notably different method of generating profit. While in Bratislava, it is possible to view the neoliberalisation of public space



**RECENTLY RESTORED MILAN NEDVĚD'S KINETIC FOUNTAIN FROM THE 1980S**

NEDÁVNO ZREKONŠTRUOVANÁ KINETICKÁ FONTÁNA MILANA NEDVĚDA Z 80. ROKOV

Photo Foto: Petr Roubal



**CONSTRUCTION OF THE REPLICA OF THE FIRE-DESTROYED LEFT WING OF THE PALACE OF INDUSTRY IN PRAGUE VÝSTAVIŠTĚ, 2023**

STAVBA REPLIKY VYHOŘENÉHO ĽAVÉHO KRÍDLA PRIEMYSELNÉHO PALÁČA NA PRAŽSKOM VÝSTAVISKU, 2023

Photo Foto: Petr Roubal

in its crystalline form, in Prague the accumulation was gained through a variety of methods, of which the most radical could be termed 'Neroization' (creating profit through arson). In a similar vein, there was the influence of heritage protection or more accurately its absence, which in Bratislava allowed much greater leeway in working with the given site. And even in the ideological level, the socialist 'legacy' had its presence in the case of both PKOs. For the anti-Communist Zeitgeist of the 1990s, the 'park of culture and leisure' was an entity completely different from all other parks. The stigma of the Communist past allowed for actions towards the PKO nearly without any limitations, something that for other types of public space, not to mention public parks, was impossible. And again, for the Bratislava PKO, the stigmatising Communist 'legacy' played strongly into the hands of the developers, while the Prague PKO resisted such labelling thanks to the presence of its historic background and built layer from the Czech nationalist movement at the end of the 19th century.

All the same, the socialist 'legacy' operated in a dynamic relation to other, purely post-Communist phenomena that also pointed in differing trajectories. Both municipal governments during the 1990s were in the hands of right-wing parties, but the degree of neoliberal orthodoxy in the cities was different. For more complex and complicated problems, such as the PKOJF site, Prague's city hall in this decade often chose leasing over sale or direct administration. Typically, municipal decisions did not aim towards privatisation (even though more than a few offers were made for the PKOJF itself),<sup>83</sup> but instead shifting the responsibility for the property to the more distant future, in which the city would be expected to have greater capacity for administering it. In the right-wing agenda of Prague's urban politics, municipal property lacked the strongly negative connotations of state property, consistently described as 'Communist' or 'dead' property. Against ineffective state ownership, a city could play the role of a truly responsible owner, though in fact far less so as an entrepreneur. The long-term leases that the city concluded, often at a great disadvantage to itself, created a system of quasi-ownership, notably following practices and habits inherited from state

socialism.<sup>84</sup> Further, privatisation through leasing was a method to avoid the entry of international capital and thus new players from abroad (occasionally stated explicitly) and exploit to the full earlier networks from state-socialist times. In addition to various criminal motivations, the idea embodied, at least for certain municipal politicians, a sense of responsible treatment of city property as a common good to be protected rather than sold off. The reference point for the decisions of Prague's councillors was less that of Margaret Thatcher's Britain, but the Greater Prague of the 1920s and 1930s under lord mayor Karel Baxa. And indeed, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the dominant force in Prague's municipal governance through the 1990s, were reluctant even on the national scale to launch the direct sale of state enterprises, preferring instead the tortuous path of 'coupon privatisation', the goal of which was the sale of the assets "nto Czech hands'. Against all the free-market rhetoric, the city of Prague was looking less for a 'responsible private' owner than for a specifically Czech owner. And since such an owner did not exist in the undercapitalized Czech market, it was henceforth necessary to follow the path of privatisation-by-lease.

In Bratislava, the municipal representation turned to the full privatisation of city property right at the start of the 1990s. The highest volume of sales, though, came in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the city governance was in the hands of the right-wing coalition between the Slovak Democratic Christian Union and the Democratic Party (SDKÚ-DS). During the two terms in office of mayor Andrej Ďurkovský, the council approved the sale of most of the city's cultural and social

**RECONSTRUCTION OF THE  
PALACE OF INDUSTRY IN PRAGUE  
VÝSTAVIŠTĚ, 2023**

REKONŠTRUKCIA PRIEMYSELNÉHO  
PALÁČA NA PRAŽSKOM  
VÝSTAVISKU, 2023

**Photo** Foto: Petr Roubal



**RECONSTRUCTION OF THE  
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REKONŠTRUKCIA PRIEMYSELNÉHO  
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VÝSTAVISKU, 2022

**Source** Zdroj: Profimedia,

**Photo** Foto: P. Topič



facilities and much of its land. Indeed, the sale of the PKO de facto took place entirely under the authority of Andrej Ďurkovský, considering that the first discussions on the sale began in 1995 in the Bratislava-Old Town district council, where the office of district mayor was held by Ďurkovský himself. And the definitive conclusion of the transfer of the PKO as former city property to private hands arrived at the end of his second term as mayor of the city. Occurring in parallel was a series of untransparent land swaps through which the city relinquished its centrally situated localities to the benefit of private entities. The key interested parties for this city property, however, were not international investors but Slovak financial groups emerging in the 1990s and the following decades. The decisive factor in the process of selling off city property was, in the end, the neoliberal ideology of the elected officials and the conviction that only private owners could ensure the development of previously city-held property that, in the view of the city hall and a majority of council members, had been neglected and poorly managed. This conviction was more than widespread in Slovak society at the time. It is worth recalling that in spring 2003, the national cabinet ordered the Minister of Culture to prepare a draft for legal measures and timetable for the sale of the unfinished new Slovak National Theatre. The acting finance minister, Ivan Mikloš, justified this step by arguing that both completion and operation of the new theatre building would be too expensive.<sup>85</sup> In the end, the sale never took place, but the incident is an accurate depiction of the force of such neoliberal assumptions in Slovak political life at the time.

With this in mind, it is worth noting a certain paradox in the frequency with which Bratislava's municipal authorities cited nearby Vienna as the reference point. "We'd go for consultations to Vienna"<sup>86</sup> – but the policies they enacted, in the end, were entirely opposed to the vision in the Austrian capital. In the wider context, we might even state that Vienna and Bratislava, for all their close geographic proximity, represent within Central Europe two entirely opposite models for urban governance. While in Vienna, the city is present as an active owner shaping urban development or housing policy, in Bratislava the government has relinquished this role and functions essentially as one minor actor in the free market.

Nevertheless, Bratislava's relationship to Vienna, or more precisely the need for its elected officials to deal with a historically peripheral status relative to the nearby metropolis, did make its own imprint on the events around the PKO. Bratislava's municipal governments after 1989 remained unusually attentive to any plan that could increase the city's importance in the region. And hence they rejected "everything non-functional, whatever [in their view] had lost its value, swept away outdated neighbourhoods or infrastructure and replaced them with new prefabricated real estate".<sup>87</sup> Removing the former public cultural and social benefits of the PKO for new commercial construction is one perfect illustration.

Another major factor in the privatisation and subsequent destruction of the PKO was the connections between local politicians and the new financial groups with an economic interest in city property. Heads of political parties, elected officials, directors of new-founded banks or founders of investment groups were all part of Bratislava's somewhat small-town-like social sphere, often friends, former fellow students, or relatives. It was such close personal ties that shaped the choice of selecting new owners, appointing the governing boards of city enterprises, or even assigning posts in the municipal administration. The process of privatising city property was thus shaped by the sense that close personal ties and mutual trust could be the basis for the good handling of former public property. Left open is the question of how much this belief represented idealistic conservative values, or how much it formed a residue of the "friendly favours" prevalent under state socialism. Contrastingly, in Prague – as shown above – the financial groups and powerful interests were more varied, increasing the unpredictability of the environment as well as the transaction costs. In the chaotic setting of Prague's political and business world, it was often easier to destroy a competing profit model than to build one's own.

A similar situation prevailed with regard to urban-planning expertise. Though in both cities, the Office of the Chief Architect was abolished, in Prague the intellectual legacy and personal remnants of the expert teams continued to survive in various positions, and the expert level of decision-making never completely vanished. For the fate of the Prague Exposition Grounds, a major factor was its presence in all post-1989 urban development and masterplans as an indivisible unit with a clear cultural and recreational service for the entire city.

Bratislava, however, saw expert professional institutions dismissed as relics of socialism, with all trust placed in independent experts. A telling summary of the prevalent practice for acquiring

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expert materials is given by former mayor Peter Kresánek: “we got rid of the Office of Chief Architect, after all it was only an academic workplace”, and “I assigned it to my friends”.<sup>88</sup>

The process of the 'creative destruction' of the PKO in Bratislava, in short, cannot be ascribed solely to the semi-legal manoeuvrings of the persons then in municipal government, but equally to a combination of circumstances: the nationwide enthusiasm for privatisation, the emergence of new political parties that acquired the finances for their operation primarily from the privatisation process (in Bratislava these being the Christian Democratic Movement - KDH and the SDKÚ), the deficient legal system and various business entities (J&T Global, Henbury Development) that could use the holes in the legislation to their advantage. Also contributing significantly to the process was the absence of urban planning (abolition of the Office of Chief Architect), or more specifically inconsistency in implementing planning measures and the scant regard paid to public interest (absence of protected zones, no public discussions...). Yet the motor powering the privatisation of the PKO was, in the end, the vision of direct profit to be gained from the location of the site: proximity to the historic centre and a prominent position on the Danube bank made the PKO complex a highly desirable article, for which the price could only grow over time and thus guarantee exceptional gain without great investment.

Similarly, after 1989 both cities saw the surrounding urban fabric expand into the vicinity of both complexes. In Bratislava, the PKO became a part of the city structure: the extant and planned new real estate join the historic core with its western suburb, thus completely obliterating it as a layer in the urban fabric. In Prague, the new construction integrates the complex into the city, where it remains present as a public park. As such, the socialist 'legacy' in Prague still remains in the possession of the city public, if undergoing extensive gentrification. The 'legacy' in Bratislava, though, most strongly benefitted the societal forces that directly opposed its ideological grounding: the public becoming private, the space for all becoming a space for the few. The PKO heritage in Bratislava can be said to have undergone a 'textbook' capitalization; in Prague, though, the process is a more sophisticated variation, where the preserved park serves more as an attraction for gentrified housing inside neighbouring former industrial localities.

**1** The site was chosen because the area already has its own history for exhibition use, but also it was part of Holešovice and Bubny, twin towns that merged with Prague in 1884 (the first and for a long time the last such a merger). The inclusion of these norther sections allowed Prague for the first time to reach beyond its medieval fortifications and find locations for functions with greater demands for space (slaughterhouses, gasworks, rail stations, etc.). KUNŠTÁT, Miroslav. 2005. Před branami Výstaviště: glosy ke stavebnímu a uměleckému rozvoji Prahy 7 na sklonku 19. století. In: *Magister noster: sborník statí věnovaných in memoriam prof. PhDr. Janu Havránkovi*, CSc. Praha: Karolinum, pp. 565–572.

**2** MOUTVIC, Miroslav. 2000. *Pražské vzorkové veletrhy 1920–1951*. Praha: Scriptorium.

**3** Návrh na změny a doplnění přehledného regulačního a zastavovacího plánu pro část území Prahy - VII - Holešovic s přílehlými částmi území Prahy - VIII - Libně a Prahy - XIX - Bubenče. [169/a] Státní regulační komise pro Prahu a okolí. Archive of the Prague Institute of Planning and Development (hereinafter AIPR). See

also Celkový regulační plán, 1924, State Regulatory Commission for Prague and Surroundings. AIPR.

**4** HALÍK, Pavel. 1995. Architektonická avantgarda a tradice českého funkcionalistického urbanismu. In: Bazac-Billaud, L. (ed.). *Problematika města: Praha a její nové čtvrtě*. Praha: Francouzský ústav pro výzkum ve společenských vědách, pp. 45–51; LUKÉŠ, Zdeněk and KRATOCHVÍL, Petr. 2012. *Der Prager Funktionalismus = Prague Functionalism. Tradition und zeitgenössische Anklänge = Tradition and Contemporary Echoes*. Praha: Galerie Jaroslava Fragnera.

**5** Originally known as the “Oriental Market”, it focused on strengthening international trade and the export of domestically produced industrial goods. From its founding in 1921, the trade fair was situated on the left bank of the Danube at the city’s southeastern edge. This position, near the freight and commercial port and close to the rail-freight depot, initially met its aim perfectly. Yet as the trade fair expanded, it grew in its need for exhibition space, not only visitor capacity but equally architectural form and position within the

city. Hence, the municipal government decided in 1931 that the exposition grounds would be moved several hundred metres further upstream. KOMORA, Pavol. *Medzinárodný dunajský veľtrh v Bratislave 1921–1942*. Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum.

**6** HRDINA, Miroslav. 2010. Niekoľko poznámok o postavení architektúry v rámci prvej Slovenskej republiky (1939 – 1945). Few notes on the position of architecture during the first Slovak republic (1939 – 1945). *Architektúra & urbanizmus*, 44(1–2), p. 93.

**7** The entrance building was placed closest to the city and oriented perpendicular to the riverbank. It formed a dynamic composition of three operational units. In the office section were (alongside the administrative areas) a theatre hall and conference room. The second part contained a restaurant and café, with an open terrace reaching out above the river itself. The space below the restaurant, raised atop massive columns, formed the symbolic entrance to the complex, containing the ticket booths and entry turnstiles. Dominating the entire ensemble was the tower-like communication core, with a viewing ramp

winding up to the very top. Directly behind the entrance building would have been the Pavilion of the State, serving as an exhibition space for presenting the cultural, technical, and economic development of the nation.

**8** On Moscow’s own park of culture and leisure, viz. esp. KUCHER, Katharina. 2007. *Der Gorki-Park. Freizeitkultur im Stalinismus 1928–1941*. Weimar/Wien: Böhlau Verlag Köln. Also, specifically SCHLÖGEL, Karl. 2023. Gorky Park: A Garden for the New Human Being. In: Schlögel, K. *The Soviet Century. Archaeology of a Lost World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 399–412; SHAW, Claire. 2011. A Fairground for “Building the New Man”: Gorky Park as a Site of Soviet Acculturation. *Urban History*, 38, pp. 324–344.

**9** *Budujeme park kultúry a oddychu*. 1955. Bratislava: Tvar, p. 8.

**10** *Budujeme park kultúry a oddychu*, 1955, p. 9.

**11** Formally, the park was already established through a cabinet decree of 15 September 1953, confirmed one month later by the Council of the Central National Committee of Prague.

- 12 The palace had been adapted for the previous Party Congress in 1949 by Jiří Kroha, also the author of the ambitiously conceived plans for the Slavic Agricultural Exposition that immediately preceded the Congress. Viz. KROHA, Jiří, 1949. *Architektura socialistického budování*. *Architektura ČSR*, 8(5–6), pp. 129–138; ELAMN ZARECOR, Kimberly. 2007. Stavoprojekt a Ateliér národního umělce Jiřího Krohy v 50. letech 20. století. In: Macharáčková, M. (ed.). *Jiří Kroha (1893–1974): Architekt, malíř, designér, teoretik v proměněných umění 20. století*. Brno: Muzeum města Brna – ERA, pp. 328–365.
- 13 Rudé právo. 1954. Park kultury a oddechu Julia Fučíka zahajuje novou sezónu. *Rudé právo*, 26 June 1954, p. 1.
- 14 WIRTH, Zdeněk. 1955. *Park kultury a oddechu Julia Fučíka v roce 1955*. Praha: STN; Rudé právo. 1954. V parku kultury a oddechu. *Rudé právo*, 27 June 1954, p. 1.
- 15 Návrh směrného územního plánu 1953. City Planning Commission of Prague, Office for the Urban Plan of the City of Prague, 1953. AIPR. The PKOJF was localised in this area of Prague even in the first postwar urban plan from 1948, viz. Návrh směrného plánu hlavního města Prahy, 1948. Planning Commission for the City of Prague and Surroundings, 1948. AIPR.
- 16 Moreover, the addition would mean a radical improvement for the logistics of the Palace of Industry with a horizontal cargo lift along the entire length of both wings.
- 17 Oriented to face the Troja Chateau, the amphitheatre would have offered theatre performances along with a water-and-light show. The banks of the Vltava would have been connected with delicate steel bridges which, in the event of flood, could be turned in the direction of the river's current.
- 18 Ideový návrh rozvoje Trojské kotliny se zaměřením na Světovou zahradní výstavu. Projektový ústav Výstavby hl. m. Prahy, 1976. AIPR.
- 19 Návrh územních a hospodářských zásad pro vypracování územního plánu zóny Trojská kotlina. Útvar hlavního architekta hlavního města Prahy, 1985. AIPR.
- 20 Návrh rámcové koncepce Parku kultury a oddechu J. Fučíka. Informace pro poradu vedoucích funkcionářů NVP ze dne 15.12. 1986. F. poradby vedoucích funkcionářů NVP. Archiv Hlavního města Prahy (Prague City Archives – hereinafter AHMP).
- 21 *Budujeme park kultúry a oddychu*, 1955, p. 3.
- 22 *Budujeme park kultúry a oddychu*, 1955, pp. 12–14. Slavín is Bratislava's hilltop monument to the Soviet Army for the liberation of Slovakia from Nazi and collaborationist rule in 1945 [translator's note].
- 23 *Budujeme park kultúry a oddychu*, 1955, p. 14.
- 24 Literally, "Michurin Orchards" – named after the Soviet botanist Ivan Michurin [translator's note].
- 25 IMRICH, Štefan. 1956. K územnému plánu Bratislavy. *Projekt*, 1(12), p. 3.
- 26 A similar development threatened Prague's PKOJF. The city transport conception proposed, directly beside the park, a massive interchange stack for the six-lane central Prague motorway ring, running between Stomovka and Letna and the North-South Motorway. In part because of massive protests for protection of Stromovka, it was never realised, and the central ring was later routed through the Blanka Tunnel to emerge only on the opposite bank of the Vltava (though, during its construction in 2008, there were two massive cave-ins in Stromovka itself).
- 27 MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta, SZALAY, Peter, HABERLANDOVÁ, Katarína, KRÍŠTEKOVÁ, Laura and BOČKOVÁ, Monika. 2020. *Bratislava (Un)Planned City*. Bratislava: Slovart, pp. 130–143.
- 28 Usnesení vlády České a Slovenské federativní republiky ze dne 23. dubna 1990 č. 278 ke zprávě o současném stavu příprav na Všeobecnou československou výstavu v Praze 1991. Národní archiv, Praha (dale NA), fond (f.) Úřad vlády ČSR/ČR, Praha – Usnesení vlády.
- 29 The committee, chaired by Jozef Mikloško, contained high-ranking governmental officials along with the mayors of Prague and Bratislava. Mikloško recalled his active participation in preparing the General Exposition in his memoirs. MIKLOŠKO, Jozef. 2000. *Veľmi prísne tajné – Ako sme boli slobodní (1989 – 1999 spoza kulís)*. Bratislava: Daco, 684 p.
- 30 GJURIČOVÁ, Adéla. 2021. Městská válka bez vítěze. Všeobecná československá výstava v Praze v roce 1991. *Střed*, 13(2), pp. 85–100. Alongside "Výstaviště", other suggestions for a changed name still included the title "Park kultury", which per its proponents better matched the current and future uses of the area (along with one proposal for the title "Prágr"). AHMP, f. Zápisy ze zasedání rady a plána NVP, rady a zastupitelstva hl. m. Prahy, inv. no. 1044, 4. (mimořádně) plenární zasedání NVP, 26. 4. 1990.
- 31 Karel Klíma proposed the exhibition already in 1986. Viz. Návrh rámcové koncepce Parku kultury a oddechu J. Fučíka. Informace pro poradbu vedoucích funkcionářů NVP ze dne 15.12. 1986. F. poradby vedoucích funkcionářů NVP. Archiv Hlavního města Prahy (Prague City Archives – hereinafter AHMP).
- 32 Důvodová zpráva k Usnesení rady Zastupitelstva hlavního města Prahy č. 1491 ze dne 21. 12. 1999. f. Zápisy
- al Exposition and the Výstaviště management is testified for instance by the minutes from their common meeting on 22 May 1991: "JUDr. Hušák, ignoring the protocol, declared that 1) at the afternoon press conference he will announce that the exhibition is financed by debt, as would have been done by the Bolsheviks (...), 2) the general secretary of the exhibition is incompetent and should resigne this very evening. Ing. Menšík reminded him that he was in charge of the meeting. JUDr. Hušák answered: "Mr. General Secretary, for God's sake, go f... yourself." Personal archive of J. Exner. Unprocessed. AHMP. (Aleš Hušák, then financial director of Výstaviště, later became an infamous CEO of the main Czech betting company Sazka which went bankrupt in 2011, in 2016 he ran an anti-immigration campaign for the Czech Senate under the slogan "a machine-gun for every family"). The Prague City Council strongly took the side of the Výstaviště management, see for instance: Usnesení rady Zastupitelstva hlavního města Prahy č. 465 ze dne 13. 9. 1991. f. Zápisy ze zasedání rady a plána NVP, rady a zastupitelstva hl. m. Prahy. AHMP.
- 33 ŠVÁCHA, Rostislav. 1991. Křížikovy pavilony. *Architekt*, 37(16), p. 3. The second reference is to Jára Cimrman, the fictitious Czech genius of the Habsburg fin-de-siècle in the comedies of Zdeněk Svěrák and Ladislav Smoljak from the 1960s and subsequent decades [translator's note].
- 33 ŠVÁCHA, Rostislav. 1991. Pavilon pro strojírenství, letectví a astronautiku. *Architekt*, 37(16), p. 7.
- 34 DOUBNER, Karel. 1991. Laterna animata. *Architekt*, 37(16), p. 11. See Ideový koncept urbanistické studie k rozvoji Výstaviště Praha. Lo-Tech Design, 1998. Personal archive of J. Exner. AHMP.
- 35 Interview with Jiří Exner, 5 October 2023, Prague.
- 36 Act no. 172/1991 Coll.
- 37 Interview with Jiří Exner, 5 October 2023, Prague.
- 38 Another link to the Social Democrats was the company producing musicals in the theatre Pyramida after the Incheba takeover, which used the Communist-era connections of Václav Kočka from the previous state cultural agency Pragokonzert to icons of the era's popular culture like František Janeček or Karel Gott. Another figure of pre-1989 pop culture, singer Michal David, was in fact a family relation of Kočka's. Srov. např. SPURNÝ, Jaroslav. 2006. Paroubek a jeho Kočka. *Respekt*, 17(24), pp. 3–7.
- 39 Důvodová zpráva k Usnesení rady Zastupitelstva hlavního města Prahy č. 1491 ze dne 21. 12. 1999. f. Zápisy
- ze zasedání rady a plánu NVP, rady a zastupitelstva hl. m. Prahy. AHMP.
- 40 Ideový koncept urbanistické studie k rozvoji Výstaviště Praha. Lo-Tech Design, 1998. Personal archive of J. Exner. AHMP.
- 41 The contract between bankruptcy trustee and Incheba of 19 June 2000 forms an appendix to the document Nedůsledný postup hl. m. Prahy a jeho organizace Výstaviště Praha při scelování majetku v areálu Výstaviště Praha. Personal archive of J. Exner. AHMP.
- 42 Interview with Jan Kasl, 22 September 2023, Prague. See also Usnesení rady hlavního města Prahy číslo 0239 ze dne 13. 2. 2001 k předložení návrhů smluv ohledně majetku hlavního města Prahy. AHMP. The purchase and lease contracts were both signed two days later, February 15, 2001. See Smlouva o smlouvě budoucí kupní č. SPB/58/01/000589/2001, Nájemní smlouva č. NAO/58/01/000588/2001. Personal archive of J. Exner. AHMP.
- 43 There were in fact more than a few additional disadvantageous contracts at the Exposition Grounds. For example, the Sports Hall was leased to controversial businessman Antonín Charouz for a symbolic 1 crown per year. A former racecar driver turned auto dealer, Charouz was also a co-owner of the collapsed bank IPB, which gave him a loan for 7 billion crowns that was never repaid.
- 44 One example of Incheba's efforts to invest the least quantity of funds into the complex is the post-flood "Study for Renewal and Development of the Exposition Grounds in Prague 7 – Holešovice", Key-Tech, 2002, AIPR. The project assumed the demolition of nearly all the flood-damaged structures and the construction of a completely uniform covering for the northern area to the rear of the Palace of Industry – a space that had already been addressed in many previous studies. At minimal cost, it would have ensured the expansion of the exhibition space and resolved the problem of water seepage into the Křížík Pavilions.
- 45 This historical circumstance is also addressed in the contribution by Matěj Spurný in the current issue, pp. 226–249.
- 46 Council Meeting 28.9.1995, ruling no. 156/1995.
- 47 Reg. no. MsZ 57, file Zápiska zo zasadnutie MsZ dated 23. 11. 1995 (Obsah Bod 5 a 6, pp. 68 – 99, Park kultúry a oddychu (PKO), prechod do útlmového režimu a doplnenie zriaďovacej listiny (výbër) + file Zasadnutie MsZ dňa 23. 11. 1995, "Pozvánka, Bod 5 Návrh transformácie PKO Bratislava. Uznesenie č. 192/1995". Bratislava City Archives.

- 48** Analýza úzmenoplánovacej prípravy územia PKO a RIVERPARK." Prepared by Silvia Gálová, 1 June 2009, p. 1. Archive of the Municipality of Bratislava.
- 49** City Council meeting 28.11.1996, resolution no. 410/1996 [online]. Available at: <https://zastupitelstvo.bratislava.sk/mestske-zastupitelstvo-hlavneho-mesta-sr-bratislavy-1994-1998-zasadnutie-28111996/bod-1/> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
- 50** Letter from councillors Jozef Házy and Jozef Košta dated 19 February 1997, addressed to the Bratislava City Council. Bratislava Old Town Archives.
- 51** Házy-Košta, p. 12.
- 52** City Council meeting 3.4.1997, resolution no. 503/1997 [online]. Available at: <https://zastupitelstvo.bratislava.sk/mestske-zastupitelstvo-hlavneho-mesta-sr-bratislavy-1994-1998-zasadnutie-03041997/bod-13/> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
- 53** Discussed in the daily press at the time: viz dailies *SME*, later *Denník N*.
- 54** The company was founded in July 1999. Its board members were then Ivan Jakabovič, Jozef Tkáč, head of the Investment and Development Bank, and Peter Korbačka, who was the board's chair.
- 55** City Council meeting 8.2.2001. Resolution 492/2001 [online]. Available at: <https://zastupitelstvo.bratislava.sk/uznesenia/uznesenie-492-2001/> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
- 56** The departure of two members from the jury meeting is recalled by Ivan Görtler. GÜRTLER, Ivan and FEČÍK, Maroš. 2003. Erick van Egeraat na bratislavskom nábreží. Interviewed by Henrieta Moravčíková, *Arch*, 8(11), p. 34.
- 57** Construction height in Sector 1 could reach 6 to 8 floors, with a single high-rise structure of up to 24 floors allowed. Sector 2 had its construction height set at 5 – 7 floors, sector 3 at 4, sector 4 at 6 and sectors 5 and 6 at only 2. The construction density index in sectors 1 and 2 was maximally 0.70, in sector 3 0.50, in sectors 4 and 5 0.40 and in sector 6, 0.20.
- 58** (mi, dro). 2002. Projekt nábrežia občanov zase sklamal. *Sme*, 17 April 2002 [online]. Available at: <https://bratislava.sme.sk/c/516596/projekt-na-brezia-obcanov-zase-sklamal.html> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
- 59** Bratislava City Council resolution 857/2002 [online]. Available at: <https://zastupitelstvo.bratislava.sk/mestske-zastupitelstvo-hlavneho-mesta-sr-bratislavy-zasadnutie-20062002/bod-13/> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
- 60** (hK). 2003. Erick van Egeraat na bratislavskom nábreží. *Arch*, 8(11), pp. 34–37.
- 61** City Council resolution no. 243/2003 [online]. Available at: <https://zastupitelstvo.bratislava.sk/mestske-zastupitelstvo-hlavneho-mesta-sr-bratislavy-zasadnutie-1122003/bod-5/> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
- 62** SEDLÁK, Miro. 2004. Na dunajskom nábreží sa Je-T zapáčilo. *Reality Trend*, 16 July 2004 [online]. Available at: <https://reality.trend.sk/komercne-nehnutelnosti/dunajskom-nabrezi-j-t-zapacilo> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
- 63** ŠIMONČÍČOVÁ, Katarína. 2005. MV SZOPK nesúhlasí s tým, ako mesto predáva PKO. *Zachráňme PKO – patrí kultúre a občanom* [online]. Available at: <https://pko.estranky.sk/clanky/tlacove-spravy-a-stanoviska/mv-szopk-nesuhlasi-s-tym-ako-mesto-predava-pko.html> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
- 64** City Council resolution dated 30. 6. 2005, no. 719/2005 [online]. Available at: <https://zastupitelstvo.bratislava.sk/mestske-zastupitelstvo-hlavneho-mesta-sr-bratislavy-zasadnutie-30062005/bod-1/> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
- 65** HANUS, Martin. 2011. Pád Andreja Ď. *Týždeň*, 29 January 2011 [online]. Available at: <https://www.tyzden.sk/casopis/8078/pad-andreja-d/> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
- 66** City Council resolution dated 17.12.2009, no. 832/2009 [online]. Available at: <https://zastupitelstvo.bratislava.sk/mestske-zastupitelstvo-hlavneho-mesta-sr-bratislavy-2006-2010-zasadnutie-17122009/bod-12/> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
- 67** KRÁKOVÁ, Dorota. 2010. Ochránari navrhujú PKO opäť medzi pamiatky. *Sme*, 4 February 2010 [online]. Available at: <https://bratislava.sme.sk/c/5224722/ochranari-navrhuj-pko-opat-medzi-pamiatky.html> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
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- 73** Materiál do MsZ 22. 12. 2012. Personal archive of the author.
- 74** Of the 45 councillors, only a close three-fifths majority necessary for approval voted in favour: – 28 councillors for, 13 against, 3 abstaining, 1 not voting. Bratislava City Council resolution dated 10. 12. 2015 no. 350/2015. Available at: <https://zastupitelstvo.bratislava.sk/152968-sk/mestske-zastupitelstvo-hlavneho-mesta-sr-bratislavy-zasadnutie-10122015/bod-7/#uznesenie-152969> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
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- 80** Výstaviště Praha. Teze pro připravovanou koncepci. Kancelář veřejného prostoru. Útvar rozvoje hl. m. Prahy, 2013; Výstaviště Praha. Materiál k návrhu koncepce budoucího využití. Útvar rozvoje hl. m. Prahy, 2013. AIPR.
- 81** LAUDER, Silvie. 2014. Návrat kultury a oddechu. Zchátralé pražské Výstaviště možná vstupuje do nové éry. *Respekt*, 25(35), pp. 26–29.
- 82** In July 2022, the company Výstaviště Praha took over the administration of the nearby Holešovice Market, once the city hall managed to win its longstanding dispute with the previous leaseholder, Delta Center, which gained the market through a fifty-year lease in 1995 and controversially allowed a brothel to operate on the premises. Thanks to the effective management of the reconstruction of the former PKOJF, the city was promised the rapid transformation of another large public space in Holešovice and the synergy of the two. For the Holešovice Market, an international architectural competition was organised; the winning architect was Martin Stára, author of the new development conception for the Výstaviště.
- 83** For instance, the Prague Council meeting on 14 June 1990 discussed three offers by companies ATC Austrian Tourism Consultants, YT+T Praha a.s. and CI-Consulting GMBH. These offers were result of longer-term negotiations that started already before the fall of communism. See 14. schůze rady NVP, 14. 6. 1990. f. Zápisy ze zasedání předsednictva, rady, pléna a zastupitelstva ÚNV, NVP a HMP (1980-94). AHMP.
- 84** Cf. for instance ŠMÍDOVÁ, Olga. 2012. Vlastnictví a kvazi-vlastnictví bytů za socialismu a jejich postsocialistická mutace. In: Olivier, A. *Cahiers du CEFRES N° 11. Původní a noví vlastníci* [online]. Prague: CEFRES, pp. 116–124. Available at: <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01510712/document> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
- 85** SITA, NULL. 2003. Predaj novostavby SND nebude patriť k plusom tejto vlády. *Sme*, 9 October 2003 [online]. Available at: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/1126101/predaj-novostavby-snd-nebude-patrit-k-plusom-tejto-vlady.html> <https://domov.sme.sk/c/1126101/predaj-novostavby-snd-nebude-patrit-k-plusom-tejto-vlady.html> (Accessed: 17 December 2023).
- 86** Interview by Matěj Spurný, Peter Szalay and Henrieta Moravčíková with Peter Kresánek, Bratislava, 6 April 2023.
- 87** MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta. 2010. Bratislava: A city with no character? *Architektúra e urbanizmus*, 44(1–2), p. 39.
- 88** Interview by Matěj Spurný, Peter Szalay and Henrieta Moravčíková with Peter Kresánek, Bratislava, 6 April 2023.