

# UNDER THE SKIN OF MONUMENT CARE

## POD RÚŠKOM PAMIATKOVEJ STAROSTLIVOSTI

Martina Jelínková

In April of this year a conference was held under the title “Monuments and Monument Care in Czechoslovakia and Other Central European countries in the Second Half of the 20th Century”, organized by four cooperating institutions – the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, the National Heritage Institute and the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

The conference was divided into four thematic sections, which included more than thirty submissions from leading art historians, theorists, professionals and architects from seven countries, including Slovakia.

The aim of this event was to commemorate the development and approaches of monument care in the second half of the 20th century with the aim of making comparisons across individual countries of Central Europe. The issue of monument care research is one of the priorities of the research concept for the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, and one of the outputs of the institute's activities is the recent publication *Theoretical Foundations of Monument Care on the Threshold of the 21st Century*, which has come out of working meetings at the Czech Technical University in Prague.<sup>1</sup>

Even the first thematic section, entitled *Architecture and Urbanism*, was more than a mere historical probe into the past. As discussed in the submissions, the development of the approach to creation in an environment of heritage preservation is a current problem even today. Terms such as “preservationist architecture”<sup>2</sup> as a conservation concept that minimizes the author's creative assumptions or the initiating, modernist or contrastive method as a departure leading toward possible contemporary inputs were regularly invoked in all the submissions of the participating Czech scholars. This debate is a kind of recurring exchange of views on the appropriate way to intervene in the historical substance of a building or

an entire urban area, yet one not necessarily related only to generational exchange,<sup>3</sup> but also to technical and economic possibilities, as addressed by Milena Hauserová, a practicing architect in the period of the second half of the 20th century.

If we accept the view of the amplitude of these two directions, as claimed by the scholar Martina Mertová, we can easily define the stage reached by our current opinion about the interventions in the preservationist environment, when we are often witness to corrections through aesthetic reconstruction<sup>4</sup> and do not hesitate to restore an earlier historical appearance to listed buildings; moreover, we understand under the term “history” simply the period of construction before the 20th century, which seems to us the most valuable. As the historian of architecture Rostislav Švácha suggests, we are thus moving away from, for example, the historical phase of monument care, which also enabled contrasting interventions by architects.

Here, there arises a very important question of truth, which was expressed in connection with the method of heritage reconstruction in the discussion after the announcement of submissions within this section. The sense of truthfulness that monument care should follow, as a social scientific discipline corresponding to all currents, not only the opinion of the professional public, is clearly worth addressing.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the Department of Monument Care should also take responsibility in the case of the sustainability of the restoration of a historic building in terms of its long-term active functioning for society, a concept also enshrined in the Venice Charter.<sup>6</sup>

The second thematic section, entitled *Legislation and Institutions*, was the richest in terms of international representation. Nine speakers from six European countries spoke, thanks to which it was possible to form a clear comparison between the various developments in institutionalization and legislation in architectural

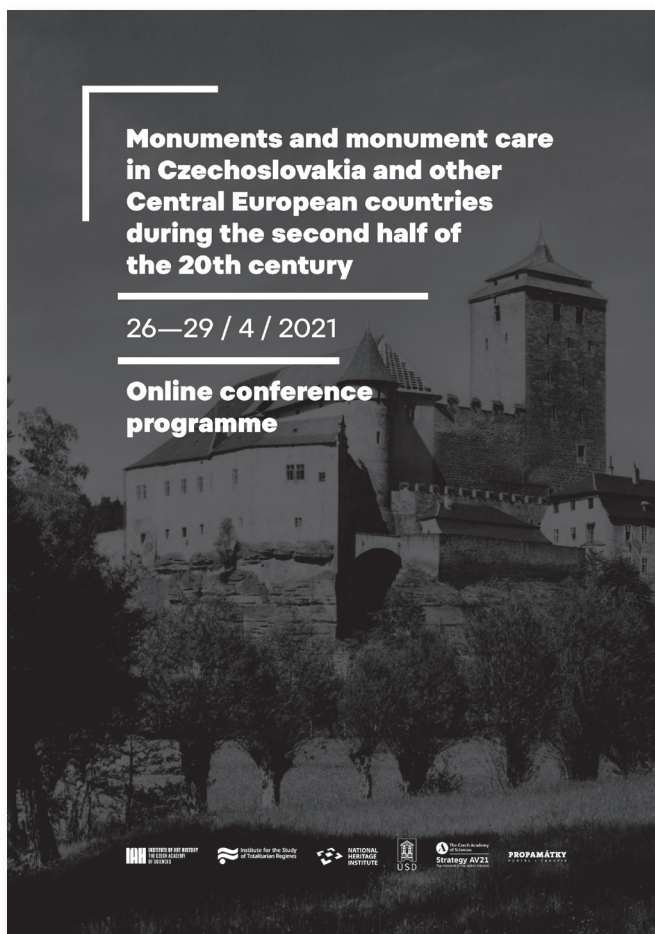
**MONUMENTS AND MONUMENT CARE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND OTHER CENTRAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY, ONLINE CONFERENCE**

PAMÁTKY A PAMÁTKOVÁ PÉČE V ČESKOSLOVENSKU A V DALŠÍCH ZEMÍCH STŘEDNÍ EVROPY VE DRUHÉ POLOVINĚ 20. STOLETÍ, ONLINE KONFERENCE

**26 - 29. April, 2021**

Institute of Art History – Czech Academy of Sciences, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, National Heritage Institute, Institute of Contemporary History – Czech Academy of Sciences

**Available online at:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4CSplGxk98>



**Monuments and monument care in Czechoslovakia and other Central European countries during the second half of the 20th century**

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**Online conference programme**



heritage care in the post-war period, moreover not only in countries under totalitarian rule. The only representative of Slovakia, Tomáš Kowalski, an expert advisor to the Monuments Office of the Slovak Republic, spoke in this section, focusing on the development of monument protection in Slovakia with overlaps into the history of art, society, and politics.

It could be expected that during the conference concerning monument care in Czechoslovakia (and other European countries), Slovakia might have a relatively high proportion of speakers to create a comprehensive view of the situation in both parts of the common state, but this did not happen. And as was noted in the discussion, the question is how many researchers are engaged in research into the development of monument care in our territory. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, this question was not publicly answered, though it can be stated that since the past days of Vendelín Jankovič there have been very few published texts addressing with the historiography of monument care in Slovakia

in the post-war period, i.e. the era not only of important institutionalization of this field in our territory, but also the adoption of the first international conventions dealing with cultural and historical heritage. Knowledge of this history is an important starting point for the current role of the field of monument care.

The brilliance of combining the topics of individual lectures was fully manifested in the third thematic section called *Heritage Management and Society*, where they were followed by presentations with completely opposing perspectives for dealing with architectural historical heritage in the Czech lands. While David Kovařík, a historian at the Institute of Contemporary History, focused on demolition from the end of World War II to the early 1960s and the important role of the Institute of Monument Care and the intervention of conservationists in saving cultural monuments, a pair of researchers, Andrea Průchová Hružová and Michal Kurz, analysed the state-supported promotion of the architectural monument fund in the form of short art films. The presented

**1** As part of the opening of the conference and one of the three introductory speeches, the director of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Tomáš Winter, presented not only the research concept of the institution, but also several publications, including the previously mentioned publication *Theoretical Foundations of Monument Care on the Threshold of the 21st Century*, edited by Ludmila Hůrková and Daniel Prix.

**2** In her presentation, Martina Mertová explains the term “preservationist architecture” as a term denoting a new intervention in a built landmark or a new building in a heritage-protected ensemble that appears inconspicuous or at least neutral, ideally with the help of traditionalist expression, i.e., forms largely resulting from the use of historical pre-modern methods and materials.

**3** Martina Mertová also deals in her presentation with factors that influence the repetition of the exchange of views on creation in a monumentally valuable environment (for example, generational exchange or professional competition, and others).

**4** Martin Horáček, a historian and art theorist, used the phrase “reconstruction as a tool of aesthetic correction” to describe a story in which the monument does not return to its pre-destruction form, but a more valuable older stage.

**5** Milena Hauserová, an architect currently working at the Department of Architectural Conservation of the Faculty of Architecture of the Czech Technical University in Prague, draws attention to the need to deal with the aspect truth in the field of heritage preservation. However her argument emphasizes the importance of considering specific situations in individual recovery.

**6** The Venice Charter is the first international document dealing with the protection of cultural heritage.

**7** Michal Sklenář, a historian and theologian, understands the concept of sacralization as a process in which Christian sacral buildings and small sacral monuments appear in the country as a tangible and visible expression of religiosity and personal spirituality. Desacralization refers to a rationalized procedure against confessionally defined objects and the processes associated with their decay.

**8** The possibility of discussion was provided through the chat function, but there was not always enough time left, and the already truncated possibility of continuing discussion through cyberspace sometimes did not even occur.

research of the mentioned pair focuses on the multilevel discursive analysis of audio-visual materials, which are also digitized and will be published, among other contributions, in the European Film Gateway festival. This research is very stimulating in terms of the study material, which is so far insufficiently explored and likely to provide of various perspectives suitable for comparison.

In other submissions, we could see the fate of monuments in terms of inappropriate use for the needs of security forces or damage to this fund resulting from the application of state economic ambitions, such as the construction of the Vltava cascade. It would certainly be interesting to compare this situation with the Slovak part of the common state, where there were also various transfers and destruction of monuments due to the construction of water works, but we will probably have to leave that for another opportunity.

The last section of presentations specialized in physical and intangible sacral monuments in the context of authoritarian regimes, largely discussing the situation in the Czech lands. The only foreign lecturer, but of particular interest, was the architectural historian Marcus van der Meulen, who in his submission covered to religious monuments and the post-war reconstruction of Warsaw. The article was a clear guide to practical examples of the different approach in the restoration of destroyed sacral buildings compared to both the Czech and Slovak contexts.

In other submissions by Czech lecturers, historiographic investigations were presented not only with respect to the post-war period, but also to an earlier past for a better understanding, which showed that the destruction of sacral monuments did not occur only in connection with the totalitarian regime, but that desacralization<sup>7</sup> took place in several historical stages.

Other presentations in this section were mostly regional, focusing on the transfer and destruction of sacred monuments and statues, as well as the important role of the church in the care of monuments.

The conference ended with a final presentation by Richard Biegel, director of the Institute of Art History, Faculty of Arts, Charles University and vice president of the Club for Old Prague. Although in his submission he dealt with the single issue of the Prague City Heritage Reservation and its status on the

occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the declaration, the legacy of the presentation can be applied to other European capitals which like Prague face the onslaught of contemporary society and the countervailing protectionist efforts towards preserving the unchanging historical character of the urban cores. Richard Biegel considers the effort to understand the situation of the formation of the reservation as one of the possible ways to understand today’s problems and how to solve them.

Although the conference took place exclusively in the online space and suffered from a lack of personal meetings and wider discussions,<sup>8</sup> thanks to the rich structure of submissions and their appropriate combination, it provided space for confrontation of many diverse views on the issue of monument care in the second half of the 20th century. In addition to the planned publication containing the individual articles of the lecturers, it is possible to view all the lectures additionally via the YouTube channel of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, which is undoubtedly a vast positive.

One direct and immediate message of the conference is the need for the emphasis of the professional community to turn their research toward the most history of heritage care: not only as an important part of historiography, but also as a possible way to understand current problems facing the field of monument care, whether in relation to general society or within the discipline itself.