Iron Landscapes
Nation-Building and the Railways in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1938

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

I, Felix Konrad Jeschke, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been

indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

In the 1920s and 1930s, Czechoslovakia created a national railway network out of the fragments of the obsolete Habsburg system. The main aim of the construction project was to create a connection from the previously Cisleithanian Bohemian Lands to the previously Hungarian territories of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. The study examines how this new network contributed to the discursive development of a Czechoslovak national space. The railways in the twentieth century have been neglected as a research topic, since, unlike in the nineteenth century, they no longer represented the shift to industrial modernity. However, the two trajectories of the railway discourse in the inter-war period still evolved around the notion of modernity. On the one hand, the railways were considered an instrument of national unification capable of overcoming the geographic and ethnic fragmentation of the country. In highly organic imagery, the railway lines between Slovakia and the Bohemian Lands were imagined as the backbone of a healthy nation-state, and thus as material confirmation of a pre-existing unity. At the same time, railway lines never stopped at national borders. Due to their transnational character, they were turned into a symbol of Czechoslovakia's modern cosmopolitanism. The study shows how these often incongruous goals were negotiated by examining the following themes: the railway plans developed by the geographer Viktor Dvorský, the new railway lines in Slovakia, the national conflict on trains, the new railway stations in Hradec Králové and Uherské Hradiště, the country's representation in travel writing, and the discourse around a Czechoslovak high-speed train. As a cultural history of infrastructure, it uses a variety of sources that include ministerial documents, press clippings, contemporary travel literature and newsreels. The study thus not only contributes to literature on nationalism, but also to a spatial history of inter-war Czechoslovakia.

Contents

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, Egbert Klautke and Peter Zusi. Egbert welcomed me to the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) when I first arrived in 2005 and has supervised all my major writing projects since. Under Peter's guidance at the Czech Seminar, I developed many ideas that found their way into this thesis. Their knowledgeable and calm advice has been invaluable. At SSEES, I am also particularly grateful to Robert B. Pynsent and David Short, who simultaneously taught me how to read Czech and write English. The shortcomings that remain in the text are, of course, my own.

This project was funded by a three-year doctoral scholarship from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). I also received financial support for a year-long study trip to the Czech Republic from the UCL Graduate School, and a seven-month fellowship for research at the Institute of Historical Studies of the Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest from the Hungarian Scholarship Board, which was then still based at the Balassi Institute. I thank all these institutions for their support, without which this project would not have been possible.

I am grateful to the colleagues who contributed to this study by giving me the opportunity to discuss it in various settings outside SSEES, particularly Chad Bryant, Milan Hlavačka, Ines Koeltzsch, Miroslav Kunt, Miroslav Michela, Jan Musekamp, Miklós Zeidler, and Martin Zückert. The study is based primarily on the resources of the National Library in Prague, the National Archives in Prague, the SSEES Library, the British Library, and the Széchényi National Library in Budapest. The staff of these institutions often went out of their way to help me, for which I am grateful.

My friends contributed more to this thesis than they probably think, especially by taking my mind off it, and I thank them for it. The desire to emulate my twin sister Lisa was one of the reasons I went to study in England. I am glad to report that the simultaneity of our academic careers is unbroken and we will submit our PhD theses at almost the same time. As to her, I am grateful to our mother Carola, whose untiring support and efforts to learn Czech mean a lot to me. Finally, I am deeply grateful to my wife Lunja for her patience when I complained about writing, among much else. This thesis is dedicated to our daughter Rita Szofia, whose gestation has been a lot quicker than this text's.

Abbreviations

Čedok	Československá cestovní a dopravní kancelář	Czechoslovak Travel Bureau
ČSA	Československé státní aerolinie	Czechoslovak State Airlines
ČSD	Československé státní dráhy	Czechoslovak State Railways
ČSR	Československá republika	Czechoslovak Republic
ČÚRŽ	Československá ústřední rada železniční	Czechoslovak Central Railways Council
KČT	Klub českých (*or* československých) turistů	Club of Czech (*or* Czechoslovak) Hikers
MÁV	Magyar Államvasutak	Hungarian State Railways
MŽ-TR	Ministerstvo železnic – Tiskový referát	Ministry of Railways – Press Department
NA	Národní archiv České republiky	National Archives of the Czech Republic
NFA	Národní filmový archiv	National Film Archives
PMH	Prágai Magyar Hírlap	Prague Hungarian Newspaper
SOA	Státní okresní archiv Uherské Hradiště	State District Archives Uherské Hradiště

'I daresay that the railways have raised nations in the same way as schools.'

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, 1898[1]

Introduction
Iron Landscapes

As Berlin correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1924, the Austrian novelist and journalist Joseph Roth (1894–1939) wrote an ambivalent hymn to modern technology entitled *Bekenntnis zum Gleisdreieck* (Affirmation of the Triangular Railway Junction). In the form of a religious creed, he invoked the railway junction as the centre of the modern world:

> I affirm the triangular railway junction. It is an emblem and a focus, a living organism and the fantastic product of a futuristic force.
>
> It is a *center*. All the vital energies of its locus begin and end here, in the same way that the heart is both the point of departure and the destination of the blood as it flows through the body's veins and arteries. It's the heart of a world whose life is belt drive and clockwork, piston rhythm and siren scream. It is the heart of the world, which spins on its axis a thousand times faster than the alternation of day and night would have us believe; whose continuous and never-ending rotation looks like madness and is the product of mathematical calculation; whose dizzying velocity makes backward-looking sentimentalists fear the ruthless extermination of inner forces and healing balance but actually engenders healing warmth and the benediction of movement.[2]

Roth's notion of the railway combined biological and mechanical images. He described the junction as a living being, even the heart of the world. At the same time, this is not a normal, organic heart, but the heart of a machine. The 'merciless regularity' of this machine, he continued, was inhuman. Indeed, the power of the machine devalued its very creators. 'What

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[1] Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Jak pracovat? Přednášky z roku 1898* (Zurich, 1977), p. 32.

[2] Joseph Roth, 'Affirmation of the Triangular Railway Junction', in *What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920–33*, trans. by Michael Hofmann (London, 2004), pp. 105–08 (p. 105). Emphasis in the original.

holds sway in the arena of my triangular railroad junction is the decision of the logical brain,

which, to be sure of success, has implanted itself in a body of unconditional certainty: in the

body of a machine. That's why everything human in this arena is small and feeble and lost,

reduced to an insignificant supporting role in the grand enterprise […].'[3] In dystopian terms,

Roth suggested that humans had passed on their power over nature to a machine that was

now devouring its children, leaving in its wake a new world dominated by technology.

> Landscape – what is a landscape? Meadow, forest, blade of grass, and leaf of tree. 'Iron
>
> landscape' might be an apt description for these playgrounds of machines. Iron landscape,
>
> magnificent temple of technology open to the air, to which the mile-high factory chimneys
>
> make their sacrifice of living, brooding, energizing smoke. Eternal worship of machines, in
>
> the wide arena of this landscape of iron and steel, whose end no human eye can see, in
>
> the horizon's steely grip.[4]

Roth presented Berlin as a mere vessel – an 'arena' or 'playground' in his terminology – of

technological progress that had gone out of control; or rather, controlled itself and had

discarded the need for human supervision. Technology had created a new geography marked

not by rivers, mountains, seas and towns, but by 'great, shining iron rails'.[5] The triangular

railway junction was the new centre of the universe.

Roth's text can be, and has been, understood as a metaphorical criticism of technology

in modern society.[6] Its metaphor was more concrete, however, than an uninitiated reader

might expect, for the 'Gleisdreieck' of Roth's affirmation was not just a symbol for the railway

as such, but also a specific junction and *U-Bahn* station in Berlin's Kreuzberg district. Roth's

notion of centrality can thus be understood in two ways. The railway junction is not only the

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[3] Ibid., p. 106.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 105.

[6] See e.g. Susanne Scharnowski, '„Berlin ist schön, Berlin ist groß." Feuilletonistische Blicke auf Berlin:
    Alfred Kerr, Robert Walser, Joseph Roth und Bernard von Brentano', in *Weltfabrik Berlin: Eine
    Metropole als Sujet der Literatur*, ed. by Matthias Harder and Almut Hille (Würzburg, 2006), pp.
    67–82 (p. 80).

centre of a technological dystopia, but also, perhaps more prosaically, the centre of Germany. After the First World War, the various provincial railway networks in Germany were merged into the single state-owned system of the *Deutsche Reichsbahn* (German imperial railways).[7] As the capital of the Weimar Republic, Berlin became the natural centre of the national railway network. In Roth's organic image, the body and heart of the railway system were, hence, also the body and heart of the nation-state. His use of organic imagery to describe non-organic technology was widespread at the time. With the parallel increase and popularization of medical knowledge, national activism and technology from the beginning of the nineteenth century, national activists increasingly identified the nation with a human body and put great expectations into the nascent railway system as the life-giving veins and arteries of the body politic. Roth's iron landscape was also a landscape that embodied the nation.

The column, then, is not just a dystopian portrayal of the de-humanization of the world by modern technology, it is also an indication of the impact of the railways on society. Throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, railway discourses in central Europe were shaped by, and in turn itself shaped, notions of modernity and nationhood. This study is about the development of these notions in one such discourse, that of inter-war Czechoslovakia. The First Czechoslovak Republic was intended to be a nation-state. But the previously Austrian and Hungarian territories of which it comprised had little in common in terms of history, economic development, geography or culture. The state ideology of Czechoslovakism, which posited that Czech and Slovak were two dialects of the same language and Czechs and Slovaks therefore two branches of the same nation, aspired to create a narrative of national unity. The creation of a national railway network out of previously Habsburg fragments was one of the main tools through which this was to be achieved. At the same time, the discussions that accompanied this construction project revealed many of the problems that, in the late 1930s, came to haunt Czechoslovak politicians: the resistance to the

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[7] Alfred C. Mierzejewski, *The Most Valuable Asset of the Reich: A History of the German National Railway. Volume 1: 1920–1932* (Chapel Hill, 1999), esp. pp. 1–18.

state project by the numerous ethnic minorities, Slovak autonomism, and the contradictions involved in attempting to forge a unitary nation-state internally while portraying a sense of cosmopolitan openness externally. Inter-war Czechoslovakia shared many structural problems with neighbouring countries in East-Central Europe, despite the notion of the state as an 'international paragon' of democracy that was only destroyed by hostile external forces, as the playwright and first post-communist president Václav Havel (1936–2011) prominently claimed.[8] At the same time, Czechoslovakia was also not simply a 'state that failed', as the historian Mary Heimann has recently suggested.[9] Rather, the country was deliberately destroyed twice, once violently by the Nazis in 1938 and 1939 and once with pen and paper by its own politicians in 1993. But these were political decisions taken by individuals, and did not mean that the Czechoslovak state collapsed by itself or was not viable (as German geographers argued in the inter-war years). Indeed, the findings presented in this study suggest that the railway system shaped – and was shaped by – a sense of a common Czechoslovak space that was, to use Roth's words, the 'arena' for a common Czechoslovak people. A public sense of nationhood and national space was forged from Czechoslovakia's iron landscapes.

Railway Journeys: Cultural Studies of Railways

This study approaches the railways in inter-war Czechoslovakia from the perspective of cultural history, drawing on a growing body of literature on the ideological, symbolic and political role of technology in history. With regard to the railways, the classic text of this genre is Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey*. Schivelbusch shows the extent to which technological innovation had the power to transform man's perception of the world. From the 1830s, trains made it possible to complete within a few hours a journey that had taken days on foot or by coach. Thus the railways led to the subjective shrinkage of time and space among

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[8] Peter Bugge, 'Czech Democracy 1918–1938 – Paragon or Parody?', *Bohemia*, 47.1 (2007), 3–28 (p. 4).
[9] Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed* (New Haven, 2009).

contemporaries, and created a 'new, reduced geography'.[10] In addition, the introduction of 'railway time', necessary for the smooth and safe running of trains on single-track lines, led to the penetration of society with time-keeping and unified time zones. *Greenwich Mean Time* was made the international norm at an international conference in Washington, DC in October 1884, and was accepted nearly everywhere by the early twentieth century. The experience of time and space, Schivelbusch suggests, was 'industrialized' by the railways. In the nineteenth century, modernity arrived on a steam locomotive and, to quote Joseph Roth once more, the landscape acquired 'a mask of iron'.[11]

Unsurprisingly, such a fundamental transformation did not always go smoothly, and Schivelbusch devotes considerable attention to the rise in 'railway diseases' diagnosed from the late 1850s. The rattling and speed of the train, it was believed towards the end of the nineteenth century, was responsible for numerous nervous ailments. In addition, he discusses the public fascination with gory railway accidents, a frequent occurrence in the technology's early days, which, he suggests, contributed to the rise of a new sensationalism among the nascent mass media. Hence, he notes that 'the early perception of the railways is characterized by a strangely ambivalent experience. The journey is experienced as incredibly smooth, light, and safe, like flying. [...] At the same time, the railway journey conveys a feeling of violence and latent destruction.'[12] His study demonstrates the profound and ambivalent effect of technology not only on the physical landscape, but also on human psychology and culture. Other scholars have supported this conclusion. In a fundamental study, Steven Kern has dealt with the impact of 'the affirmation of the reality of private time and the levelling of traditional spatial hierarchies' in art and science at the turn of the century.[13] However, Kern devotes little space to the railways, focusing instead on technologies that were new at the turn

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[10] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise: Zur Industrialisierung von Raum und Zeit im 19. Jahrhundert*, 5th edn (Frankfurt am Main, 2011), p. 35. Unless noted otherwise, all translations in this thesis are my own.
[11] Joseph Roth, p. 108.
[12] Schivelbusch, p. 117.
[13] Steven Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918: With a New Preface* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), p. 8.

of the century, such as 'telephone, wireless telegraph, x-ray, cinema, bicycle, automobile, and airplane'.[14] By contrast, Wolfgang Kaschuba's study of the cultural production of time and space in modern Europe pays close attention to the railways, but is also critical of Schivelbusch for over-emphasizing the caesura the railways represented; he suggests that new perceptions of speed had already developed before with the introduction of new, faster coaches on post routes.[15]

Several studies have followed Schivelbusch in using a cultural historical framework to delve deeper into an analysis of the railways as a cornerstone of the modern experience in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, making it their aim to 'take the history of the railways out of railway history', in the words of Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman.[16] Beaumont and Freeman make their indebtedness to Schivelbusch explicit by mentioning the 'machine ensemble' in their book's title, a term coined in *The Railway Journey* to indicate the 'filter' through which railway travellers experienced the landscape.[17] In particular, the narrative of train travel as a traumatic experience and Schivelbusch's development of a pathology of railway diseases has inspired numerous studies. While his work is limited by its dependence on British and French sources, other scholars have taken up themes from his book and showed that, in the main, the railway experience differed little in other European contexts. In a notable example, Laura Marcus has demonstrated the effect railway travel had on Sigmund Freud's theory of neurosis. After his family had had to emigrate from Moravia in 1859, first to Leipzig and then to Vienna, railway travel for Freud was a trauma that he kept his entire life, 'inseparable from childhood experiences of loss and dislocation'. Railways, Marcus suggests, formed part of the modern life-world that led to the development of psychoanalysis.[18] As such, trains also soon became the setting of literary texts and especially

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[14] Ibid., p. 1.

[15] Wolfgang Kaschuba, *Die Überwindung der Distanz: Zeit und Raum in der europäischen Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), p. 96.

[16] Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman, 'Preface', in *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space and the Machine Ensemble*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman (Bern, 2007), p. 7.

[17] Schivelbusch, p. 21.

[18] Laura Marcus, 'Freud and the Railways', in *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space and the Machine*

early films. As Lynne Kirby has argued, train passengers and cinema audiences shared a common experience of passing scenery that challenged one's perception of time and space. It is no coincidence, she suggests, that trains were a common theme in early film; as in real life, they inspired both awe and horror, as the terrified contemporary audience reaction to the oncoming train in the Lumières' *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (Arrival of a train at La Ciotat station) attests.[19] Similarly, the impact of the railways has been interpreted as fundamentally ambivalent in literature. Emile Zola's *La Bête Humaine* concludes with a scene of a driverless train crowded with soldiers on their way to the front hurtling through the night. Wojciech Tomasik has discussed this apparently chaotic finale in relation to the novel's general technological optimism.[20]

While interpretations have varied, the social, economic and cultural impact of the railways on nineteenth century societies has been widely acknowledged. The railways contributed to transforming old notions of time and space. The creation of railway time led to the universal establishment of measurable time, and the publication of timetables and maps made all stations appear within easy reach in a clear and logical system.[21] A further theme of Schivelbusch's book that has been taken up by other scholars is the impact of the railways on the urban environment.[22] They made possible the dynamic development of cities that led to the tearing-down of city walls and the creation of suburbs. The European notion of cityscapes

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Ensemble, ed. by Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman (Bern, 2007), pp. 155–75 (p. 161). Other texts that take up this theme include Tim Armstrong, 'Two Types of Shock in Modernity', *Critical Quarterly*, 42.1 (2000), 60–73; Jeffrey T. Schapp, 'Crash (Speed as Engine of Individuation)', *Modernism/Modernity*, 6.1 (1999), 1–50; and John Zilcovsky, '"Kafka war Reisender": Trains, Trauma and the Unreadable Body', in *Kafka for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Stanley Corngold and Ruth V. Gross (Rochester, NY, 2011), pp. 179–206.

[19] Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Exeter, 1997).

[20] Wojciech Tomasik, 'The Auschwitz Terminus: Driverless Trains in Zola and Borowski', in *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space and the Machine Ensemble*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman (Bern, 2007), pp. 191–200. For more general discussions of trains in literature, see Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity* (Manchester, 2001); and Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860–2000* (Cambridge, 2004).

[21] Kern, pp. 12–13; Tim Robbins, *The Railway Age* (Manchester, 1998), pp. 37–38.

[22] See Ralf Roth, 'Interactions between Railways and Cities in Nineteenth-Century Germany: Some Case Studies', in *The City and the Railway in Europe*, ed. by Ralf Roth and Marie-Noëlle Polino (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 3–27, as well as other contributions to the volume. Of some relevance to this study is Alena Kubova's 'Railway Stations and Planning Projects in Prague, 1845–1945' on pp. 155–68.

was revolutionized as sacred structures such as churches, synagogues and mosques gradually

lost much of their function as points of orientation, and were replaced by grand railway

termini (or cathedrals of the nineteenth century, as awed contemporaries commented).[23]

Nowadays, our first and often most important markers of orientation in a city are not only

railway stations, but mainly underground, bus and tram stops. The railways were thus crucial

in the development of modern urbanity. All these approaches suggest that trains were a key

element of modern life that changed not only the appearance of the landscape, but also had

important psychological effects on travellers.

None the less, the Austrian historian Günter Dinhobl is right in his claim that in Austria

'unfortunately there has been no examination of the railways and "culture", despite the

"cultural turn". Even on an international level, approaches of this kind are still in their

infancy.'[24] This is certainly the case for Czech and Slovak historiography, although there are

exceptions. Milan Hlavačka has been influential in introducing experience-based studies of

travel and time-perception, especially with his study of coach travel in early modern Central

Europe.[25] Chad Bryant has discussed the correlation between liberal bourgeois values and the

opening of the *Kaiser Ferdinands-Nordbahn* (Emperor Ferdinand Northern Railway) between

Vienna and Brünn (Brno) in 1839.[26] Cultural studies of the railways in the Czech context have

tended to focus primarily on literary representations, influenced by Jaroslav Pacovský's

collection of early railway writing published in 1982.[27] As in other literatures, railway narratives

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[23] Carroll L. V. Meeks, *The Railroad Station: An Architectural History* (Secaucus, 1978), p. 90.

[24] Günter Dinhobl, *Bahnbrechend zum „Kulturpflug unserer Zeit": Kulturwissenschaftliche Zugänge zur Eisenbahngeschichte* (Innsbruck, 2009), p. 26.

[25] Milan Hlavačka, *Cestování v éře dostavníků: Všední den na středoevropských cestách* (Prague, 1996). See also id., 'Fenomén času ve zrychlené době', in *Čas rychlých kol a křídel, aneb, Mezi Laurinem a Kašparem: Kapitoly z kulturních dějin přelomu 19. a 20. století*, ed. by D. Blümlová, J. Rauchová et al. (České Budějovice, 2008), pp. 7–19 and id., 'Superstroj 19. století a nová organiszace času, prostoru a společnosti', in *Člověk a stroj v české kultuře 19. století*, ed. by Taťána Petrasová and Pavla Machalíková (Prague, 2013), pp. 117–130.

[26] Chad Bryant, 'Into an Uncertain Future: Railroads and Vormärz Liberalism in Brno, Vienna, and Prague', *Austrian History Yearbook*, 40 (2009), 183–201.

[27] Jaroslav Pacovský, *Lidé, vlaky, koleje* (Prague, 1982). See also Martin Hrdina, 'Diskurz o železnici v české literatuře 19. století', in *Čas rychlých kol a křídel, aneb, Mezi Laurinem a Kašparem: Kapitoly z kulturních dějin přelomu 19. a 20. století*, ed. by D. Blümlová, J. Rauchová et al. (České Budějovice, 2008), pp. 48–65; Vladimír Macura, 'Vlak jako symbol 19. století', in *Osudový vlak: Sborník*

teetered between cultural pessimism and optimism, although most writers who addressed the new technology followed journalist and 1848 revolutionary Karel Sabina (1813–1877) in his judgment that railways were the 'victorious banner of a new age'.[28]

The Infrastructure of the Nation: Railways in the Twentieth Century

As this short outline demonstrates, in recent decades a body of academic literature has emerged that, often inspired by Schivelbusch's ground-breaking work, interprets the introduction of the railways – and modern travel in general – as an historical caesura that can illuminate various social developments. The notion of experience became a primary interpretive principle that made it possible to gauge the cultural impact of technology on society. My study draws on this literature when discussing the cultural narrative that developed around the railways. However, my approach differs in two key respects: first, I do not deal with the nineteenth century, but with the inter-war period. Second, I focus on how the railways contributed to Czechoslovak nation-building rather than the experience of individual railway travellers. In other words, my study will take the cultural history of the railways to the twentieth century. With the exception of research on the Holocaust, studies of the railways in the twentieth century are by and large still confined to traditional technologically-centred popular railway history. This comes as no surprise, considering that, as Schivelbusch notes, the railways had been culturally assimilated by the 1880s.[29] In 1890, the Prague illustrated journal *Světozor* (View of the world) published a text that confirms the view that they had become thoroughly normalized even in the Habsburg Empire:

> Anyone without grey hair on an experienced head will be hard-pressed to imagine the
>
> world before the railways. For me and others of my younger generation, the current

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příspěvků stejnojmenné vědecké konference k 150. výročí příjezdu prvního vlaku do Prahy, ed. by Vladimír Macura and Rudolf Pohl (Prague, 1995), pp. 59–62; and Vladimír Novotný, 'Železná dráha na kolejích české literatury', in *Osudový vlak*, pp. 83–87.

[28] Hrdina, p. 50.

[29] Schivelbusch, p. 54.

railway network, that enormous cobweb of strands stretched and weaved into twisted

knots, appears like an age-old thing grown into the land, as self-explanatory as trees in a

forest and houses in a city.[30]

By the end of the First World War, then, the railways had long lost their aura of novelty in

Central Europe. The term 'railway time' fell out of usage, since it described an experience of

time shared and deemed normal by the vast majority of Europeans. Life without the railway

seemed unimaginable in the inter-war years, and as a result phenomenological accounts of its

novelty ceased, as well. The railway network had indeed 'grown into the land', it was an

infrastructure that was taken for granted and, if the trains ran on time, excited nobody but a

few enthusiasts.

Hence, rather than dealing with the psychological impact of train travel, my study is

guided by Dirk van Laak's call to study the history of infrastructures. Van Laak argues that

infrastructures, as 'media of social integration', have 'snuck into the routines of our everyday

life and [...] structured it to an ever greater extent both in terms of senses and in terms of

space'.[31] For him, infrastructures are as much part of state power structures as of everyday

life, and thus merit historiographical attention as an invisible but fundamental tool for the

functioning of the modern state. Railways, roads, telephone and telegraph lines, sewage pipes

and other amenities were essential to ensure the spatial homogeneity of modern nation-states

– the territory reached as far as its infrastructure, but no further. In his plea for the

reintegration of space as a category of historical enquiry, the historian Karl Schlögel follows

van Laak's approach in regarding trains as historically meaningful infrastructure. He writes:

> Railway timetables are something like the cadastres of the inner working of our culture.
>
> They are not just tables and indexes, but choreographies of an infinite number of
>
> synchronized movements; they are protocols of movement, without which the self-

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[30] Josef Janů, 'U kolébky železnic: Obraz z historie moderní dopravy', in *Světozor*, 24 (1890), p. 279;
  quoted in Pacovský, p. 27.
[31] Dirk van Laak, 'Infra-Strukturgeschichte', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 27.3 (2001), 367–93 (p. 367).

evident routine of our civilization would come to a standstill almost immediately. They are

not just timetables, but chronicles of the mastering of space, protocols of the progress in

shortening distances and compressing space. [...] Their absence is the best indication for

chaos ruled not by the timetable, but improvisation.[32]

Schlögel reminds us that the timetable was an instrument of power. The control of the

railways offered control of travel, which had significant political consequences. Even in the

Habsburg Empire, the increased mobility contributed to the development of an imperial

identity, which the authorities supported by naming lines after members of the imperial family

(such as the *Kaiser Ferdinands-Nordbahn* mentioned above). Schlögel writes that in the course

of the nineteenth century 'the monarchy, a collection of diverse lands joined initially by power

politics, prudence and dynastic marriages, increasingly became one territory, one space. [...]

Kakania grew in the rhythm of railway kilometres laid in the Danube Monarchy.'[33] Travel

guides such as the *Baedeker* offered itineraries through the whole of the empire, always

following the railway lines.

Indeed, much of what became the Czechoslovak railway system had existed before

1918. The horse-drawn railway between Linz and Budweis (České Budějovice), built between

1824 and 1832 and used mainly for the transport of salt to Bohemia, was the first major freight

railway on the European continent.[34] Steam railways appeared soon thereafter. At the

beginning of the railway era in Austria, private companies built those railways they expected to

be most profitable with little government influence. In its early stages from 1836, the

Nordbahn was to a large extent financed privately by the banker Salomon Rothschild (1774–

1855), and it remained a private enterprise until 1906.[35] However, the state soon developed a

greater interest in railways, realizing that the control of their routing was politically valuable.

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[32] Karl Schlögel, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit: Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* (Frankfurt am Main, 2006), pp. 352–53.

[33] Ibid., pp. 374–75.

[34] Karl Bachinger, 'Das Verkehrswesen', in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, ed. by Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch, vol. 1, *Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung*, ed. by Alois Brusatti (Vienna, 1973), pp. 278–322 (p. 278).

[35] Ibid., pp. 278, 295.

The prominent statesman Carl Friedrich Kübeck (1780–1855) declared in 1841 that only the state administration was in a position to develop a railway system 'in accordance with the interests of traffic and hence with due regard for all purposes of the state'.[36] The first comprehensive railway programme was drafted in 1841 and featured a network of planned state railways (most importantly Vienna–Prague and Vienna–Trieste). 'In planning the system', a prominent *Nordbahn* official noted in 1898,

> the greatest concern was given to the direction of world trade from the North Sea to the Adriatic. At the same time, there was an effort to connect the individual parts of the Empire closer to one another, especially with Vienna as the centre of the Empire. Therefore strategic concerns were taken into account, as well.[37]

Despite the fact that private enterprise continued to play an important part in the development of the Habsburg railway system throughout the nineteenth century, the state administration ensured that lines it deemed important were constructed. Utilizing part of the already completed *Nordbahn*, the construction of the line from Vienna to Prague via Olmütz (Olomouc) was finished in 1845 and opened for traffic with 'rare pomp' on 19 and 20 August.[38] The *Südbahn* from Vienna to Trieste followed in July 1857.[39]

The Habsburg authorities initially considered it unnecessary to build east-west railways due to the shipping capacities of the Danube, but railways parallel to the river soon appeared nevertheless.[40] A direct connection between Vienna and Pest via Pressburg was opened in April 1851.[41] The new railway programme of 1854, furthermore, projected a complex network of lines that would link all major cities of the monarchy along three west-east and three north-

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[36] Hermann Strach, 'Geschichte der Eisenbahnen Oesterreich-Ungarns von den ersten Anfängen bis zum Jahre 1867', in *Geschichte der Eisenbahnen der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie*, vol. 1, part 1, ed. by Hermann Strach (Vienna, 1898), pp. 73–503 (p. 197).
[37] Ibid., p. 198.
[38] Ibid., pp. 222–26.
[39] Ibid., p. 283.
[40] Ibid., p. 198.
[41] János Majdán, *A közlekedés története Magyarországon (1700–2000)* (Pécs, 2014), p. 48.

south main lines.[42] Construction of new railways continued apace throughout the second half

of the nineteenth century. The 1867 Compromise gave Hungary complete autonomy in

matters of transport, and was followed by a railway construction boom in the 1870s.[43] The

privately owned line between Kassa (Košice, Kaschau) and Oderberg (Bohumín) in Silesia,

which later became essential as an east-west link in Czechoslovakia, was opened in March

1872. It had been built primarily to connect the Upper Hungarian iron and copper industries to

the Moravian and Silesian coal mines and further on to Prussia.[44] By the 1880s, most of the

important main lines in both parts of the Empire had been built and attention turned towards

local lines.[45] While the railway density was lower than in many western European countries, it

was comparatively high in the Bohemian Lands where Austria's industry was concentrated.

Railways in Hungary were fewer, particularly in the country's mountainous north which

became Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia.[46] After the First World War, Czechoslovakia thus

inherited more than 13,000 kilometres of track.[47]

Given the high degree of private involvement in the railway planning and construction

during the Habsburg period, economic factors were more important development incentives

than nation-building. None the less, the extent of state intervention into railway construction

continued to grow as the Habsburg authorities increasingly became aware of the political value

of the network.[48] Opening ceremonies such as the Prague railway in 1845 were conscious

celebrations of the Empire and its rulers who brought technology and progress. The standard

history of Austrian railways, published in 1898 in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of Emperor

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[42] Strach, p. 316.

[43] Markus Klenner, *Eisenbahn und Politik 1758–1914: Vom Verhältnis der europäischen Staaten zu ihren Eisenbahnen* (Vienna, 2002), p. 183.

[44] Josef Gonda, 'Geschichte der Eisenbahnen in Ungarn: Vom Jahre 1867 bis zur Gegenwart', in *Geschichte der Eisenbahnen der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie*, vol. 3, ed. by Hermann Strach (Vienna, 1898), pp. 355–418 (pp. 375, 414).

[45] Bachinger, p. 298.

[46] Ivan Jakubec, 'The Transport Problems of a new State: Czechoslovak Railways and Rivers, 1918–38', *The Journal of Transport History*, 17.2 (1996), 116–132 (p. 123).

[47] *Statistika československých drah za rok 1919* (Prague, 1922).

[48] Klenner.

Francis Joseph's ascent to the throne, ended with an appeal to coming generations of railway workers:

> May the young fondly preserve and administer what the old have created, may they vigorously develop it by chaining one rail to another and one line to another, until the iron routes reach the farthest corners of our dear fatherland, carrying everywhere the blessings of culture, wealth and satisfaction under the protective wings of the glorious Austrian double-headed eagle.[49]

While the development of the network in the Habsburg Empire certainly generated expressions of patriotism, it was still not considered a matter of government responsibility. As Markus Klenner has argued, throughout Europe the railways and most other infrastructures only became a systematically addressed interest of the state after the First World War. The end of the war saw an unprecedented wave of nationalization. With the exception of Great Britain, which only followed in 1948, all European countries had nationalized their main lines by the late 1930s.[50] In Czechoslovakia, the Ministry of Railways began nationalizing the remaining private railways in May 1924.[51] My study intends to demonstrate that after the infrastructure of the railways was turned into an asset of the state, it was used for the purpose of national unification. Instead of merely contributing to a burgeoning popular nationalism as in the nineteenth century, the railways became a tool in the process of nation-building that was actively controlled by the state.[52] In the twentieth century, the state became the central actor in spatial nation-building.

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[49] Ignaz Konta, 'Geschichte der Eisenbahnen Oesterreichs: Vom Jahre 1867 bis zur Gegenwart', in *Geschichte der Eisenbahnen der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie*, vol. 1, part 2, ed. by Hermann Strach (Vienna, 1898), pp. 1–426 (p. 426).

[50] Klenner, p. 195.

[51] Jakubec, Transport Problems of a new State, p. 125.

[52] This process has been studied in impressive fashion by Dietmar Neutatz in his work on the Moscow metro's role in the consolidation of the Soviet system. He argues that the Soviet obsession with technology represented a surrogate religion, and posters propagating the metro were used as modern versions of Orthodox icons. See Dietmar Neutatz, *Die Moskauer Metro: Von den ersten Plänen bis zur Großbaustelle des Stalinismus (1897–1935)* (Cologne, 2001).

In a similar fashion to Klenner, Ivan Jakubec has analysed the official approach to transportation in Czechoslovakia and its neighbouring countries during the inter-war period.[53] He points out the nationalizing impact of the railways, arguing that 'after the First World War, the integrative function of transport as a stabilizing and consolidating element of the state and society exceeded the significance of its technical and economic functions'.[54] This assessment forms the starting point of my own discussion of the Czechoslovak railways. While I regard van Laak's approach as inspiring, neither he nor Schlögel addresses the methodological problem inherent in an infrastructural history as both structural and everyday history. How can a history of infrastructures be written that is not merely a technical account of 'progress'? How can the ideological value of infrastructures be gauged from timetables? I address the problem of sources by approaching the railway as a cultural discourse closely connected to the nation-building project of inter-war Czechoslovakia. Hence, my study uses a variety of source materials which all contributed to the formation of an infrastructural narrative. Based on a discussion of the state's railway policy, I analyse representations of the railways in academic texts, literature, journalism and film. In this way, I examine the national railway narrative both 'from above' and 'from below', attempting to capture the various perspectives affected by this all-embracing infrastructural cobweb. Hence, this is a study of Czechoslovak nation-building as revealed through the lens of the railway network. Rather than describing the development of this network, I consider the discourses that developed in conjunction with it, approaching them as constituent parts of the discursive construction of Czechoslovak nationhood.

Accordingly, the sources for this study are diverse and range from contemporary scholarship to newsreels. Chapter 1 sets the scene by discussing the proposals for the spatial

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[53] Ivan Jakubec, Transport Problems of a New State; id., *Eisenbahn und Elbeschiffahrt in Mitteleuropa 1918–1938: Die Neuordnung der verkehrspolitischen Beziehungen zwischen der Tschechoslowakei, dem Deutschen Reich und Österreich in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Stuttgart, 2001); id., 'Integration or Decentralization? The Construction of Railways and Waterways in Cisleithania', in *Mastery and Lost Illusions: Space and Time in the Modernization of Eastern and Central Europe*, ed. by Włodzimierz Borodziej, Stanislav Holubec and Joachim von Puttkamer (Munich, 2014), pp. 183–203.

[54] Jakubec, *Eisenbahn und Elbeschiffahrt*, p. 15.

dimensions of the new state at the end of the First World War. In particular, it examines the

plan for a national railway system proposed by the influential geographer Viktor Dvorský

(1882–1960). This academic view of space and railways is followed by the government's

perspective: based on documents from the Ministry of Railways, Chapter 2 focuses on the

railway policy of inter-war Czechoslovakia, in particular on the construction of new railway

lines in Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. I examine the narrative used in the opening

ceremonies of new lines, arguing that it contributed to the notion of a unified Czechoslovak

state, but created a hierarchy in Czech-Slovak relations that positioned the Bohemian Lands as

the centre, and Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia as the periphery of the new state. Chapter 3

further studies the impact of the railways on Czech-Slovak (and Czech-German) relations by

dealing with the ways in which the railways became a focal point of national conflicts. It

contrasts the governmental narrative with some of the reactions to Czechoslovak nation-

building among minority representatives and railway passengers. Chapter 4 returns to the

representative function of the state and deals with the narratives of Czechoslovakia that were

communicated in new stations buildings, using the case studies of the stations in Hradec

Králové (Königgrätz) and Uherské Hradiště (Ungarisch-Hradisch). It illustrates that even in the

inter-war period, various notions of modernity continued to play a major role in the railway

discourse. Notions of modernity in inter-war Czechoslovakia remain of a focus of the final two

chapters. Using travel accounts as source material, Chapter 5 argues that the image of

Czechoslovakia differed in travel writing aimed at Czechoslovaks and at foreigners,

respectively. The former pursued internal nation-building, while the latter attempted to

disseminate the notion that Czechoslovakia was a paragon of democracy and modernity. The

travel narrative thus correlated closely with the railway discourse in general. Finally, Chapter 6

considers the high-speed train *Slovenská strela* (Slovak bullet) as the culmination of the inter-

war Czechoslovak railway project. The study thus considers perspectives from a wide variety of

actors – academics, the Czechoslovak government, railway employees, architects and

engineers, travellers, Czechoslovaks and foreigners – in order to construct a multifaceted

account of the function of the railways in the process of nation-building in the first

Czechoslovak Republic.

The primary aim of this study is to demonstrate that railway discourses on all levels of

society played a decisive and underappreciated role in inter-war Czechoslovak nation-building.

Railways and the discourse that surrounded them contributed to the creation of national

space. For one thing, the new technology contributed to democratization and the

development of mass culture, a point to which Schivelbusch devotes close attention.[55] As a

relatively inexpensive means of transport open to all, trains not only necessitated social

contacts that crossed class boundaries while on board, but also provided the means for

millions of rural dwellers to move to the cities. Manfred Riedel quips that 'the masses are

advancing, as Hegel called it, and in their railways they are overtaking the coaches of the

aristocrats'.[56] But also the central argument of Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey* – that the

railways transformed the subjective experience of landscape and time – indicates its

significance for nationalism. Using categories introduced by the psychiatrist Erwin Straus,

Schivelbusch argues that for the early railway traveller, space that had been experienced as

landscape became geographical space when observed from a railway carriage. Instead of

walking through a succession of towns and villages, the railway traveller is always on his way

between his point of departure and arrival, merely watching the landscape 'fly' by through the

window. This led to the development of a 'panoramic vision', which regarded territory not as

lived landscape, but a closed geography in which 'every point [...] is determined by its location

in the whole'.[57] This was the beginning of an organized landscape that was mapped by

geographers and soon marked by fixed and policed boundaries.[58] Such a landscape invited

national interpretations and appropriations.

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[55] See especially Chapter 5 on 'the compartment' in Schivelbusch, pp. 67–83.
[56] Manfred Riedel, 'Vom Biedermeier zum Maschinenzeitalter: Zur Kulturgeschichte der ersten Eisenbahnen in Deutschland', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 43 (1961), 100–23 (p. 119).
[57] Erwin Straus, *Vom Sinn der Sinne* (Berlin, 1956), p. 319; quoted in Schivelbusch, p. 52.
[58] Kaschuba, p. 77.

The territorial extension of Czechoslovakia corresponded to the territorial extension of its railway network, as the railway maps that decorated every station made clear to the passengers. The language spoken by railway employees, the signage and symbols in stations and carriages, and the architecture of station buildings were used to symbolically integrate space into the nation. In many minority areas of the country, railway officials were the only Czechs and *nolens volens* became representatives of the ruling nation. Eduard Goldstücker noted that in the 1920s, the area of the Slovak city of Košice predominantly inhabited by railway workers was popularly called 'Little Prague' due to its ethnic make-up.[59] Hence, the railways reproduced a national view of the world analogous to Michael Billig's notion of 'banal nationalism'. Billig argues that 'daily, the nation is indicated, or "flagged", in the lives of its citizenry'. Nationalism, he writes, is so embedded in the everyday life of the Western world that it has become an unconscious part of existence. 'As a nation-state becomes established in its sovereignty, […] the symbols of nationhood, which might have been consciously displayed, do not disappear from sight, but instead become absorbed into the environment of the established homeland'.[60] From railway stations to signage and the language spoken by staff, the ever-present infrastructure of the railways provided some of the most visible symbols of nationhood.

The Railway Station as a Fortress: The Codification of Czechoslovak Space

My study is thus based on the fact that there were strong connections between the railways, industrialization and nationalism in the political discourse. The railways stand among the main forces of industrialization that brought about the rise of nationalism, which then in turn influenced the railway narrative. My study draws on the classic literature of the constructivist theory of nationalism.[61] In particular, I follow Ernest Gellner in his assertion that national

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[59] Eduard Goldstücker, *Vzpomínky 1913–1945* (Prague, 2003), pp. 39–40.
[60] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (Los Angeles, 1995), pp. 6, 41.
[61] In addition to the work discussed below, I draw primarily on the following texts: Hugh Seton-Watson,

ideology is a product of industrialization. Industrialized society, he writes, is 'based on high-powered technology and the expectancy of sustained growth, which required both a mobile division of labour, and sustained, frequent and precise communication between strangers involving a sharing of explicit meaning, transmitted in a standard idiom and in writing when required'.[62] Even though Benedict Anderson criticizes Gellner for suggesting that the nation is invented and thus in a certain sense 'false', Anderson also subscribes to the view that nationalism is a product of modernity. He argues that the development of a new sense of time and space was a precondition for the 'imagined political community' of the nation. Due to the primacy of religion in pre-modern societies, time had been experienced as cyclical simultaneity with mythic religious events, and space as an equation of the local with the transcendent. Modern technology made time measurable and space mappable, which allowed for a new experience of simultaneity. Referring to the modern 'mass ceremony' of reading a newspaper, Anderson writes: 'Each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. [...] What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?'[63]

It is surprising that neither Gellner nor Anderson mention the railway's impact on this modern imagination. In my view, this neglect of the railways in the classic theories of nationalism can be attributed to the fact that as a spatial system, the railways could not easily be included in the dominant scholarship of nationalism, which has focused on language as the main medium of national ideologization.[64] Both Anderson and Gellner assert that 'imagined

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Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism (London, 1977); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1992); Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations* (New York, 2000); and id., *Národy nejsou dílem náhody: Příčiny a předpoklady utváření moderních evropských národů* (Prague, 2009).

[62] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 2006), p. 33.

[63] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn (London, 1991), p. 35.

[64] In his classic study of nationalism, Karl W. Deutsch identified communication as the primary building block of nationhood. However, also he regarded it as a linguistic and not a spatial system. See

national communities' were made possible chiefly by an academically codified common language. While the codification of vernaculars into national languages was undoubtedly necessary for the rise of the national idea, I argue that every linguistic codification was followed by a codification of space. In other words, the creation of an official national language out of disparate dialects is mirrored in the creation of an official national territory out of disparate and often disconnected geographies.

I understand codification of space as a process of spatial representation, which engendered the transformation of a landscape previously understood primarily in religious terms into a national landscape. Representational strategies of this sort have received much academic attention recently, primarily regarding the symbolic appropriations of urban space in a national context. Especially Aleida Assmann's view of urban space as a palimpsest hiding layers of meaning to be excavated by the historian, and Pierre Nora's conception of *lieux de mémoire* have served as inspirations for these approaches.[65] Nora suggests that with the advent of modernity, spaces that had previously been 'milieux de mémoire', landscapes whose meaning was deeply ingrained in the local culture and did not need explanation, transformed into spaces whose history had to be written in order to be understood. The divergence of history and memory was the outcome of the 'increasingly rapid slippage of the present into the historical past', which in his view characterizes our age.[66] The receding power of spatially grounded public memory opened the doors for the re-interpretation of *lieux de mémoire*, both in discourse and in the physical landscape.

Such *lieux de mémoire* are in abundant supply in the highly politicized spaces of East-Central Europe. Territorial discourses changed in the course of the nineteenth century to designate some regions of Bohemia as 'German', creating a national geography that included

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Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality (Cambridge, MA, 1966), esp. pp. 87–103.

[65] Aleida Assmann, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis: Von der individuellen Erfahrung zur öffentlichen Inszenierung* (Munich, 2007); Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7–24.

[66] Nora, p. 7.

linguistic borders, walls and islands (such as the so-called *Iglauer Sprachinsel*). Pieter Judson

argues that in this period spatial metaphors became prevalent which attached contested

national identities to the very landscape itself.[67] Unsurprisingly, this was mirrored in the Czech

national discourse. In recent years, a number of scholars have described spatial codification in

Prague and other towns that became Czech or Slovak.[68] The naming of and signage on streets

and squares and the erection of national monuments have been singled out as the primary

instances of this process.[69] Railway lines gave the impetus to add more of these national

markers to the landscape, and busts of the first Czechoslovak President Tomáš G. Masaryk

(1850–1937) and other national heroes soon adorned many railway stations.

Peter Haslinger's work in particular introduced a meaningful spatial approach to Czech

historiography by comprehensively analysing the discursive construction of a Czech national

territory. He demonstrates that by the late nineteenth century, the notion of the Czech

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[67] Pieter Judson, 'Frontiers, Islands, Forests, Stones: Mapping the Geography of a German Identity in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848–1900', in *The Geography of Identity*, ed. by Patricia Yaeger (Ann Arbor, 1996), pp. 382–406, and Pieter Judson, '"Every German visitor has a völkisch obligation he must fulfill": Nationalist Tourism in the Austrian Empire, 1880–1918', in *Histories of Leisure*, ed. by Rudy Koshar (Oxford, 2002), pp. 147–68. See also Mark Cornwall, *The Devil's Wall: The Nationalist Youth Mission of Heinz Rutha* (Cambridge, MA, 2012).

[68] Cynthia Paces, *Prague Panoramas: National Memory and Sacred Space in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh, 2009); Nancy M. Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands became Czech* (Cambridge, MA, 2007); Mark Cornwall, 'The Struggle on the Czech-German Language Border, 1880–1940', *The English Historical Review*, 109.433 (September 1994), 914–51; Derek Sayer, 'The Language of Nationality and the Nationality of Language: Prague 1780–1920', *Past and Present*, 153 (November 1996), 164–210; Jeremy King, *Czechs and Germans into Budweisers: A Local History of Bohemian Politics* (Princeton, 2002); Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA, 2007); Eleonóra Babejová, *Fin-de-Siècle Pressburg: Conflict and Cultural Coexistence in Bratislava 1897–1914* (Boulder, 2003); Scott Spector's *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka's Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley, 2000) is noteworthy in that it traces less the Czech national appropriation of Prague as the spatial depiction of the city by German-Jewish writers. Quoting a poem by Egon Erwin Kisch which describes the Vltava flowing in a circle around the city, Spector writes (p. 9): 'It [the river] does not connect sources and destinations; it circumscribes and imprisons its inhabitants. The image of the Prague "island" is a persistent one, as is the corresponding metaphor of the circle. [...] The above images of "Prague" inscribe a territory without continuity with other territories, geographical as well as temporal.'

[69] In a characteristic example, Pavel Dvořák describes the twists and turns with which the (frequently renamed) square in front of the Municipal Theatre in Pressburg/Bratislava was nationally marked. In 1904, under pressure from the Hungarian nationalist lobby, the city council replaced a statue of the Pressburg German composer Johann Nepomuk Hummel with a monumental representation of the Hungarian national poet Sándor Petőfi. Immediately after the First World War, Petőfi was replaced by the Slovak poet Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav (see Pavel Dvořák, *Zlatá kniha Bratislavy* [Bratislava, 1993], pp. 462–63).

territory as coextensive with the historical Lands of the Bohemian Crown – i.e. Bohemia, Moravia and Austrian Silesia – had become all but universal in Czech elite discourse, which demanded its administrative unification within the Habsburg Empire on a national basis.[70]

These instances of spatial codification demonstrate that more than ever before, space had become an object of discursive production in the age of nationalism. The effects of these developments are evident even today. In much English-language literature, the Lands of the Bohemian Crown (or Bohemian Lands for short) are mistakenly referred to as 'Czech Lands'. This is a mistranslation from the Czech *české země*, which does not differentiate between Bohemian (a geographic term) and Czech (an ethnolinguistic one). Although the Bohemian Lands were by no means entirely Czech, the label stuck and contributed to the area's national codification. Similarly, the term 'Slovakia' (*Slovensko*) for the predominantly Slovak-speaking northern part of the former Kingdom of Hungary ethnicized a space that had traditionally been described in geographic terms as Upper Hungary, the mountainous part of the Kingdom. For much of the inter-war period, Hungarian-language sources referred to the re-codified territory as 'Szlovenszkó' (before switching to the now standard *Szlovákia*), adopting a Slovakism as if to emphasize the foreignness of the territory's new rulers.

The point that space can be discursively shaped has not always been appreciated. Michel Foucault, who himself has come under attack for disregarding the heuristic significance of space in his writings, criticized the 'devaluation of space that has prevailed for generations': 'Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectic, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic.'[71] The increased value attached to space by scholars is

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[70] Peter Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium im tschechischen politischen Diskurs 1880–1938* (Munich, 2010). Long before the 'spatial turn', D. Perman dealt with this discussion during the First World War in an informative and often neglected book: *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State: Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia, 1914–1920* (Leiden, 1962). In addition, Peter Bugge explores a similar question from the opposite perspective in a succinct essay, i.e. the discursive creation of 'Bohemia' abroad, especially in Great Britain, France and Germany. See Peter Bugge, '„Land und Volk" – oder: Wo liegt Böhmen?', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 28.3 (2002), 404–34.

[71] Michel Foucault, 'Questions on Geography', in Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon (Brighton, 1980), pp. 63–77 (p. 70).

indebted to a Marxist strain of geography that, drawing on Henri Lefebvre, viewed space as a product of social relations and hence of politics. In Lefebvre's words, 'space has been shaped and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies.'[72] In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre develops the idea that relations of capital can be traced in spatial relations. Edward Soja fittingly characterized Lefebvre's writing as 'historical-geographical materialism'.[73] In many ways, the present study is concerned with a Lefebvrian production of space by railway systems. However, I prefer to use the term codification in order to indicate that my focus is less on a social history of railways spaces than on their impact on nationalism. In general, though, the fundamental point that space is created by politics and is thus a category accessible to history has recently led to a widespread appeal from historians and geographers for a heightened awareness of space in historical scholarship.[74] Some scholars have characterized this development as a 'spatial turn', although this expression has itself been criticized. Frithjof Benjamin Schenk reminds us that the French historical tradition around the *Annales* school has a long history of cooperation with neighbouring spatial disciplines such as geography. 'In an international perspective, then, there never was a comprehensive "loss" or "return of space".'[75] Nevertheless, it is evident that space as an analytical category has received increased academic attention in recent years. The constant transformation of the appreciation of space has made clear the relativity of a concept that was often taken for granted by historians. As Wolfgang Kaschuba writes, 'the space-time nexus is organized into cognitive landscapes and perspectives whose mountains and valleys, dates and epochs are

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[72] Henri Lefebvre, 'Reflections on the Politics of Space', trans. by Michael J. Enders, *Antipode*, 8.2 (May 1976), 30–37 (p. 31). It is noteworthy that Lefebvre does not problematize the unit of spatial production, which he simply posits as 'society' or 'mode of production'. In *The Production of Space*, he writes that 'every society – and hence every mode of production [...] – produces a space, its own space' (Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith [Oxford, 1991], p. 31).

[73] Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London, 1989), p. 51.

[74] See esp. Schlögel, *Im Raume*.

[75] Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, 'Der Spatial Turn und die Osteuropäische Geschichte', in *H-Soz-Kult* (1 June 2006) <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/forum/2006-06-001.pdf> [accessed 25 August 2015], p. 1.

created and determined by us. It is the result of our authority over interpretation and, as such, always subject to re-interpretation and change.'[76] However, not many historical studies have taken up the challenge of empirical research into the specifics of this change. I hope that the present study can contribute to changing this situation.

It might appear incongruous that I approach the railways as a spatial system, despite the fact that the prevalent discourse long considered trains to be destroyers of space. However, by the late nineteenth century, this view had been replaced by the implicit acknowledgement that one of the most important ways to experience space was by railway. This is the case especially on a macro-geographic level, such as a state, where trains soon displaced coaches or walking as the primary mode of transport. While never in the foreground, trains thus play a central role in travel writing as the prerequisite of experiencing the landscape. For international travellers, the view out of the compartment window constituted the first and often one of the most durable impressions of a country. For instance, it seemed to be obligatory for western travel accounts to the Soviet Union in the inter-war period to feature a railway chapter.[77] In a sense, this study examines the ways in which the view out of a train window shaped Czechoslovak nationhood.

The Czechoslovak Railway Paradox: National and Cosmopolitan Railways

Although the link between nationalism and the railway system has received remarkably little academic attention, the connection was explicitly acknowledged by national activists in the nineteenth century.[78] In 1827, the journal of the National Museum in Prague described plans

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[76] Kaschuba, p. 13.

[77] Karl Schlögel, *Berlin, Ostbahnhof Europas: Russen und Deutsche in ihrem Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1998), p. 54. Examples from the Bohemian context are F. C. Weiskopf, *Do XXI. století přestoupit* (Prague, 1928), which featured a cover designed by Karel Teige and is discussed below; Jiří Weil's novel *Moskva–hranice* (Prague, 1937); and Arnošt Winter, *Co jsem viděl v SSSR* (Prague, 1936).

[78] For instance, no article published in the *Journal of Transport History* until 1993 dealt with this topic (see Terry Gourvish, 'What kind of railway history did we get? Forty years of research', *Journal of Transport History*, 14 [1993], 111–25). The few exceptions include A. Kim Clark, *The Redemptive Work: Railway and the Nation in Ecuador, 1895–1930* (Wilmington, DE, 1998); Albert Schram,

to build a railway from the Bohemian capital to Pilsen (Plzeň) as an 'important patriotic enterprise' to increase trade in Bohemia.[79] However, many Czech nationalists soon came to consider the first railway lines in the Bohemian Lands as a dangerous measure of Germanization. In 1881, the nationalist writer Svatopluk Čech (1846–1908) made a pilgrimage to Velehrad, a religious site in Moravia famous for its association with the medieval Greater Moravian Empire and with the missionary Saints Cyril and Methodius. On the train, Čech was dismayed that the conductors spoke only German, even with passengers dressed in Czech national costume.

> Whoever has but a spark of Czech feeling and even the tiniest of tempers will not fight the sense of fury and shame about the malicious, breeding hatred that is allowed under the sign of the winged wheel in this purely Slav area. This is not just the philistinism and indolence of obstinate, deep-rooted practice; no, it is clearly and provocatively hostile intent that glares at you from all sides. You feel the glowing breath of stubborn national hatred everywhere. Indeed, it seems that the Moravian railways are a network of artificial canals that are intended to channel Germanness into this Slav land. They are all but military tracks of an aggressive foreign sentiment [*cizáctví*]: every station is its fortress and every employee, from the manager to the last porter […], is its warrior.[80]

Not all national activists in the Bohemian Lands were so shrill about the dangers of Germanization introduced by trains. But even statements in favour of railways, such as a travelogue of the Slovak national activist Jozef Miloslav Hurban (1817–1886), are testament to how widespread this sentiment was. Hurban travelled on the *Kaiser Ferdinands-Nordbahn* a day after it opened in 1839:

Railways and the Formation of the Italian State in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge, 1997); Sarah H. Gordon, *Passage to Union: How the Railroads transformed American Life, 1829–1929* (Chicago, 1996); and Laura Bear, *Lines of the Nation: Indian Railway Workers, Bureaucracy, and the Intimate Historical Self* (New York, 2007).

[79] 'Eisenbahn in Böhmen', *Monatsschrift der Gesellschaft des vaterländischen Museums in Böhmen*, vol. 1 (April 1827), 74–76 (p. 74). I am grateful to Lena Dorn for sending me this article.

[80] Svatopluk Čech, 'Velehradská pouť', in *Vzpomínky z cest a života I: Sebrané spisy, díl V* (Prague, 1908 [1881]), pp. 48–67 (pp. 48–49). I am grateful to Robert B. Pynsent for pointing this text out to me.

> Since the arrival of the railway has made Brno into, as it were, a suburb of Vienna, I
>
> understand many fear that the town will become more Viennese, and the Viennese
>
> element will predominate over the Slav one. But these apprehensions are groundless; for
>
> the railways do not belong to any nationality, but are the fruit of all nationalities – of
>
> mankind. Hence they will be a link also for the Slavs![81]

Indeed, they did become a link for the Slavs in the inter-war period. From the Bohemian German nationalist perspective, the significance of the railways for the subjective experience of Czechoslovak national space was demonstrated by the Austrian geographer Hugo Hassinger (1877–1952), whose notion of Czechoslovak statehood is discussed in the first chapter. His description of, as he perceives it, the de-Germanization of the Czechoslovak borderland illustrates the intimate connection between the railways and nationalism that will be explored throughout this study.

> A traveller who hastily rushes past the border towards the capital without coming into
>
> contact with the autochthonous population will meet only Czech customs officials,
>
> conductors, soldiers, station pub landlords and waiters, who mostly do understand some
>
> German. He will read Czech names on the station buildings and think that the state border
>
> he just crossed was also the language border. But centuries of German inhabitants never
>
> knew the south-western border town of 'Horní Dvořiště' by any other name than
>
> Oberhaid, and Czechs were only settled here in 1919. In the west, 'Železná Ruda' has
>
> always been known as Eisenstein. Coming from the north-west, our traveller will find the
>
> designation Cheb next to the name of the old German imperial city Eger on the station
>
> building. From the north, he will be surprised to find a 'Déčin-Podmokly' [sic] in the
>
> ancient German [*urdeutsch*] Tetschen-Bodenbach, or a Liberec-Reichenberg. In the north-
>
> east, his train now enters the border station Bohumin [sic], which always used to be
>
> Oderberg. His through carriage might run to Marianské Lázně [sic] or Karoly Vary [sic],
>
> names that hardly anyone might suspect to denote the universally known Marienbad and

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[81] Jozef Miloslav Hurban, *Cesta Slováka ku bratrům slavenským na Moravě a v Čechách* (Žilina, 1929 [1841]), p. 49.

Karlsbad. As many a spa guest will know, no Czechs lived in these towns or their

surroundings before 1918. Another train speeds to Bratislava, the German-Magyar

Preßburg with the newly invented name. These names were decreed by the state, and the

people transplanted by the state to the border and the railway stations form the masks

that hide the landscape's true features.[82]

Hence, on a daily basis, the railway network reminded citizens and visitors of which

country they were in. Through the practice of travelling on trains, the landscape acquired an

'iron mask' for Czechoslovaks and foreigners alike, and almost inconspicuously, railway space

became national space.[83] Like Anderson, Rogers Brubaker does not deny the reality of

nationhood, but does not see this reality as a useful category of analysis. Rather, he suggests, a

nation is a category of practice and should thus be treated 'not as substance but as

institutionalized form; not as collectivity but as practical category; not as entity but as

contingent event'.[84] The institution of the railways provided the practice of travelling through

the country and thus played its part in constituting Czechoslovak nationhood.

While the impact of the railways on the development nationalist ideology has been

largely neglected, until recently railway history has predominantly operated from a national

perspective and included only very sparse comparative and transnational aspects.[85] The

paradoxical nature of this national perspective on railway history has rightfully been pointed

out recently, considering the internationality of most railway systems.[86] There is, however, no

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[82] Hugo Hassinger, *Die Tschechoslowakei: Ein geographisches, politisches und wirtschaftliches Handbuch* (Vienna, 1925), pp. 103–04.

[83] Joseph Roth, p. 108.

[84] Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 16.

[85] Of all the literature on the Czechoslovak railways known to me, only Ivan Jakubec's study on inter-war transport in Czechoslovakia, Germany and Austria takes a comparative perspective.

[86] Ralf Roth, 'Die Entwicklung der Kommunikationsnetze und ihre Beziehung zur europäischen Städtelandschaft', in *Städte im europäischen Raum: Verkehr, Kommunikation und Urbanität im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Ralf Roth (Stuttgart, 2009), pp. 23–62 (p. 29); Ralf Roth and Karl Schlögel, 'Einleitung: Geschichte und Verkehr im 20. Jahrhundert', in *Neue Wege in ein neues Europa: Geschichte und Verkehr im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Ralf Roth and Karl Schlögel (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), pp. 11–26 (pp. 13–14). See also the contributions to the volume Monika Burri, Kilian T. Elsasser and David Gugerli (eds), *Die Internationalität der Eisenbahn 1850–1970* (Zurich, 2003).

lack of technical and popular literature on the development of the railways within inter-war

Czechoslovakia. Most recent literature draws on a 1958 study by Miloslav Štěpán, which,

although quick to blame any delay to technological progress on the bourgeois-capitalist

system, is a reliable overview of railway construction.[87] In addition, several pamphlets were

published during the inter-war period, primarily collections of facts and statistics written by

former railway employees or published by the government.[88]

While these works provide valuable and necessary background information, their focus

on technical developments disregards the fact that from the very beginnings, railways had also

had a profound international aspect. Indeed, they played a key role in the development of a

cosmopolitan consciousness that looked beyond national borders. Especially in the early days

of the new technology, before the First World War revealed the immense destructive potential

of the railways in war, railways were expected to become a motor of transnational

understanding and peace.[89] The German economist, national activist and railway enthusiast

Friedrich List (1789–1846) believed that the railways would be equally beneficial for all:

> Through the new means of transportation, man will become an infinitely happy, wealthy,
>
> perfect being. [...] National prejudices, national hatred, and national self-interested [will
>
> disappear] when the individuals of different nations are bound to one another through the

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[87] Miloslav Štěpán, *Přehledné dějiny československých železnic, 1824–1948* (Prague, 1958). Štěpán was head of the Czechoslovak Railway Archives from 1942 until his death in 1956 (see Miroslav Kunt, 'Vývoj dopravního archivnictví v Československu se zvláštním zřetelem k archivům železničním', *Paginae Historiae*, 4 [1996], 227–61 [p. 233]). For further technical or popular science works on the topic, see: Ivan Jakubec, Transport Problems of a New State; Ivan Jakubec, *Eisenbahn und Elbeschiffahrt*; Pavel Schreier, *Naše dráhy ve 20. století: Pohledy do železniční historie* (Prague, 2010); Mojmír Krejčiřík, *Po stopách našich železnic* (Prague, 1991); id., *Železniční móda: Dějiny železničního stejnokroje v Českých zemích a na Slovensku* (Prague, 2003); Josef Hons, *Dejiny dopravy na území ČSSR* (Bratislava, 1975); Stanislav Pavlíček, *Naše lokálky: Místní dráhy v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku* (Prague, 2002); Paul Catchpole, *Steam and Rail in Slovakia* (Birmingham, 1998).

[88] Ctibor Fiala, *Železnice v republice Československé: Historie a vývoj železnic v zemích československých* (Prague, 1932); Zoltán Berger, *Die Eisenbahnpolitik der tschechoslovakischen Republik seit ihrem Bestehen* (Strasbourg, 1928); Robert Burian, *Co vykonaly ČSD na Slovensku v prvých 15 letech po převratu* (Bratislava, 1934); *O vývoji a úkolech československého železnictví* (Prague, 1921); see also *Ročenka státních a soukromých drah Československé republiky* published annually by the Ministry of Railways from 1920 to 1933.

[89] See Christopher Kopper, 'Der erste Weltkrieg als Eisenbahnkrieg', in *Neue Wege in ein neues Europa*, pp. 222–34.

ties of science and art, trade and industry, friendship and family. How will it even be

possible for cultivated nations to wage war with one another?[90]

Similarly, the Czech historian and leader of the National Revival František Palacký asserted that

through the railways, 'the old dams between countries and nations are disappearing ever

more quickly, and all tribes, all races of humanity are converging, touching and depending on

one another'.[91] Heinrich Heine expressed a similar sentiment when, in his French exile, he

wrote about the opening of the line from Paris to Rouen and Orléans in 1843:

> Now you can travel to Orléans in four and a half hours, and it takes no longer to get to
>
> Rouen. Just imagine what will happen when the lines to Belgium and Germany are
>
> completed and connected up with their railways! I feel as if the mountains and forests of
>
> all countries were advancing on Paris. Even now, I can smell the German linden trees; the
>
> North Sea's breakers are rolling against my door.[92]

Even contemporary poetry anticipated the railways as harbingers of peace.[93] In view of this

abundant literature, the disregard in theoretical literature of the essential paradox regarding

railways and nationalism is striking: as soon as the railway tracks crossed the border, they

facilitated not national cohesion, but international contact.

Indeed, the railways soon offered prestigious international connections; from 1883, for

instance, well-to-do Europeans could travel non-stop from Paris to Constantinople on the

Orient Express. The first Habsburg railways stayed within the empire, but often crossed the

borders of territories which were codified as 'national' soon after: the *Kaiser Ferdinands-*

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[90] Quoted in Todd Samuel Presner, *Mobile Modernity: Germans, Jews, Trains* (New York, 2007), p. 160.
For a discussion of List's impact on the Czechoslovak railway discourse, see Chapter 1.

[91] Quoted in Macura, p. 60.

[92] Quoted in Schivelbusch, p. 39.

[93] Florian Cebulla cites a German poem of the *Vormärz*: 'Ja, alle Ketten, Fesseln, Wehr und Waffen, | aus
roher harter Zeit, | sie werden einst in Schienen umgeschaffen, | zum Preis der Menschlichkeit! -
| Mit Schienen, Freunde, webet ohne Bangen | ein Netz von Pol zu Pol! | Sieht sich Europa einst
darin gefangen, | dann wird es ihr erst wohl.' See Florian Cebulla, 'Grenzüberschreitender
Schienenverkehr: Problemstellungen – Methoden – Forschungsüberblick', in *Die Internationalität
der Eisenbahn 1850–1970*, ed. by Monika Burri, Kilian T. Elsasser and David Gugerli (Zurich, 2003),
pp. 21–35 (p. 23).

Nordbahn ran from Vienna to Brünn from 1839 and was later extended to Krakow, and the

Südbahn went from Vienna to Trieste from 1857. In addition, many railway lines were planned

and built by transnationally active investors whose interest certainly did not lie in national

homogenization. The Rothschild family, for instance, financed not only the *Nordbahn*, but

numerous other railway projects on the entire continent.[94] In the inter-war period, as well,

railways were included in ever more grandiose international transport plans, such as a direct

Paris-Dakar railway line with a tunnel through the Strait of Gibraltar.[95] As Irene Anastasiadou

has argued, the hope that 'the political unification of Europe could be achieved through the

construction of international railway arteries' lasted throughout the 1920s and 1930s and

thereafter.[96] Thus, despite the fact that railways were used as a means towards national

unification, they were also inherently international. Due to this apparently contradictory

discourse, the new technology of the railways was perceived ambiguously in the nineteenth

and even the twentieth century. They were simultaneously national and international, and

hence used to justify ideologies that, on first sight, had little in common. The railways were

equally central to narratives of exclusive national unification as of inclusive bourgeois

globalization.[97]

Only a few years after the *Orient Express* reached its zenith of political and cultural

importance in the 1930s – frequented by nobility, politicians and diplomats, the train offered

three different routes to travel between Paris and Istanbul/Athens and featured luxurious

facilities[98] – trains of a rather different type played an essential role in the violent apogee of

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[94] Melanie Aspey, 'Making Tracks: Promoting The Rothschild Archive as a Source for Railway History', in
   Across the Borders: Financing the World's Railways in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, ed.
   by Ralf Roth and Günter Dinhobl (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 3–12. The other contributions to this
   volume discuss numerous other examples.

[95] Irene Anastasiadou, 'Networks of Power: Railway Visions in Inter-war Europe', *The Journal of Transport
   History*, 28.2 (2007), 172–91; Dirk van Laak, 'Verkehr und Infrastruktur in der Zeit der beiden
   Weltkriege', in *Neue Wege in ein neues Europa*, pp. 141–55.

[96] Irene Anastasiadou, *Constructing Iron Europe: Transnationalism and Railways in the Interbellum*
   (Amsterdam, 2011), p. 12.

[97] This paradox is also pointed out by Kaschuba, p. 84.

[98] Werner Sölch, *Orient-Express: Glanzzeit und Niedergang eines Luxuszugs* (Düsseldorf, 1998), pp. 43–
   45.

nationalism. The complicity of the *Deutsche Reichsbahn* in the extermination of European Jews has been established by historians such as Raul Hilberg, and the picture of the tracks leading into Birkenau has become a powerful symbol of the Holocaust.[99] It is clear, as one historian states simply, that 'the murder of millions of European Jews would not have been possible without the railways'.[100] Hence, the railways remained a central tool of modernity even in the twentieth century, both constructively and destructively.

The dilemma of nationalism and cosmopolitanism represented by the railways is especially pertinent to the inter-war Czechoslovak case. The Czechoslovak government represented by the so-called Castle – the propaganda machine around the first president Tomáš G. Masaryk and his foreign minister Edvard Beneš (1884–1948) – pursued two contradictory goals. One the one hand, they aimed to establish the myth of an inherent Czechoslovak democracy abroad and at home, and on the other, they aspired to create a unified and strong nation-state based around singularity of the Czechoslovak nation. As Andrea Orzoff has argued, 'Czechoslovakia and other post-Habsburg states of East-Central Europe shared the central dilemma presented in this book: their inter-war nation building was dual, simultaneously domestic and international.'[101] Masaryk's notion of Czechoslovak statehood, which was based on the writings of the national historian František Palacký and was elevated to official ideology after 1918, considered the Hussites to be founders of a Czech tradition of democracy that had found its renewed expression in the independent state.[102] In this narrative, Czechoslovakia became a beacon of peace and democracy in the centre of Europe, open to its neighbours and cosmopolitan in its outlook. At the same time, there was no

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[99] Raul Hilberg, *Sonderzüge nach Auschwitz* (Mainz, 1981). See also Alfred C. Mierzejewski, *The Most Valuable Asset of the Reich: A History of the German National Railway. Volume 2: 1933–1945* (Chapel Hill, 2000); Simone Gigliotti, *The Train Journey: Transit, Captivity, and Witnessing the Holocaust* (New York, 2009); and Marie-Noëlle Polino, 'Der Zusammenhang von Transport und Vernichtung – ein ungelöstes Problem für Historiker', in *Neue Wege in ein neues Europa*, pp. 281–300.

[100] Alfred Gottwaldt, 'Die „Logistik des Holocaust" als mörderische Aufgabe der Deutschen Reichsbahn im europäischen Raum', in *Neue Wege in ein neues Europa*, pp. 261–80 (p. 261).

[101] Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe* (Oxford, 2009), p. 16.

[102] Petr Drulák, 'Between Geopolitics and Anti-Geopolitics: Czech Political Thought', *Geopolitics*, 11.3 (2006), 420–38.

shortage of nationalist conceptions of the nation that often contradicted this narrative of democracy. The first chapter of this thesis discusses one of these, the geopolitical theory of Viktor Dvorský. The railways magnified the problem, since they could effortlessly stand in both as symbols of nationalism and internationalism.

I will addresses the national ambivalence of the railways by using the terms 'national railways' and 'cosmopolitan railways' as structuring principles that frame my investigation of both political developments and cultural representations of the Czechoslovak railways. I use the expression 'cosmopolitan' to denote a conceptualization of railway space that was not caught in the bounds of nationalism, but that also did not limit itself to international train connections. Instead, I want to discuss how discourses of the railways contributed to representations of Czechoslovakia as an open, outward-looking and modern state, which was the main goal of the Castle. As such, the narrative of cosmopolitanism represented a vital ingredient to Czechoslovak nation-building that dialectically interacted with the nationalist impulse. The Ministry of Railways simultaneously pursued both sides of the national-transnational paradox. It oversaw the construction and upgrading of lines to unify the nation, but faced with the lack of a governmental body entrusted with the task of propagating Czechoslovakia internationally, it became an unofficial ministry of tourism, publishing brochures, timetables, guides and posters that advertised Czechoslovakia as attractive, modern and within easy reach by train from all over Europe. Hence, my study aims to show the central and underappreciated part in the creation of the myth of modern and democratic Czechoslovakia that the Ministry of Railways played.

This study intends to contribute both to cultural studies of the railways, which have heretofore neglected Czechoslovakia in terms of geography and time frame, and to Czechoslovak railway history, which has approached railway building as a straightforward history of technical progress. Approaching the railway network as an infrastructure that codified space nationally, my study intends to carve out the ambivalences of the railway

discourse: in Czechoslovakia, the railways were simultaneously perceived as old-fashioned and

modern, as national and international, and as an organic circulatory organ and an artificial

'iron landscape'. They none the less became one of the main pillars of Czechoslovak

nationhood and statehood.

Chapter 1
Viktor Dvorský and the Space of the Czechoslovak Nation

On 9 August 1917, the Czech geographer Viktor Dvorský (1882–1960) published a map of the 'Czech national territory' in the periodical *Národ* (The nation).[103] It was the first map of a future Czechoslovakia that reached a wide audience in the Bohemian Lands and included what was then still Upper Hungary (see Figure 1). It was reproduced with a revised version of the accompanying article in October of the same year in the popular daily *Národní listy* (National newspaper).[104] Dvorský went on to become one of the most prominent academic geographers in Central Europe and played a crucial role in the Czechoslovak delegation at the Paris Peace Conference. Dvorský's organicist notion of geography and his exclusive approach to Czechoslovak statehood formed the basis of one of the most influential nation-building projects in early Czechoslovakia. His 1923 *magnum opus*, *Základy politické geografie a Československý stát* (Principles of political geography and the Czechoslovak state) included a proposal for a 'Czechoslovak central railway'. Dvorský's writings represented a powerful appeal for the redevelopment of the railway network in the interest of national consolidation in inter-war Czechoslovakia. Approaching it as an attempt to codify the Czechoslovak nation spatially, I argue that his railway project was part of the intellectual tradition of the German economist and national activist Friedrich List (1789–1846), and thus regarded railways as the bond that would turn the nation-state into an organic whole. Even though his proposal remained unknown to the majority of Czechoslovaks, he had a considerable impact on the construction of a new Czech spatial discourse, which focused on the inclusion of Slovakia and Ruthenia into the national territory. Furthermore, as I will discuss with reference to his critics,

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[103] Viktor Dvorský, 'Hranice českého území', *Národ*, 1.19 (9 August 1917), 367–71 (p. 369).

[104] Viktor Dvorský, 'Území českého státu', *Národní listy*, 21 October 1917, p. 3. See also Vlastislav Häufler, 'O vzniku a vymezení našich státních hranic', *Acta Universitatis Carolinae: Geographica*, 13.2 (1978), 13–29 (p. 16).

his writing formed the most important Czech point of reference in the academic discourse that developed in Central Europe around the question of whether Czechoslovakia was geopolitically a viable state.

Dvorský's inclusion of Upper Hungary in his 1917 map transformed the geographic discourse, for before the outbreak of the First World War, most conceptions of Czech national space had been limited to the three Cisleithanian crown lands Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. The unity of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown was based on the Bohemian state right, a demand which dominated Czech politics in the later nineteenth century.[105] Drawing on the Hungarian example, the state right programme argued for the administrative unification of the Bohemian Lands within the Habsburg Empire. As such, as Peter Haslinger has argued, 'the state right motif proved to be a suitable means of arguing for national integration across the crown lands'.[106] It also countered German Bohemian demands of administering the German-speaking areas of the crown lands separately.

Very few Czech intellectuals, however, went as far as demanding the administrative union of the Slovak-speaking areas of Hungary with the Bohemian Lands. The Slovak-speaking intelligentsia in Hungary had been depleted by Magyarization measures since the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. Hence, a concerted effort to define a Czechoslovak territory that included northern Hungary was only made remarkably late, for the most part long after the start of the First World War.[107] None the less, interest in unification with the Hungarian Slovaks increased after the start of the war, and Dvorský was not the first to call for their inclusion in the new state. Both Czechoslovakia's later first Prime Minister Karel Kramář (1860–

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[105] Jan Křen, *Die Konfliktgemeinschaft: Tschechen und Deutsche 1780–1918*, trans. by Peter Heumos (Munich, 1996), pp. 77–90, and Luboš Velek, 'Böhmisches Staatsrecht auf „weichem Papier": Tatsache, Mythos und ihre symbolische Bedeutung in der tschechischen politischen Kultur', *Bohemia*, 47 (2006/07), 103–18 (p. 103).

[106] Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, p. 67.

[107] Peter Haslinger, 'Hungarian Motifs in the Emergence and the Decline of a Czechoslovak National Narrative, 1890–1930', in *Creating the Other: Ethnic Conflict and Nationalism in Habsburg Central Europe*, ed. by Nancy M. Wingfield (New York, 2003), pp. 169–82. Regarding the inclusion of Slovakia into the new state, see also Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, and Perman.

1937) and its later first President Tomáš G. Masaryk prepared proposals for a future state that included northern Hungary. However, both documents remained unknown to the Czech and Slovak public. Kramář, a Russophile who envisaged Czechoslovakia as a federal part of the Russian Empire, merely sent his proposal to the Russian foreign minister.[108] Masaryk's draft was pencilled into an English-language map of Central Europe and only reached a general audience in Czechoslovakia when it was reproduced in an authoritative history of the anti-Habsburg movement published in 1937, where it was presented as one of the founding documents of the country.[109] Perhaps the most daring proposal of the country's borders was presented to the Russian tsar Nicholas II by a delegation of Czech associations in Russia in September 1914. It featured all of what later became Czechoslovakia, but also all of Austria north of the Danube (making Vienna a border city), northern Hungary past Miskolc, Lusatia and Silesia (including Breslau [Wrocław]), a corridor to Yugoslavia and even Carpathian Ruthenia with Užhorod (Ungvár, Uzhhorod) as the capital.[110] This last point is especially noteworthy, considering Russia had claims to Ruthenia, and its incorporation into Czechoslovakia only became a serious option when it was mooted by Rusyn émigré societies in the United States in 1918.[111] While intriguing as documents of the independence movement based outside the country, none of these proposals had an impact on domestic politics in the Habsburg Empire.

For the most part, Dvorský's territorial demands were not as extravagant as those in the Russian proposal, or even those of Kramář and Masaryk. Its Bohemian, Moravian and Silesian sections, as well as the northern border of Slovakia, corresponded to the historical borders during the Habsburg Empire. It featured neither a corridor to Yugoslavia nor Carpathian Ruthenia. The Slovak border with Hungary, by contrast, was more daring than the

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[108] Häufler, O vzniku a vymezení, pp. 13–14; see also Ivan Kupčík, 'Die ersten kartographischen Festlegungen der tschechoslowakischen Staatsgrenzen', *Bohemia*, 30 (1989), 41–51.

[109] See Milada Paulová, *Dějiny Maffie: Odboj Čechů a Jihoslovanů za světové války 1914–1918. Díl I: Ve znaku persekuce* (Prague, 1937), back fold. It is discussed in Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, pp. 211–13.

[110] Häufler, O vzniku a vymezení, pp. 13–14.

[111] Paul Magocsi, *The Shaping of a National Identity: Subcarpathian Rus', 1848–1948* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), pp. 78–102.

final boundary. In the south-east, Dvorský used the 'Novohradské hory' (a chain of hills in contemporary Nógrád County) and the Mátra mountain range as delimiting lines, which were located well within the Hungarian borders designated by the Paris Peace Conference. In general, Dvorský's proposal steered Czech territorial demands into more realistic channels, though he still considerably exceeded claims that could be justified on the linguistic basis of self-determination. It was received positively on the Czech political scene, and served as the geographic justification of the 'state right declaration' made by the Czech agrarian politician František Staněk, the chairman of the *Český svaz* (Czech Union), before the Vienna *Reichsrat* on 30 May 1917. Staněk's speech had called for 'the union of all tribes of the Czechoslav people in a democratic state'.[112] The historian Jaroslav Werstadt (1888–1970) wrote at the time: 'Dvorský's study offers a scholarly geographic basis for the Czech state programme of 30 May and is also in many other ways highly noteworthy'.[113] Following Staněk's speech, the union of Czechs and Slovaks in a democratic state became a clearly formulated aim of the national movement.[114] Considering that Kramář's and Masaryk's conceptions were unknown at the time in the Bohemian Lands, it was Staněk's declaration in conjunction with Dvorský's map that prepared the Czech public for the fact that their post-war state might also include the northern part of the Kingdom of Hungary.

Dvorský's proposals received wide recognition in the weeks and months following the proclamation of Czechoslovakia on 28 October 1918.[115] He was one of the most prominent and active members of the Czechoslovak delegation to the Paris Peace Conference.[116] As the head

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[112] Jan Galandauer, 'Prohlášení Českého svazu z 30. května 1917 – Zapomenutá programová revoluce', *Český časopis historický*, 91.4 (1993), 582–92, and Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, p. 224. Staněk still used the term *čechoslovanský* (Czechoslav) instead of *čechoslovenský* (Czechoslovak), which was widespread among national activists in the nineteenth century to indicate the commonality of Czechs and Slovaks. After the foundation of Czechoslovakia, it fell out of use.

[113] J. W. [Jaroslav Werstadt], 'První mapa česk. státu', *Neodvislost*, 1.1 (29 August 1917), p. 4. See also Perman, p. 313, who identifies Werstadt as the author of the article.

[114] Jörg K. Hoensch (ed.), *Dokumente zur Autonomiepolitik der Slowakischen Volkspartei Hlinkas* (Munich, 1984), p. 27.

[115] See Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, pp. 243–44.

[116] Of all Czechoslovak delegates, Dvorský produced the second highest number of advisory studies in preparation of the Peace Conference (54). Only Vladimír List (1877–1871), a member of subcommittee for industry and trade, contributed more (59). See Zdeněk Vácha, *Žádám Vás jako*

of the ethnographic-geographic-statistical subcommittee, he held the overall responsibility for the drawing of the borders of the country.[117] Dvorský was involved in the Czechoslovak preparations for the Peace Conference from the very beginning as the chairman of the ethnographic section of the Office for the Preparation of the Peace Conference (*Úřad pro přípravu mírové konference*), which had been formed on 29 November 1918 under the chairmanship of the agrarian politician Antonín Slavík (1869–1948).[118] Dvorský had been among the first experts requested by the National Council to join the delegation on 22 November 1918 and was on the first special train that went to Paris on 6 January 1919.[119] Of all Czech geographers, one historian wrote in 1967, Dvorský 'was best prepared for this role, not only given his education in geography, jurisprudence and economics, but also due to his efforts of several years to justify and document the borders of our future […] state'.[120]

The other seven members of the subcommittee were the ethnographers Lubor Niederle (1865–1944), Karel Chotek (1881–1967) and Josef Malíř (1874–1945), the statistician Antonín Boháč (1882–1950), the poet and diplomat Adolf Černý (1864–1952), the Slovak philologist Jozef Škultéty (1853–1948) and the Silesian national activist Tomáš Stypa (1873–1931).[121] Dvorský thus oversaw an elite group of nationalist scholars within the numerically largest subcommittee.[122] Some of the section's members – like Niederle and Boháč – went on to become influential public intellectuals in the First Republic. The Czechoslovak delegation also featured a cartographic section that was led by Jaroslav Pantoflíček (1875–1951), a

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vynikajícího odborníka… Organizace odborných prací pro československou delegaci na mírové konferenci v Paříži v letech 1918–1919 (Prague, 2012), pp. 247–48. Vácha also lists all of Dvorský's studies by title on pp. 255–58.

[117] Ivan Kupčík, 'Činnost čs. kartografické sekce v Paříži 1918–19', *Acta Universitatis Carolinae: Geographica*, 9.1 (1974), 95–96. See also Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, p. 259 and Häufler, O vzniku a vymezení, p. 16.

[118] For a detailed account of the work of the *Úřad*, see Vácha, pp. 21–116.

[119] Jan Chodějovský, 'Vědci uprostřed „velké politiky": Pařížská mírová jednání ve svědectví odborných poradců československé delegace', in *Zrod nové Evropy: Versailles, St.-Germain, Trianon a dotváření poválečného mírového systému*, ed. by Jindřich Dejmek et al. (Prague, 2011), 139–57 (pp. 145–47).

[120] Vlastislav Häufler, *Dějiny geografie na Universitě Karlově 1348–1967* (Prague, 1967), p. 151.

[121] Kupčík, Činnost čs. kartografické sekce, p. 95.

[122] Vácha, p. 39.

professor of geodesy at the Czech Technical University in Prague. However, it comprised of only two members. Dvorský's group gave instructions and topics to Pantoflíček's, as well as preparing maps and memoranda themselves.[123]

Dvorský was the central figure in drawing up Czechoslovakia's borders. Proposals prepared by him and based on the spatial arguments advanced in his writing during the war were at the centre of the discussions at the meetings of the ethnographic section of the Office for the Preparation of the Peace Conference on 2 and 5 December 1918. Dvorský then took them to the plenary session of the Office on 29 December, where they were well received.[124] As a result he was invited (along with the Office's chairman Slavík) to participate in a government meeting on 2 January 1919 in Prague Castle, where Slavík presented the four border variants the Office had drawn up, going from a 'minimum' a 'maximum' list of territorial demands.[125] Naturally, all variants included the Bohemian Lands in their historical boundaries. The minimum proposal made only slight adjustments in Czechoslovakia's favour in Silesia and left to Hungary most of the Velký Žitný ostrov (Große Schüttinsel, Csallóköz), a large island in the Danube. The maximum proposal planned for the Czechoslovak annexation of Upper Silesia as far north as Bytom (Beuthen) and of Hungarian territory south of Visegrád, as well as the entire railway line between Miskolc (Miškovec) and Csap (Čop).[126] Slavík and Dvorský suggested that a compromise between these extreme demands be found, and as the following discussion showed, the provisional government agreed. While the Czechoslovak authorities sought to gain as much territory as possible, they were also wary of including too large an ethnic minority in the country. President Masaryk, who joined the meeting in the afternoon, summed up the discussion when he urged moderation in the territorial demands,

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[123] Kupčík, Die ersten kartographischen Festlegungen, p. 45.

[124] Vácha, pp. 67 and 70–75.

[125] The minutes of this meeting are reproduced as document 57 in *Československo na pařížské mírové konferenci 1918–1920*, vol. 1, *Listopad 1918–Červen 1919*, ed. by Jindřich Dejmek and František Kolář (Prague, 2001), pp. 131–42. See also Vácha, p. 67.

[126] *Československo na pařížské mírové konferenci*, pp. 132–33.

while stating the importance of preserving all of the Bohemian Lands in their historical

boundaries, even if large a German minority had to be integrated into the new state.[127]

Dvorský's proposals thus formed the spatial basis of the Czechoslovak delegation's

memoranda submitted to the Peace Conference in Paris, but were still adjusted as new

demands were raised. Concerning the border of southern Slovakia, Dvorský prepared several

map variations depending on whether Czechoslovakia was to be connected by a corridor to

Yugoslavia, an idea strongly supported by the pan-Slav Prime Minister Kramář,[128] or whether

the border was to follow the course of the Danube. The latter option still left a large number of

Magyar speakers in Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak line of argument in the memorandum

was formulated mainly by Niederle. It suggested that before the arrival of the Magyars in the

ninth century, Slovaks had settled in the entire area as far south as Lake Balaton. Furthermore,

Czechoslovakia required a substantial portion of the Danube for its economic survival.[129] The

Czechoslovak delegation also pushed for adjustments to the historical borders of southern

Moravia and Lower Austria, which had previously followed the rivers Dyje (Thaya) and Morava

(March). It argued that the railway line between Břeclav (Lundenburg) and Znojmo (Znaim)

passed over Lower Austrian territory and that several villages in the north-east of Lower

Austria had a Czech-speaking majority. In a memorandum prepared by Antonín Boháč, it was

argued that due to Czech settlement since the sixteenth century, 'the part of Lower Austria

that lies north of the Danube cannot be considered German territory. It is a zone of

transition.'[130] Dvorský prepared the map attached to the memorandum.[131]

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[127] Ibid., p. 140.

[128] Perman, p. 127.

[129] Hermann Raschhofer, *Die tschechoslowakischen Denkschriften für die Friedenskonferenz von Paris 1919/1920*, 2nd edn (Berlin, 1938), pp. 52–61. See also Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, pp. 261–65.

[130] Ibid., pp 278–79.

[131] Ibid., appendix. Most maps attached to the memoranda were drawn by the Cartographic Service of the Czechoslovak Army, but Dvorský himself contributed two (marked 'D-ský'). In addition to 'Rectification de la Frontière sur la Rivière Dyje', this was a map of 'Le Sud-Est de la Slovaquie'.

Chapter 1
Viktor Dvorský and the Space of the Czechoslovak Nation

The deliberations at the Paris Conference which settled Czechoslovakia's final boundaries have been described in detail elsewhere.[132] They took place primarily within the Commission of Czechoslovak Affairs, an ostensibly unpolitical body formed to solve technical questions of the course of the border and made up of representatives of France, Britain, Italy and the United States. Lacking a clear general policy, however, the commission could not but make political decisions; its recommendations to a large extent became the final boundary. The commission's work was guided on the one hand by the Czechoslovak memoranda and on the other by the strategic and geopolitical considerations of the individual Great Powers. The Czechoslovak spatial arguments put forward in the memoranda – both as texts and as maps – was thus discussed largely without local counterclaims. Given Dvorský's central role in the delegation that created this spatial discourse, his later claim to have 'established the borders of the Czechoslovak state' thus seems somewhat self-important, but not incorrect. He credited himself with a particularly prominent role in securing almost the entire southern border for Czechoslovakia, i.e. 'České Velenice, Valtice, the left bank of the Dyje until its confluence with the Morava and the Danube from the mouth of the Morava to the mouth of the Ipeľ'. After returning to Paris, he continued his work as deputy head (*commissaire adjoint*) of the Czechoslovak-Polish and the Czechoslovak-Austrian border commissions appointed to delimit the precise course of the border.[133] However, not all his proposals met with success. He participated in a delegation to Sighetu Marmației (Máramarossziget, Marmarošská Sihoť) on the Ruthenian border with Romania, which unsuccessfully bargained for the inclusion of the town's railway station into Czechoslovakia, as it lay on a line otherwise entirely within Ruthenia.[134]

Dvorský's prominence in the Czechoslovak delegation was based on his reputation as a nationalist academic which he built before and during the First World War. He completed a

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[132] See Perman, esp. chapter 6.

[133] Vácha, pp. 204–05 and Prague, Archives of the Academy of Sciences, Fond Viktor Dvorský, shelf-mark Ic, no. 5: 'Autobiografie (1956)' and no. 9: 'Návrh na člena (II. sekce) ČSAV'.

[134] Ibid. The line is discussed in greater detail in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

doctorate at Prague University in 1908 on the economic geography of Montenegro and

thereafter continued researching the Balkan Peninsula as well as the Alpine countries.[135] His

attention turned to his homeland after he contributed to Czech anti-Habsburg resistance

movements both in Italy and in Prague from 1914.[136] Soon after the war, he was awarded a

professorship at Prague University, and also taught at the Prague Business Academy (*Vysoká*

škola obchodní v Praze) and the Free School of Political Studies (*Svobodná škola politických*

nauk). Throughout the 1920s, he published pamphlets and longer studies that aimed to justify

Czechoslovak statehood through its political geography and helped build his reputation as the

'founder of Czech human geography', as the daily *Lidové noviny* (People's newspaper) wrote in

an article in honour of his sixtieth birthday.[137] His prolific academic career was cut short when,

during a trip to a conference in London in 1929, Dvorský suffered a stroke that left him partly

paralyzed and unable to speak. Though he lived for another 30 years, he never taught or

published again.[138] None the less, he remained a familiar scholar even outside his discipline.

When the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences was founded in 1952, he was the first

geographer to be awarded the title of *akademik*.[139]

A Railway to Unify the Country

Dvorský's 1917 map of the future country and his contribution in Paris constituted milestones

in the development of Czech(oslovak) national space. His foray into politics did not end there,

though. Throughout the early days of the Czechoslovak Republic, Dvorský strove to provide a

justification for the integration of Slovakia (and, to an extent, Carpathian Ruthenia) into the

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[135] Häufler, *Dějiny geografie*, p. 366.

[136] Paulová, pp. 435–37.

[137] 'Profesor Viktor Dvorský šedesátníkem', *Lidové noviny*, 22 September 1942, p. 4. Similarly, Dvorský's pupil Jaromír Korčák called him 'our first political geographer'. See Jaromír Korčák, *Geopolitické základy Československa: Jeho kmenové oblasti* (Prague, 1938), p. 10.

[138] For an overview of Dvorský's career, see Jan Choděkovský, 'Portrét z archivu: Viktor Dvorský (1882–1960)', *Akademický bulletin*, 1 (2010), 40, available online at <http://abicko.avcr.cz/2010/01/10/> [accessed 19 August 2015].

[139] Häufler, *Dějiny geografie*, p. 158.

national territory. He believed Czechs and Slovaks to constitute one nation not for reasons of ethnicity or language, but rather because they inhabited a 'single, geographically distinctive space'. He argued that 'the nation is a living system firmly tied to the territory from which it grew and on which it lives'.[140] None the less, he acknowledged that Czechs and Slovaks had had different experiences, as they had lived in different states for centuries. The scarcity of transport connections engineered by the Austro-Hungarian authorities, Dvorský thought, was the primary reason for these differences.

> The inadequate connection between the Elbe, Morava, Danube and Hornád valleys is a wilful political act. With good will the geographical obstacles are surmountable technically and economically. Of course, the transport autonomy of the individual valleys of the Czech territory has resulted in a looser alliance than one would expect considering the language is the same. However, the conditions in central and southern Germany were no different prior to the development of the railway and look at them now![141]

Hence, Dvorský argued in favour of a consolidated national transport system as a means of Czech and Slovak unification. While he acknowledged that the country's long border could present a problem in the case of a military attack, he argued that the 'quick merging of the population […] does not depend primarily on the shape of the state, but rather on the organization of its transport system'.[142] Hence, the infrastructure of the state, created by Austrians and Hungarians and 'only rudimentarily adapted to the needs of our state', had to be adjusted to suit its geography.[143] His proposal to create a unified nation out of the Czechoslovak population was based on the physical interaction of people facilitated by better transport. For him, then, 'the primary task of our railways is to surmount the Carpathian range

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[140] Dvorský, Hranice, pp. 367–68.
[141] Viktor Dvorský, *Území českého národa* (Prague, 1918), pp. 51–52.
[142] Viktor Dvorský, *Základy politické geografie a Československý stát* (Prague, 1923), p. 59.
[143] Ibid., p. 60.

that divides Moravia and Slovakia'.[144] In other words, the primary task of the railways was to unify Czechs and Slovaks.

In *Principles of Political Geography*, Dvorský presented a detailed proposal of a 'Czechoslovak central railway' (*Československá centrální dráha*). Partially taking advantage of existing tracks, the railway line was to lead from Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) in Western Bohemia via Prague, Košice and Užhorod to Chust (Huszt, Khust) in Carpathian Ruthenia (see Figure 2). It would cross the border between Moravia and Slovakia at the Lysá Pass, precisely halfway between Poland and Austria along the Moravian-Slovak border. Dvorský imagined the line as the main axis of a transport grid that would make every town in the country easily accessible. Readers of his book could verify the route on an attached map that showed Czechoslovakia criss-crossed by railway lines, and as a highly unified state since neighbouring states were omitted. 'These measures would give us a transport network […] that would not only eliminate the disadvantages of [the country's] oblong shape, but also make it possible to penetrate all parts of our territory more easily than even in a country with a rounded shape, even if these are peripheral areas.'[145] Dvorský explicitly identified a lack of internal unity in Czechoslovakia and argued that this could be mitigated by the railway network.

> Most certainly the most pressing problem is how to overcome the internal segmentation
>
> of the territory of our state, especially the high watersheds between individual tributaries
>
> of the Danube. This is also the most realistic field of work for internal unification. Even if
>
> the system of local trains that currently maintains the connection of Moravia with Slovakia
>
> in the Carpathians satisfies military objectives, *it does not satisfy political objectives*.
>
> Russia built the Trans-Siberian Railway as a *national enterprise*, from material produced
>
> exclusively in domestic factories, by exclusively Russian technicians and Russian workers.
>
> The Muslims maintained a similar principle for the construction of the Hejaz Railway in
>
> order to demonstrate the higher value of an enterprise that opens the country, protects it,

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[144] Viktor Dvorský, *Hospodářský přehled světa: Evropa jako celek. Československá republika* (Prague, n.d. [1929]), p. 71.
[145] Dvorský, *Základy*, p. 64.

connects related populations and is becoming the backbone of political development. I

consider the Czechoslovak central railway as a matter of necessity and honour.[146]

Considering Dvorský's praise of the fact that it was only Russian workers who built the Trans-

Siberian Railway, the nationalist impulse of the proposal is unmistakeable. He considered the

railway the primary means of Czech-Slovak rapprochement and unification. It was also

positively received by his German critics, who were not otherwise sparing in vitriolic criticism.

Hugo Hassinger called the proposal 'noteworthy', though he added 'it is characteristic that the

task of this railway would be to "overcome the internal segmentation of the state"', something

he considered impossible.[147] The geographer Robert Nowak (1895–1972) wrote in 1938 that

the project was 'highly interesting' and compared it favourably with the results of actual

railway construction: 'the aim [of railway construction in Slovakia] coincides completely with

the claims postulated by Dvorsky [sic] fifteen years ago, i.e. the creation of a central railway

and a "grid" of transport routes'.[148] This comment demonstrates the ease with which the

railways were accepted as a potential means of Czechoslovak national unification in the inter-

war academic discourse even by scholars who disputed the viability of the state in general.

Dvorský regarded them as the main means of creating a nation-state out of the territory he

sketched on his map in 1917. The fusion of territory and infrastructure for the benefit of the

nation was at the heart of his proposal.

Geography as the Biology of Nations

Despite the fact that his territorial claims appear moderate in comparison with those of

Kramář and Masaryk, and that he was widely praised for his railway proposal, Dvorský went on

to develop an original nationalist ideology that was not afraid to court controversy. It was

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[146] Ibid., p. 61. Emphasis in original.
[147] Hassinger, *Tschechoslowakei*, p. 350.
[148] Nowak, pp. 83, 86.

based on the work of Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), the German pioneer of human and political

geography, but also significantly diverged from his views. Ratzel had founded an

understanding of geopolitics that became popular not only in German geography, but also at

the universities of East-Central European countries like Czechoslovakia and Hungary.[149] The

former zoologist approached states as organisms formed through the symbiosis of people and

soil, whose life and death were governed by laws analogous to those of biology.

> The state is an organism towards which a certain part of the earth's surface contributes to
>
> such an extent that the state can be characterized as a union of the people and the soil. I
>
> do not regard the state as an organism merely because it is a connection of the living
>
> people and the rigid soil, but because this connection is consolidated by mutual
>
> interaction to such an extent that both become one and cannot be thought apart without
>
> losing their vitality.[150]

Ratzel's geopolitics thus approached states as actors in a geographic environment that was (to

a lesser or greater extent) determined by laws of nature. His work was long neglected in the

post-war period since it was perceived to be a precursor of Nazism, particularly for the coinage

of the term *Lebensraum*. In recent years, a more differentiated view has taken hold, which

acknowledges Ratzel's great impact on the political discourse in the first half of the twentieth

century, while attempting to place his thought in his contemporary context rather than that of

Nazism. Scholars have pointed out that Ratzel rejected the racist and antisemitic ideologies of

Arthur de Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, but he was certainly informed by

German romantic nationalism. Hence, Gertjan Dijkink has argued that while *Politische*

Geographie unwittingly prepared the soil for extreme nationalist ideas to take root, the book

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[149] See Drulák and Zoltán Hajdú, 'The Influence of Friedrich Ratzel on Hungarian Geography', in *Europe between Political Geography and Geopolitics: On the Centenary of Ratzel's Politische Geographie*, ed. by Marco Antonsich, V. A. Kolosov and M. Paola Pagnini (Trieste, 2001), pp. 129–43.

[150] Friedrich Ratzel, *Politische Geographie* (Munich, 1897), p. 5.

did not pursue this aim and should rather be regarded in the tradition of German idealist

philosophy.[151]

Considering his sharply anti-German attitude, it is ironic (if not untypical) that Dvorský's

geopolitics was based on firmly Ratzelian ground. He viewed both history and political

geography as a 'part of the superior discipline of biology of nations', arguing that states 'abide

by the fundamental laws of biology'.[152] Like living beings, states were governed by unchanging

laws that controlled their birth, growth, decline and death. Based on a pseudo-Darwinist

theory of historical natural selection, Dvorský emerged as a firm adherent of a geographical

determinism in which territorial states and physical force – rather than nations and ideas –

control the development of history. In his first book on Czechoslovakia, *Území českého národa*

(The territory of the Czech nation) of 1918, Dvorský wrote:

> The causality does not work in such a way that, with exceptional shrewdness, nations
>
> somehow find their own territory. Rather the fundamental agent here is territory itself.
>
> Every geographically independent territory – most often a territorial state that united
>
> tribes speaking a similar language – gave rise to one nation, or at least one branch of a
>
> nation, which differed from its neighbours.[153]

In contrast to most other nationalists of the period, he believed that states came before

nations: 'It is not that nations create their states, but rather states that create their nations.'[154]

Hence, he claimed that every modern nation was based on a historical state. He traced the

roots of the Czechoslovak nation to the early medieval Greater Moravia, which had existed for

roughly 70 years in the ninth century. 'The contemporary Czechoslovak state is the restitution

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[151] Gertjan Dijkink, 'Ratzel's Politische Geographie and Nineteenth-Century German Discourse', in *Europe between Political Geography and Geopolitics: On the Centenary of Ratzel's Politische Geographie*, ed. by Marco Antonsich, V. A. Kolosov and M. Paola Pagnini (Trieste, 2001), pp. 115–28 (p. 117). See also Harriet G. Wanklyn, *Friedrich Ratzel: A Biographical Memoir and Bibliography* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 34–36, and, for a more critical re-evaluation of Ratzel, Schlögel, *Im Raume*.

[152] Viktor Dvorský, Hranice, p. 368, and Dvorský, *Základy*, p. 14.

[153] Dvorský, *Území*, p. 10.

[154] Dvorský, *Základy*, p. 18.

of the Greater Moravian Empire, just as contemporary Italy is the restitution of the Roman Empire.'[155] The territory of Greater Moravia – and hence Czechoslovakia – formed an independent geographical unit that allowed for the undisturbed development of the Czechoslovak nation even during the thousand-year period of foreign rule. The nation created by Greater Moravia, he suggested, re-created its state in 1918, a process that was in accordance with the laws of political geography. It was successful despite the fact that neighbouring nations intruded into the Czech national territory and formed linguistically and culturally foreign islands.

While Dvorský was clearly a supporter of a unified Czechoslovak state, his justification diverged from the Masarykian mainstream. In his view, Czechoslovaks were not one nation due to linguistic or cultural links, but because of their shared historical heritage of Greater Moravia. What remained now, he argued, was to create a unified nation out of a Czechoslovak population of which one third did not speak Czech or Slovak as their mother tongue.[156] He rejected any Slovak separatism, for it contradicted the innate desire of the Czechoslovak nation to re-create their state. In particular, he had little patience for claims of Slovak cultural distinctiveness. In his view the codification of the Slovak standard language in the nineteenth century resulted in 'the Magyars having the Slovaks exactly where they wanted them, in the position of a non-political nation within the Magyar nation'.[157] For him, the Slovaks were a part of a greater Czech nation, and in all his earlier writing of 1917 and 1918, he used the adjective 'Czech' to refer to Czechoslovakia as a whole.

Hence, for Dvorský, modern geopolitics was based on the principle that all European nations have a territory, theirs by right of medieval statehood. He considered countries composed of more than one ethnolinguistic group, such as Switzerland or Belgium, as anomalies that included but 'fragments' of their respective nations, be they the German,

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[155] Ibid., p. 22.
[156] Dvorský, *Území*, pp. 26–40, and Dvorský, *Základy*, p. 22.
[157] Dvorský, *Základy*, p. 74.

French, Italian or Dutch. Hence, Dvorský was highly critical of the intrusion of members of foreign nations into a national territory, for which, in the Czech case, he blamed primarily the Germans and, to a lesser extent, the Magyars. 'The most fateful disruptions of the regular territorial development of the European nations were brought about by the Germans. The Germans violated the bounds of their national territory on all sides.'[158] In a lecture given in May 1920, he argued that the Germans, who had entered the Bohemian Lands from the west and north as 'colonists', found themselves in sunny and dry south-eastern Europe, 'which is entirely foreign to their mentality', since they were used to the damp north-western Europe. Notwithstanding their 'amphibian ability for adaptation', the Germans of Czechoslovakia were simply trapped outside of their natural territory.[159] The situation of the Magyars in the country was similar: 'The idea of the Greater Moravian Empire, embodied today by the Czechoslovak state, and the idea of the Hungarian Empire [sic] are irreconcilable. Faced with such a historic clash, all political means of reconciliation will necessarily end in failure.'[160]

As this indicates, he approached history as a 'life-and-death struggle' between members of national groups that subscribed to the 'idea' of different states, even if they lived outside its territory. This notion was also based on Ratzel, who wrote that every state had a 'political idea that animated [*beseelen*] it'. 'The most powerful states are those in which the political idea pervades all parts of the state body', while two souls 'rupture the cohesion of the political body'.[161] Dvorský thus took issue with Czechoslovakia's comparably liberal policy towards national minorities, dismissing 'so-called minority protection' as a 'remarkable crusade against the fundamental and vital function of the state, which is to create its own nation'.[162] Hence, despite his works' aspiration to scientific objectivity, Dvorský had a martial approach to history and geography. He saw Czechoslovakia at a crossroads: either it would succeed in assimilating

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[158] Viktor Dvorský, *Národ a půda* (Prague, 1919), p. 13.
[159] Viktor Dvorský, *Němci v Československé republice* (Prague, 1920), pp. 11, 14.
[160] Dvorský, *Základy*, p. 108.
[161] Ratzel, p. 7.
[162] Dvorský, *Základy*, p. 71.

its minorities as loyal 'apolitical nationalities' or it would face being swallowed up by

irredentist Germany and Hungary. He concluded his *Principles of Political Geography* with a

quotation by an 'impartial foreign observer', the French geographer Bertrand Auerbach, who

claimed that 'the Czechs have no choice but either to prevail or perish'.[163] Dvorský's geopolitics

provides evidence for scholars who have observed an 'authoritarian potential' in the First

Czechoslovak Republic, despite its reputation as a model democracy.[164]

Peter Haslinger has argued that Dvorský's theories were marginal in the Czech national

discourse 'in their apodictic exclusiveness', and Jan Galandauer has even called them 'bizarre'

and considered it 'lucky that they did not enter Czech politics'.[165] Indeed, most Czech

intellectuals followed the nineteenth-century historian František Palacký and the first

president Tomáš G. Masaryk in regarding the Hussite movement, rather than the historically

obscure Greater Moravian Empire, as the ideological forerunner of the Czech national

movement. Masaryk's notion of Czechoslovak statehood, which was elevated to official

ideology after 1918, considered the Hussites to be founders of a Czech tradition of democracy

that had found its renewed expression in the independent state.[166] None the less, the idea that

every nation had a territory that by natural right belonged to them was widespread at the

time. Politics, in this nationalist logic, was mainly a means of aligning borders according to the

principle of 'one country, one people, one state'.[167] Thus, although it remained a niche

position, Dvorský's geopolitics had a widely supported foundation and became one of the few

internal ideological challenges to the prevailing Masarykian myth of democracy in inter-war

Czechoslovakia. It was referred to in the press and in parliament.[168] Drawing on *Území českého*

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[163] Ibid., p. 131.
[164] Peter Bugge quotes this expression from Peter Heumos (Bugge, Paragon or Parody, p. 6).
[165] Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, p. 231, and Galandauer, p. 592.
[166] Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, p. 27.
[167] Hans-Dietrich Schultz, 'Land – Volk – Staat: der geografische Anteil an der "Erfindung" der Nation', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 51.1 (January 2000), 4–16 (pp. 5–8).
[168] At the parliamentary debate of 11 December 1923, the Agrarian deputy Rudolf Bergman referred to Dvorský to argue for greater agricultural subsidies. See 'Těsnopisecká zpráva o 240. schůzi poslanecké sněmovny Národního shromáždění republiky Československé v Praze v úterý dne 11. prosince 1923', in *Společná česko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna* <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/stenprot/240schuz/s240002.htm> [accessed 19 August

národa, *Lidové noviny* asserted in the autumn of 1918 that 'this entire territory [i.e. the Bohemian Lands and Slovakia] is destined for independent statehood'.[169]

Dvorský's political star faded fast and after the end of the Peace Conference, he returned to his academic work. *Principles of Political Geography* garnered only relatively short reviews upon its publication in 1923. *Východ* (The east), the eastern Bohemian party organ of Karel Kramář's National Democratic Party, wrote merely that 'the book is a rewarding orientation tool'.[170] In addition, Dvorský's theories were no longer accepted as unquestioningly as immediately after the war. A review in the legal journal *Všehrd* criticized Dvorský's theory that Greater Moravia had created the Czechoslovak nation, pointing to 'the Pyrenean and Scandinavian peninsulas, where identical conditions and a uniform geographical territory gave rise to two nations'. The review also disagreed with Dvorský's geographic determinism at the expense of human interaction and pointed out his political agenda: '[Dvorský] attempts to deduce guidelines for our internal and external politics from the character of the state territory and its location. He does not hide his nationalist and anti-socialist opinions, which he uses to further spike his conclusions'.[171]

However, by the late 1930s, public opinion had changed. After the Munich Agreement of 1938, which awarded the Sudetenland to the Third Reich and thus destroyed the Czechoslovakia he had helped to create in 1919, Dvorský's nationalist geopolitics received a more positive second reception. In late November 1938, two months after the agreement was signed, a series of large adverts was printed in *Lidové noviny* that advertised *Principles of Political Geography* as a 'highly timely book'.

> [The book] deserves the full attention of all those who are following the current events
> and their tragic fall, caused by the haughty conceit of some, the ignorance of others, and

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2015].

[169] 'Území československého státu', *Lidové noviny*, 23 November 1918, p. 1.
[170] 'Literární koutek', *Východ*, 3 November 1923, p. 3.
[171] *Všehrd*, 6.1 (1 October 1924), p. 25.

the boundless stupidity of yet others. It is an outline of the past and a warning for the

future. It is a pity that the age and its circumstances succeeded in suppressing a work of

such merit, whose ideas are appreciated fully […] only today, alas late and after bitter

experiences.[172]

The threat of Nazi Germany and finally the experience of being deprived of a part of the

national territory led to a general discursive shift among the Czech intelligentsia towards

geopolitics as the major force in international relations. In 1938, Dvorský's one-time pupil

Jaromír Korčák (1895–1989) published the book *Geopolitické základy Československa: Jeho*

kmenové oblasti (The geopolitical principles of Czechoslovakia: Its tribal areas), which the

political scientist Petr Drulák has called 'the most elaborate scholarly contribution to Czech

geopolitical thinking'.[173] In contrast to the work of Dvorský, which has been largely forgotten,

the study is today considered one of the classic works of Czech geography. Korčák shared

Dvorský's organic conception of nations and states and drew heavily on his work, writing that

he 'in essence agrees with the conception of our first political geographer, who genetically

connects the Czechoslovak state to the drainage basins of the main rivers'.[174] However, Korčák

avoided Dvorský's geographical determinism and attached more importance to human activity

than geographic realities in the creation of societies. He argued that all European nations

developed out of centuries of inhabiting the same 'tribal areas', which revolved around 'action

centres'. He described tribal areas as 'areas in which the geographic continuity of the

population is also a genetic continuity'.[175] Like Dvorský, Korčák traced the creation of the

Czechoslovak nation back to Greater Moravia, which he described as the most powerful and

important tribal area in Central Europe. He blamed its destruction on the rise of the Alföld (the

Great Hungarian Plain) as a refuge for marauding Magyars. He did not consider the Alföld a

tribal area, but an Asiatic steppe without a history of continuous settlement. Indeed, the area

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[172] *Lidové noviny*, 26 November 1938, p. 6. See also a similar advert in *Lidové noviny*, 29 November 1938,
   p. 6.
[173] Drulák, p. 430.
[174] Korčák, p. 10.
[175] Ibid., p. 16.

'constitutes the cultural border between Europe and Asia'.[176] His argument for Czechoslovak nationhood was thus based on a re-appropriation of Dvorský's Greater Moravian theory, although he replaced Dvorský's rabid anti-Germanism with a negative attitude towards the Magyars, whom he stereotypically depicted as Asiatic hordes and invoked them as the destroyers of the first Czechoslovak state.

Drulák emphasizes Korčák's ambivalent view of Nazism; one the one hand, Korčák considered Nazi Germany a mortal threat to the Czechoslovak nation, but he also admired the German 'action centre' in the Baltic, which he saw as the most dynamic in Europe.[177] However, he added little to a geopolitical discourse that Dvorský had already based on a glorification of physical force and a more or less open desire to retrospectively justify the existence of Czechoslovakia. Korčák's carefully positive approach to Nazi Germany was by no means exceptional in Czech academia at the time, and became even less so after the German occupation of the country, as is demonstrated by an article published in 1942 in *Přítomnost* (The presence/present), one of the cornerstones of the democratic press in the First Republic. In it, the legal scholar Rudolf Wierer argued for the acceptance of German geopolitical claims in former Czechoslovakia. While he regretted that Dvorský's work 'did not reach the general public', he suggested that geopolitically, inter-war Czechoslovakia was not a viable state.

> Masaryk's belief that we should have a sovereign state, considering nations much smaller in number (Norwegians, Danes, Portuguese and Swedes) and even nations culturally and numerically weaker (Greeks and Bulgarians) have one, too, neglected an entirely primitive teaching of geopolitics: the fact that the Czech nation does not exclusively inhabit a geopolitically closed and protected life-space.[178]

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[176] Ibid., p. 50.

[177] Drulák, p. 431. See also Korčák, p. 158.

[178] Rudolf Wierer, 'Neznámá geopolitika: Potřeba nového politického nazírání', *Přítomnost*, 17.2 (1 November 1942), 11–13.

This, of course, is the very antithesis of Dvorský's notion, who attempted to geopolitically

prove the existence of a single Czechoslovak national territory. Wierer based his thought on a

rejection of Masaryk's theory of democracy, which, he argued, had neglected geopolitical

considerations. He characterized Masaryk's 'humanist democracy' as an amalgamation of the

French Revolution, Tolstoy and Anglo-Saxon Protestantism, arguing that in the First Republic,

'this attitude, which was apparently deduced from the Czech reformation, was elevated to a

virtually unchangeable foundation of all political scholarship, be it in literature, education, or

the press'.[179] The changing reception of Dvorský's geopolitical world-view – if not his pro-

Czechoslovak conclusions – supports Haslinger's argument that the Munich Agreement

'changed the Czech national discourse on territory more radically than any political event

before'.[180]

Wierer's article is noteworthy not only because it in effect supported German

expansionism in a journal that had been co-founded by Masaryk and that, in Andrea Orzoff's

words, 'constituted the closest thing the Castle had to a party press'.[181] It also reused

arguments made by German geographers in the 1920s and 1930s in order to deny

Czechoslovakia's geographical viability. The most prominent works in this scientific debate was

Hugo Hassinger's *Die Tschechoslowakei: Ein geographisches, politisches und wirtschaftliches*

Handbuch (Czechoslovakia: A geographic, political and economic handbook), published in

1925, and Robert Nowak's *Der künstliche Staat: Ostprobleme der Tschecho-Slowakei* (The

artificial state: Eastern problems of Czecho-Slovakia) of 1938. Both of these books refer to

Dvorský as their most important Czech intellectual antagonist, and especially Hassinger's

argument is often based on a desire to refute Dvorský. Like Dvorský, Hassinger was a Ratzelian,

who, in organicist language, aimed to present a biographical account of Czechoslovakia and

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[179] Ibid., p. 11.
[180] Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, p. 432.
[181] Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, p. 82. A useful discussion of *Přítomnost* can also be found in Ines
    Koeltzsch, *Geteilte Kulturen: Eine Geschichte der tschechisch-jüdisch-deutschen Beziehungen in*
    Prag (1918–1938) (Munich, 2012), pp. 236–51.

chart the 'becoming and being of this state'.[182] He rejected Dvorský's connection of

Czechoslovakia with Greater Moravia and stated unequivocally that 'Czechoslovakia was born

in 1918'.[183] His critique was based on the fact that Czechoslovakia's borders did not

correspond to ethnic boundaries, leading to the re-creating of the national problems of

Austria-Hungary on a smaller scale. 'The large head of the long state body, formed by the

Bohemian basin and its borderlands, pierces westwards into the German-speaking area

between Austria and Germany. Its contours are not ethnic, but by and large historical

boundaries inspired by natural barriers.'[184] He took issue with Czechoslovakia's oblong shape

and the large distance between the major cities.

> The Slovak capital Preßburg is within a 60-kilometre train journey from Vienna, but it is
>
> 200 kilometres from Prague. The distance from Eger to Marmaros [sic] on the upper Tisa is
>
> 930 kilometres as the crow flies, i.e. farther than to London […]. Even from Prague to
>
> Uzhorod [sic], the capital of Carpathian Russia, the express train takes 20 hours! A truly
>
> monstrous body politic!'[185]

To an extent, then, Dvorský and Hassinger shared their negative assessment of the current

railway network in Czechoslovakia. But while the former saw an upgraded network as a means

to national unification, the latter simply regarded it as a symptom of the fact that

Czechoslovakia was unviable as a state.

Hassinger went on to accuse Czechoslovakia of a brutal policy of Czechization, whose

theoretical cornerstone he identified in Dvorský's anti-minority policy as laid out in *Principles*

of Political Geography. He argued that Dvorský's study 'was intended to encourage the

government to pursue purposeful measures of Czechization' and noted sardonically that it

'presented and scientifically justified a Czech national programme of power-political brutality

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[182] Hassinger, *Tschechoslowakei*, p. 1.
[183] Ibid., p. 181.
[184] Ibid., p. 338.
[185] Ibid., pp. 340–41. 'Marmaros' refers to the former Hungarian county of Máramaros, which was incorporated into Romania as Maramureş after the First World War and formed the southern border of Carpathian Ruthenia.

with a candour that is worthy of praise'.[186] The publication of Hassinger's book caused a wave

of indignation in Czechoslovakia and was strongly criticized by a number of prominent

members of the academic community. The German-language pro-government daily *Prager*

Presse (Prague press) published a series of reviews that rejected the study from the

perspective of various disciplines, including a contribution by Josef Pekař (1870–1937), the

most famous Czech historian in the First Republic.[187] The critics attacked the selective source

material of the book, and argued that it was a tendentious piece of pro-German propaganda.

In return, in 1926 Hassinger published a pamphlet that refuted his critics and accused them of

a political agenda of their own. The debate on both sides radicalized further after the Nazi

assumption of power in Germany and on 2 August 1934 the Ministry of the Interior went as far

as banning Hassinger's book.[188] In truth, both Hassinger and his critics played a significant part

in the political discourse throughout the First Republic.

Robert Nowak, whose attitude towards the country is evident from his book's title,

went even farther than Hassinger in his geopolitical criticism of Czechoslovakia. His book was

published just months before the final break-up of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Intended

primarily to show the stark internal contradictions between Slovakia and the Bohemian Lands,

Nowak repeatedly referred to the 'inorganic nature of this state construct', and wrongly

implied that Dvorský had expected the country to fall apart due to the large number of

minorities.[189] It remained Nowak's only academic work, but he published several volumes of

Habsburg nostalgia fiction.[190] In the study's preface, Karl Haushofer, the German geographer

whose notion of geopolitics laid some of the foundations for the territorial expansion of Nazi

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[186] Hugo Hassinger, *Mein Buch „Die Tschechoslowakei" und seine tschechischen Kritiker* (Augsburg, 1926), p. 12, and Hassinger, *Tschechoslowakei*, p. 449–50.

[187] See Hassinger, *Mein Buch und seine Kritiker*.

[188] See list of banned German-language books in *Reichenberger Zeitung*, 3 August 1934, p. 3.

[189] Robert Nowak, *Der künstliche Staat: Ostprobleme der Tschecho-Slowakei* (Oldenburg, 1938), pp. 11, 294.

[190] See the summary to Franz Gotsmy, 'Leben und Werk des Schriftstellers Robert Nowak' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Vienna, 2004), available online at <http://media.obvsg.at/AC04289275> [accessed 19 August 2015].

Germany, was even more outspoken. Referring to the country's oblong shape, he called

Czechoslovakia a 'strangely formed state with a Middle Eastern appendix' and an 'empire of

the Czechs over Germans, Slovaks, Magyars, Poles, Romanians and Ruthenians'.[191] Indeed,

uncertainties over the organic viability of the state due to its unusually long shape were

common even in the Czech discourse, as a brochure published in 1918 by the northern

Bohemian schoolteacher Hanuš Kuffner indicates.

> It is simply impossible to choose a worse shape for a state […]: an overly oblong
>
> (spaghetti-like) shape […]. The 'republic' is held in the embrace of enemies from three
>
> sides. […] The current world war will have been worthless if the German wedges are left
>
> implanted into the Slav body.[192]

These texts indicate that the geopolitical discussion of Czechoslovakia at home and in

the wider region was based on an organic narrative that, while reaching different conclusions,

used the same geographically normative rhetoric. Dvorský, Hassinger and Nowak all

approached political geography as a biological science based on a peculiar interpretation of the

teachings of Friedrich Ratzel. The fact that they reached diametrically opposed conclusions is,

in this case, an indication of the shortcomings of their academic method, which was to a large

extent driven by political considerations.[193] For whoever was prepared to listen, Dvorský's

theory did indeed provide an apparently scientifically grounded programme of national

homogenization. Meanwhile, in the brochure defending his book 'against its Czech critics',

Hassinger rejected 'propaganda literature' on both sides and fashioned himself as an outsider

with an objective view unaffected by personal animosities, denying any connection to the

Sudeten German political movement.[194] None the less, his book was officially recommended by

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[191] Karl Haushofer, 'Geleitwort', in Nowak, p. 7.

[192] Hanuš Kuffner, *Náš stát a světový mír* (Prague, 1918). Translated from the German version *Unser Staat und der Weltfrieden* (Varnsdorf, 1922), pp. 8, 10. Quoted in Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, p. 245.

[193] Hassinger even accuses Dvorský of being a member of Karel Kramář's National Democratic Party (see Hassinger, *Mein Buch und seine Kritiker*, p. 12). I have not found any information to substantiate this claim.

[194] Hassinger, *Mein Buch und seine Kritiker*, pp. 2–4. Hassinger was born in Vienna and spent his

the German Ministry of the Interior and several short texts of his were published by the

Anstalt für Sudetendeutsche Heimatforschung (Institute for Sudeten German Research) in

Liberec (Reichenberg).[195] Hence, despite the fact that Dvorský's geopolitics, in particular, stood

outside the political mainstream, the academic discussion of the geographic viability of

Czechoslovakia were at the heart of the German-Czech conflict over territory.

The Railways and Circulation

Dvorský and his main critics perceived the railways as the 'backbone of the nation'. Hassinger

invoked the railway between Košice and Bohumín, the only double-track main line between

Moravia and Slovakia, which Dvorský's proposal sought to replace with a more secure route in

the country's interior, as the 'transport backbone of the east'.[196] Nowak called the same

railway 'the only continuous connection between the country's east and west and its main

transport and vital artery'.[197] Indeed, as for geography as a whole, a highly organicist view of

the role of the railways in the nation was commonplace in inter-war Czechoslovakia. This

discourse was undoubtedly connected to the great impact of Ratzel's conception of the state,

not only for Dvorský, but throughout Central Europe. But the endorsement of national railway

networks through organicist imagery had roots in discourses that predated Ratzel, whose book

Politische Geographie was only published in 1897. A railway narrative based on the corporeal

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academic career at the universities of Basel, Freiburg and Vienna. Before the First World War, he worked for several years as a schoolteacher in Hranice na Moravě (Mährisch-Weißkirchen). See Hans Bobek, 'Hassinger, Hugo Rudolf Franz', *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 8 (1969), 49–50, available online at <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd116515597.html> [accessed 19 August 2015].

[195] In addition to *Mein Buch und seine Kritiker*, this also included Hugo Hassinger, *Die Entwicklung des tschechischen Nationalbewusstseins und die Gründung des heutigen Staates der Tschechoslowakei* (Kassel, 1928). The institute, part of the *Deutsche Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft* (German Academic Society) in Liberec, acted as the academic arm of the German nationalist movement in northern Bohemia, but was nevertheless partly financed by the Czechoslovak government. It was disbanded in 1939 and replaced with an openly Nazi institution in 1940. See Ota Konrád, 'Die Sudetendeutsche Anstalt für Landes- und Volksforschung 1940–1945: „Wissenschaftliche Gründlichkeit und völkische Verpflichtung"', in *Die „sudetendeutsche Geschichtsschreibung" 1918–1960: Zur Vorgeschichte und Gründung der Historischen Kommission der Sudetenländer*, ed. by Stefan Albrecht and Robert Luft (Munich, 2008), pp. 71–96 (pp. 73–74).

[196] Hassinger, *Tschechoslowakei*, p. 350.

[197] Nowak, p. 81.

metaphor of the nation as a body, and the (future) railways as its veins or arteries leading to and from the heart, i.e. the capital city, was dominant at the very beginnings of railway construction. It was established primarily by Friedrich List, one of the central figures of German nationalism in the nineteenth century.

List argued that economic unity was as important to the creation of a nation-state as the linguistic and cultural measures proposed by earlier thinkers such as Herder and Fichte. He was one of the main proponents of a customs union between the various German states.[198] List saw the railways and the customs union as naturally compatible aims:

> The railway network and the Customs Union are Siamese twins; born simultaneously, physically grown together, they are of one spirit and mind. They support one another and strive for one and the same great goal, the unification of the German tribes into one great and cultured, rich, powerful and inviolable nation. [...] Only by way of a German railway network will the social economy of the Germans be able to attain national greatness [...].[199]

In the 1830s he developed detailed route plans of a unified German system that crossed internal state boundaries and was the first to apply the notion of the *body politic* to the new technology. For List, railways were a necessary circulatory organ that would turn the German nation into an organic whole. He drew the first map of a unified German system in 1833, which was also among the first maps of an imaginary unified German nation-state.[200] In his illuminative discussion of List's impact on German nationalism, Todd Samuel Presner compares it to a medical diagram, and argues that 'List introduces an important metaphor for thinking

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[198] Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 96–115.

[199] Friedrich List, 'Das deutsche Eisenbahnsystem [III] als Mittel zu Vervollkommnung der deutschen Industrie, des deutschen Zollvereins und des deutschen Nationalverbands überhaupt (Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf württembergische Eisenbahnen)', in *Schriften/Reden/Briefe: Band III. Schriften zum Verkehrswesen. Erster Teil: Einleitung und Text*, ed. by Erwin V. Beckerath and Otto Stühler (Berlin, 1929), pp. 347–77 (p. 347).

[200] The map can be found in Friedrich List, *Ueber ein sächsisches Eisenbahn-System als Grundlage eines allgemeinen deutschen Eisenbahn-Systems, und insbesondere über die Anlegung einer Eisenbahn von Leipzig nach Dresden* (Leipzig, 1833); it is reproduced in Presner, p. 167.

about the nation, namely, the newly assembled body'.[201] Indeed, List conceived of the nation

in organic terms. He supported the customs union because 'thirty-eight customs boundaries

cripple inland trade, and produce much the same effect as ligatures which prevent the free

circulation of the blood'.[202] Similarly, he imagined that the railway would become 'a solid belt

around the loins of the German nation, which will connect its limbs into a combative and

powerful body'; in addition it would function as the 'nervous system of the common spirit

[*Nervensystem des Gemeindegeistes*]'.[203] List's theory of a national railway made a powerful

case for a unified Germany conceived of as a society united by language, culture and heritage

spread over a united territory.

The role of the Habsburg territories in List's conception was ambivalent, and the only

Habsburg city included on his map was Prague. Vienna, the largest German-speaking city at the

time, was conspicuous by its absence, as were Pest and Buda, which at the time still possessed

a German-speaking majority. Presner's explanation for this points to List's conflicted

relationship with Austrian chancellor Klemens von Metternich (1773–1859), who was

suspicious of List's potentially revolutionary activities.[204] However, List was a great

Magyarophile and visited Hungary twice in the 1840s. Influenced by Herder's theory that the

Magyar nation was destined to a slow death because it was surrounded by foreign linguistic

groups – Slavs, Germans and Romanians – List called for a systematic programme of German

immigration to Hungary (he expected half a million immigrants annually). There, the Germans

would assimilate and become Magyars, thus contributing to the strengthening of the nation.[205]

This also seems the most probable reason for leaving Buda and Pest out of his German railway

map, since he envisioned the cities to become ethnically Magyar. In a memorandum sent to

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[201] Ibid., p. 170.
[202] Quoted in Szporluk, p. 104.
[203] Quoted in List, Das deutsche Eisenbahnsystem, p. 348.
[204] Presner, p. 168.
[205] Friedrich List, 'Die Ackerverfassung, die Zwergwirtschaft und die Auswanderung', in
    Schriften/Reden/Briefe: Band V. Aufsätze und Abhandlungen aus den Jahren 1831–1844, ed. by
    Edgar Salin, Artur Sommer und Otto Stühler (Berlin, 1928), pp. 418–547. See also Gottfried
    Fittbogen, *Friedrich List in Ungarn* (Berlin, 1942), pp. 20–24.

Carl Friedrich Kübeck, the Austrian imperial official responsible for railways, List argued for a strong link between Vienna and Hungary: 'Vienna, the heart of the Austrian monarchy, cannot be connected too closely with Ofenpest [Budapest], the heart of Hungary'.[206]

List's visits had a great impact in Hungary, especially on the national reformer István Széchenyi (1791–1860). The 'greatest Magyar', as his rival Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894) called him, saw the creation of a modern transport system as one of the most important tools of nation-building and contributed to making the lower Danube navigable.[207] Széchenyi became interested in trains after riding on the Manchester–Liverpool railway during a trip around England in 1832.[208] His pamphlet *Javaslat a magyar közlekedési ügy rendezésérül* (Proposal for a Hungarian transport system) clearly shows List's influence. Written during Széchenyi's brief tenure as Hungarian Minister of Transport in 1848, it became the blueprint for the construction of the transport system in the Kingdom of Hungary until the First World War.[209] Invoking railways as 'the blood vessels of a living body', Széchenyi called for a radial railway to circle around the national capital.

> The centre of growth of Hungarian trade and industry is Budapest, the heart of the
> country, and all transportation lines shall be regarded as arteries carrying the blood from
> the heart to the borderlands of the country. The main transportation lines should fan out
> from Budapest, which is considered the centre, in order to connect our homeland with the
> world and spread the benefit arising from this to every part of the country.[210]

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[206] Friedrich List, 'Über die Transportverbesserung in Ungarn', in *Schriften/Reden/Briefe: Band III. Schriften zum Verkehrswesen. Erster Teil: Einleitung und Text*, ed. by Erwin V. Beckerath and Otto Stühler (Berlin, 1929), pp. 434–61 (p. 440).

[207] George Barany, *Stephen Széchenyi and the Awakening of Hungarian Nationalism, 1791–1841* (Princeton, 1968), pp. 2, 248.

[208] Ibid., p. 274.

[209] Andreas Oplatka, *Graf Stephan Széchenyi: Der Mann, der Ungarn schuf* (Vienna, 2004), p. 372. Bernhard Neuner writes that 'this study is a foundation of Hungarian transport policy'. See Bernhard Neuner, *Bibliographie der österreichischen Eisenbahnliteratur: Von den Anfängen bis 1918. Band 1* (Vienna, 2002), p. 173. György Spira often takes a rather hagiographic tone. See *A Hungarian Count in the Revolution of 1848* (Budapest, 1974), esp. pp. 105–128.

[210] István Széchenyi, *Javaslat a magyar közlekedési ügy rendezésérül* (Pressburg, n.d. [1848]), pp. 4–5, 54–55. Széchenyi's text is also noteworthy for being among the first to call the Hungarian capital 'Budapest'. Until the city was administratively united in 1873, it was common to refer to both

Széchenyi went one step further than List and propagated the new technology as a means of national homogenization, i.e. of Magyarization. Referring to the Slovak and German-speaking mining areas of Upper Hungary, he wrote:

> On a daily basis, I hear complaints that the people of these areas are foreign to our nationality and gravitate towards another element [...]. Be that as it may, nothing is a more powerful defence against this as a vital connection and hence constant communication with the centre of the country and Magyardom. Nothing will make them gravitate towards us quicker and more securely than the railway.[211]

The notion of circulation was a central metaphor in this narrative. Trains were imagined as the blood particles that circulated around the country to ensure the survival of all individual parts of the nation. The image of circulation is, at the same time, one of the most pervasive metaphors of modernity. Its roots reach to 1628, when the English physician William Harvey (1578–1657) discovered that blood circulated around the heart in the human body.[212] Thereafter, this image quickly became a universal metaphor whose use was transferred from its original medical meaning to many fields of politics and economics. In a lecture on the changing 'spaces of security' in the early modern period, Michel Foucault stressed that 'what was at issue in the eighteenth century was the question of the spatial, juridical, administrative, and economic opening up of the town: resituating the town in a space of circulation'.[213] Indeed, the comprehensive projects of urban reform carried out in the nineteenth century in various European cities, such as the construction of the *Champs d'Elysées* in Paris, the *Ringstraße* in Vienna or *Andrássy út* in Budapest, followed the paradigm of free circulation of people and goods as set against the perceived lack of hygiene in cluttered medieval towns.[214]

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sides of Danube as 'Pest-Buda'.

[211] Ibid., p. 59.

[212] Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (London, 1994), pp. 255–62.

[213] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, ed. by Michel Senellart, trans. by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke, 2007), p. 13.

[214] On Vienna, see Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (Cambridge, 1981), esp. Chapter 2 ('The Ringstrasse, Its Critics, and the Birth of Urban Modernism', pp. 24–115). For the Budapest case, see John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture*

Chapter 1
Viktor Dvorský and the Space of the Czechoslovak Nation

Richard Sennett has analysed Haussmann's transformation of Paris as guided by these principles: 'planners sought to make the city a place in which people could move and breathe freely, a city of flowing arteries and veins through which people streamed like healthy blood corpuscles'.[215] The rise of the image of circulation in political rhetoric coincided with the rise of nationalism, and led to a fundamental spatial turn in the usage of the body metaphor. The notion was not attributed to the fixed social groups of medieval society, but to society as a whole in a certain delimited geographical area, be it a city or a state. The most ambitious elaboration of the analogy was presented by Ratzel, who was critical of previous organic analogies in politics for neglecting their territorial dimension. He defined the organs of the state in a territorial manner, distinguishing between centre and periphery, and inland and coast. Invoking the image of circulation, Ratzel wrote that the connection between the 'vital parts' of each country, between centre and periphery, was to be ensured by transport routes, 'the organs of the inner cohesion of the state'.[216]

The writings of List, Széchenyi and Ratzel thus contributed to an organicist conception of the state in which the railways came to be seen as a central means to national unification. This is reflected in literature. In 1847, the Hungarian national poet Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849) wrote the poem *Vasúton* (On the railway), which imagined the railway as a means of healthy circulation in a corporeal world:

> They are building | A hundred railways, a thousand! | May the railways extend all over the
>
> world, | Like veins in the body. | They are the veins of the earth; | They spread culture |
>
> and make flow far and wide | the juices of life.[217]

(New York, 1988), esp. pp. 29–66.

[215] Sennett, pp. 255–56.

[216] Ibid., pp. 16, 411.

[217] Sándor Petőfi, 'Vas-uton', in *Összes költeményei*, vol. 1 (Budapest, 1901), p. 487. The original reads: 'Szász vas-útat, ezeret! | Csináljatok, csináljatok! | Hadd fussák be a világot, | Mint a testet az erek. | Ezek a föld erei, | Bennök árad a müveltség, | Ezek által ömlenek szét | Az életnek nedvei.'

This discourse of iron lines as human veins contributed to the reification of the geographically grounded nation as a healthy and stable body. As such, it became the primary mode in which the railway system was imagined in inter-war Czechoslovakia. The Czech Social Democrat Arnošt Winter (1880–1944) expounded its main thesis in a programmatic essay just two days after the Czechoslovak occupation of Pressburg in January 1919 in the Slovak party organ *Robotnícke noviny* (Workers' newspaper).[218]

> The dualist organisation of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy becomes clear on first sight if we have a look at the railway map. There are two consciously established railway networks, the Austrian and the Hungarian, in whose centre two cities sit like spiders: Vienna and Budapest. Our young state is inheriting railway tracks *whose centres lie outside our state* […].

Winter thus called for the development of a Czechoslovak railway network: 'The railways are arteries through which the economic blood of the state flows. Hence, it is the most urgent state obligation to construct these arteries in the way demanded by its new structure [...].'[219]

The metaphor remained pervasive and powerful throughout the inter-war years. One of the most significant works to use it was Jan Antonín Baťa's *Budujme stát pro 40,000.000 lidí* (Let's build a state for 40,000,000 people), published in 1937 only months before the destruction of Czechoslovakia. Jan Antonín (1898–1965) was the younger half-brother of shoe tycoon Tomáš Baťa (1876–1932) and had been the head of the Baťa company since the latter's death in an aeroplane crash. The book was a utopian tract that argued for a radical economic modernization of Czechoslovakia. It suggested that even after almost twenty years of independent statehood, the individual parts of the country were still not unified. 'The lands that maps show as the single shape of the Czechoslovak state *are still not a unified state in the*

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[218] At the time, the town was known as Pozsony in Hungarian and Prešporok in Slovak. In March 1919, it was renamed 'Bratislava', a name that – like many other toponyms in the country – was declared untranslatable.

[219] Arnošt Winter, 'Najbližšie úlohy železníc v Československej republike', *Robotnícke noviny*, 3 January 1919, p. 3. Emphasis in original.

sense of a living, perfectly connected whole. […] Although Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia are the limbs of a single living organism, the connection between these limbs is severed, which prevents a united and healthy circulation of blood'.[220] For Baťa, as for Dvorský, the main problem was the long shape of the state and a lack of suitable transport links to ensure communication between west and east. Like Hassinger, he decried the long time it took to travel from one end to the other, which was comparable to a railway journey from Prague to England or from Prague to Lithuania. The solution, he suggested, was a combination of two means of transport: a new road that would make it possible to drive from Cheb (Eger) in western Bohemia to Jasiňa (Kőrösmező, Yasinia) in Carpathian Ruthenia's far east in ten hours, and the upgrade of the existing Czechoslovak main line that would allow trains to cover the same distance in eleven hours. An integrated transportation system, Baťa wrote, would allow 'life to flow in these lands like in a unified body and beneficially stream from one end to the other'.[221] His view of the role of the railways in the state was unequivocal: 'the railway arteries in a state have the same effect as arteries and veins in a living body. Wherever they reach, there is life. Where they do not reach, the limbs die.'[222]

Through a combination of a unified transport network and a slimmed-down state that was supportive of private enterprise, Baťa envisioned that Czechoslovakia would be able to support a population of forty million. He argued for a 'single [economic] plan with a timetable' that 'can be realized with the cooperation of all sections of the nation'.[223] For instance, the unemployed would be recruited for motorway construction. His pamphlet was thus a mixture of free-market liberalism and state-run projects of national unification with a total grip on society, which had echoes of policies in Nazi Germany. He was more explicit than most in his corporeal analogy: for him, it was not so much state boundaries as the railway lines and roads that marked the reach of a state, since that was as far as its arteries went. This notion was

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[220] Jan Antonín Baťa, *Budujme stát pro 40 000 000 lidí* (Zlín, 1937), p. 8. Emphasis in the original.
[221] Ibid., p. 7.
[222] Ibid., p. 73.
[223] Ibid., pp. 13–14.

communicated by the design of the book's cover. It showed a Czechoslovak flag and,

superimposed on top of it, the geographic outline of Czechoslovakia patterned like a brick wall,

and crossed from west to east by the cartographic symbols of roads, railways and waterways

(see Figure 3). Baťa's book demonstrates how engrained that analogy was in the Czechoslovak

railway discourse. For, as Dvorský's writing indicates, Baťa's utopian republic was just one of a

line of proposals that approached the railways as a means of national unification. The

following chapter will consider another attitude towards a national railway network, that of

the Czechoslovak government.

The rise of industrialization saw the development of a strong organic narrative that

attempted to discursively integrate the machine world into the natural world. The image of the

railways as a circulatory organ within the nation-as-body enabled the quick normalization of

technology within a familiar corporeal rhetoric. This allowed nationalist writers to integrate

the call for a modern transport network into a narrative that equated the strength of the

nation with its ethnic and geopolitical health. In Czechoslovakia, which was attacked by

geographers like Hassinger and Nowak for its implicitly crippled, oblong shape, the notion of

the free circulation of the national spirit facilitated by the railways became especially

significant. Dvorský's concept of a network of railway lines criss-crossing the country was, in

essence, a development of this narrative of national circulation. He envisioned the unification

of related populations through a transport grid held together by a railway backbone. The aim

of Dvorský's writing on Czechoslovakia, then, was characterized by two closely related

objectives. First, he argued that the Czech nation had included the Slovaks of Hungary ever

since the existence of Greater Moravia, and that from Cheb to the Tisa, the country formed a

perfect geomorphological body. Second, he proposed an extensive national railway network

that would act as a circulatory organ of this body, ensuring the physical rapprochement of the

members of the nation and preventing the continued intrusions of Germans and Magyars. His

writing provides strong evidence for the significance of the railways for spatial concepts of the

nation. Linked by a narrative of the nation-as-body, the railways became a primary mode in

which the nationalization of Czechoslovakia was implemented. Dvorský's concept of a

Czechoslovak central railway within his national geography presented one of the most

compelling codifications of Czechoslovak national space in the inter-war period.

Chapter 2
Forging a Nation from the Tracks
Railway Construction and Representation in Inter-War Czechoslovakia

On 29 September 1936, the Czechoslovak president Edvard Beneš inaugurated the construction of a new railway line between Banská Bystrica (Besztercebánya, Neusohl) and Diviaky (Turócdivék) in central Slovakia (see Figure 4). The new section was part of the so-called 'Central Slovak main line' (*Středoslovenská transverzála*), the government's most prestigious railway project, which aimed to link Slovakia and Ruthenia to the Bohemian Lands. Beneš was on an official tour through Slovakia, which he had declared a 'national pilgrimage, during which he is reminded of one of the great Slovak [national] awakeners at every step'.[224] The ground-breaking ceremony on the line near Banská Bystrica was the culmination of the trip. Beneš gave a speech that praised the technical, economic and cultural significance of the new railway. He then symbolically drilled the first hole for what was to become the longest railway tunnel in the country, which was to bear his name. Tool in hand, he declared that 'there are no mountains high enough to divide Czechs and Slovaks and prevent Czechoslovak unity!'[225] The representation of the ceremony, which the radio broadcast to all parts of the country, was celebratory. Writing that Czechs and Slovaks cooperate with a 'unity of spirit', *Robotnícke noviny*, the organ of the Slovak Social Democrats, asserted that 'we are one body and one soul. A punch given to a Czech hurts the Slovak and a blow suffered by a Slovak is felt by the Czech. [...] The new railways not only link Slovakia even closer to the Bohemian Lands in terms of transport and the economy, but also unites them spiritually.'[226] Even *Slovák* (The

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[224] 'President republiky dr. Ed. Beneš skončil svou slovenskou cestu', *Národní politika*, 29 September 1936, in National Archives of the Czech Republic (NA), Fond 813 ('Ministerstvo železnic I – Tiskový referát' [MŽ-TR]), Carton 59.

[225] Quoted widely, see e.g. '14 tunelů na 47 km: Není hor, které by oddělily Čechy od Slováků', *Večerní České slovo*, 29 September 1936, in ibid.

[226] 'Silným Slovenskom k čs. jednote aj hospodárskej', *Robotnícke noviny*, 30 September 1936, in ibid.

Slovak), the organ of the autonomist Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (*Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana*, HSĽS), grudgingly acknowledged that 'it was a nice celebration'.[227]

When the line was opened four years later on 19 December 1940, the German Minister of Transport Josef Dorpmüller (1869–1945) took part in the celebrations at the invitation of Jozef Tiso (1887–1947), the president of the semi-independent Nazi satellite First Slovak Republic. Dorpmüller's speech detailed how the Slovak railways could be best adapted to suit German military requirements.[228] It is a bitter irony that the prestigious project of Czechoslovakism was thus turned into a showcase of German-Slovak wartime cooperation. After more than twenty years' work of developing a Czechoslovak national spatial consciousness, the Bohemian Lands and Slovakia were, once again, divided by an international border. The destruction of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany also led to a substantial change in the Czechoslovak spatial discourse. The state idea of Czechoslovakism was quietly abandoned after the destruction of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and was never resurrected even after the reconstitution of the country in 1945.[229] The Czechoslovak constitution of 9 May 1948 acknowledged the existence of separate Czech and Slovak nations and the regime used the term 'Czechoslovak working people' (*československý pracující lid*), avoiding a reference to the term 'nation'.[230]

Based on a discussion of the Czechoslovak discourse of space created around the ceremonial opening of new railway lines in the inter-war period, this chapter deals with the role of the railway discourse in the failure of Czechoslovakism. The development of a Czechoslovak national railway system was part of a process that the historian Peter Haslinger has called 'work on national space' (*Arbeit am nationalen Raum*). Haslinger argues that neither

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[227] 'Započatie stavby B. Bystrica-Diviaky', *Slovák*, 30 September 1936, in ibid.
[228] Jan Rychlík, 'Spor o koľajnice: Viedenská arbitráž narušila komunikačný systém', *Historická revue*, 8.1 (1997), 17–18 (p. 18).
[229] Elisabeth Bakke, *Doomed to Failure? The Czechoslovak Nation Project and the Slovak Autonomist Reaction 1918–38* (Oslo, 1999), esp. pp. 179–313.
[230] Jan Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století: Česko-slovenské vztahy 1945–1992* (Bratislava, 1998), p. 125.

the political indoctrination of an indifferent populace as laid out in Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen* nor the internalization of Benedict Anderson's notion of an *imagined community* is sufficient to explain the process of the large-scale nationalization of people. Instead, he stresses that a shared conception of the national territory is indispensable to create a mass national consciousness. 'The constant identification of the question "where?" often only makes possible communication directed towards common action.'[231] The borders of this national space are not predetermined, but are created through communication. If this discursive process is successful, Haslinger suggests, the terms 'nation' and 'national space' become intertwined to such an extent as to be synonymous. 'As a rule, nation and territory are correlated on all relevant levels of communication. This makes it impossible to clearly differentiate between the two components. Only this discursive entanglement creates the shared conviction that the nation would cease to exist without "its" characteristic and stable space.'[232] Haslinger uses the term 'work' to refer primarily to the creation of political, academic and literary discourses. However, the creation of a national railway network was 'work on national space' at its most non-metaphorical level: workers built railways to make travel within the country possible. By building a network of transport connections, they also created a national space out of the previously Austrian and Hungarian fragments. The physical construction of a railway network was a necessary requirement for the existence of national space.

The Railways in the Czechoslovak Takeover of Political and Spatial Power

The proclamation of Czechoslovak independence in Prague's Wenceslas Square on 28 October 1918 marks the beginning of this work on national space. The assertion of political power over

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[231] Peter Haslinger, 'Die „Arbeit am nationalen Raum" – Kommunikation und Territorium im Prozess der Nationalisierung', in *„Arbeit am nationalen Raum": Deutsche und polnische Rand- und Grenzregionen im Nationalisierungsprozess*, ed. by Peter Haslinger and Daniel Mollenhauer (Leipzig, 2005), pp. 9–21 (p. 9).
[232] Ibid., p. 11.

territory lasted for the next two years and its outcome was never certain. The territorial extent

of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia was particularly unclear. While Czech and Slovak activists

were able to invoke the – as they saw it – right of Bohemia, Moravia and Austrian Silesia to be

preserved in their historical borders, the Slovak and Rusyn-speaking areas of the northern

Hungarian highlands had never been an administrative unit, and the final Czechoslovak

borders indeed took little notice of the county borders of old Hungary. Despite the significance

of the date of 28 October in Czech and Slovak national mythology, the so-called 'revolution'

(*převrat* in Czech and *prevrat* in Slovak) marked but the beginning of a process of a gradual

takeover of power over space.[233]

As the most important means of transport, the railways played a decisive role in this

takeover, both in practical and in discursive terms. Vojtěch Kroužil and Markéta Novotná have

rightly asserted that 'in the revolutionary days at the turn of October and November 1918, the

railways became one of the pillars on which the nascent Czechoslovak state was based'.[234] This

was evident even in the revolutionary moment itself. The republic was proclaimed not by one

of the 'men of 28 October' (*muži 28. října*) later canonized as the founders of the republic, but

by the priest and relatively unknown national activist Isidor Zahradník (1864–1926).[235]

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[233] Recent studies have argued that the events of October 1918 were, in fact, not revolutionary. In one of its first decisions on 28 October, the Prague-based Czechoslovak National Council stated that existing laws were to remain in force for the time being. Most civil servants also remained in their posts. See Martin Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität: Die tschechoslowakische Armee und ihre Nationalitätenpolitik 1918–1938* (Munich, 2006), p. 30. Noting the lack of bloodshed, Hans Lemberg has written that the events of October 1918 could just as much have been called 'Velvet Revolution' as those of 1989. There is certainly an irony in the fact that the Nation Council 'took power in a revolutionary manner and immediately issued a conservative first law and a proclamation; both documents imploringly call for the preservation of the legal and social *status quo*'. See Hans Lemberg, 'Die Tschechoslowakei im Jahr 1: Der Staatsaufbau, die Liquidierung der Revolution und die Alternativen 1919', in *Mit unbestechlichem Blick… Studien von Hans Lemberg zur Geschichte der böhmischen Länder und der Tschechoslowakei*, ed. by Ferdinand Seibt, Jörg K. Hoensch, Horst Förster, Franz Machilek and Michaela Marek (Munich, 1998), pp. 1–27 (p. 19).

[234] NA, 1769 ('Generální ředitelství ČSD'): 'Vývoj původce', in Vojtěch Kroužil and Markéta Novotná, *Inventář* (Prague, 2009), available online at <http://www.badatelna.eu/fond/2200/uvod/7003> [accessed 19 August 2015].

[235] The 'men of 28 October' were the leading representatives of the National Council, who, in the evening of that day, released a document that declared Czechoslovakia an independent state. The signatories of this document were Antonín Švehla, Alois Rašín, Jiří Stříbrný, Vavro Šrobár and František Soukup. This document was turned into a law on 6 November 1918 (see <http://ftp.aspi.cz/opispdf/1918/002-1918.pdf> [accessed 19 August 2015]).

Zahradník's decisive action on the day led to his appointment as Minister of Railways in Czechoslovakia's first cabinet. In a speech delivered to the crowd below the statue of St Wenceslas in the eponymous Prague square, Zahradník uttered the sentence that is now considered the proclamation of the republic:

> We will forever break the chains in which the treacherous, foreign and immoral Habsburgs abused us. We are free. On the steps of the memorial to the Czech prince we solemnly swear to aspire to be worthy of this freedom and to defend it with our lives.[236]

Zahradník then proceeded by car to the nearby Francis Joseph Station, the main long-distance railway station in Prague (which was renamed Wilson Station several days later). There he announced to the station's staff that the Czechoslovak National Council had taken over power and had the following telegram sent out to railway stations across Bohemia and Moravia:

> The Czechoslovak state was proclaimed today at 11 o'clock by the statue of St Wenceslas in Wenceslas Square. Remove immediately all symbols of the former Austro-Hungarian state. Seize all goods to be shipped to Vienna and Germany. Transport all other shipments as normal. Long live the Czechoslovak state. Nazdar! Dr Zahradník![237]

Many railway workers reacted jubilantly to the news and decorated their uniforms with badges sporting the Bohemian lion or ribbons in the national colours red and white.[238] The telegram inspired a number of smaller uprisings in several towns and villages it reached. As the historian Antonín Klímek points out, Zahradník was one of the few national leaders who on 28 October 1918 remembered the nation stretched beyond the narrow confines of central Prague.[239] The railways were a crucial factor in the revolution, since they enabled it to spread across the (as yet ill-defined) territory of the nation.

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[236] Quoted in Antonín Klímek, *Říjen 1918: Vznik Československa* (Prague, 1998), p. 194.

[237] Quoted in ibid., pp. 196–97. The term *nazdar* was a Czech nationalist greeting that developed in the 1850s during a donation campaign in support of the reconstruction of the National Theatre in Prague. It is a contraction of the campaign's motto 'Na zdar Národního divadla' (Towards the success of the National Theatre).

[238] Krejčiřík, *Železniční móda*, p. 77.

[239] Antonín Klímek, *Vítejte v první republice* (Prague, 2003), p. 17. Zahradník was Minister of Railways in

Despite Zahradník's efforts, however, communication and coordination remained a great obstacle to the Czechoslovak takeover of power. This is illustrated by the fact that the Slovak National Council, which only had loose ties with its Prague-based counterpart, proclaimed the so-called Martin Declaration on 30 October 1918 in Turčiansky Svätý Martin (Turócszentmárton, Turz-Sankt Martin) without having been informed of the events that had convulsed Prague two days earlier. The document expressed its belief in the unity of a single 'Czecho-Slovak nation'.[240] Zahradník's telegram had not reached stations in the Slovak-speaking areas of Upper Hungary. Since the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, the Hungarian State Railways MÁV (*Magyar Államvasutak*) had been a company administratively independent from the Imperial Royal Austrian State Railways (*k.k. Österreichische Staatsbahnen*). This was but one sign of the weak connection between the two parts of the monarchy in the dualist period. While Czech and Slovak national activists had still held up the ideal of a unified Czechoslovak nation, links between the two movements had weakened during the Magyarization push in Hungary between 1867 and 1918. Czech writers were drawn to northern Hungary primarily out of ethnographic curiosity and developed few ties with the Slovak national movement.[241] While the Czechoslovakist activists around the Prague Slovak journal *Hlas* (The voice) were retrospectively cast into the role of a national avant-garde after 1918, few Slovak students and intellectuals actually went to Prague. Budapest remained the urban centre that drew the most Slovak migrants before the First World War.[242]

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the first Czechoslovak cabinet under Karel Kramář from 14 November 1918 to 8 July 1919. However, due to his connections to the highly unpopular Catholic Church (he was a Catholic-turned-Orthodox priest), his political career faded fast and this remained his only government post.

[240] Stanislav J. Kirschbaum, *A History of Slovakia: The Struggle for Survival* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 151–52.

[241] Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, pp. 100–07, and Jörg K. Hoensch, 'Tschechoslowakismus oder Autonomie: Die Auseinandersetzungen um die Eingliederung der Slowakei in die Tschechoslowakische Republik', in *Das Jahr 1919 in der Tschechoslowakei und in Ostmitteleuropa: Vorträge der Tagung des Collegium Carolinum in Bad Wiessee vom 24. bis 26. November 1989*, ed. by Hans Lemberg and Peter Heumos (Munich, 1993), pp. 129–57 (p. 132).

[242] Monika Glettler, 'The Slovaks in Budapest and Bratislava, 1850–1914', in *Ethnic Identity in Urban Europe*, ed. by M. Engman (New York, 1992), pp. 295–330.

Both in terms of transport and in terms of personal connections, then, the Bohemian Lands and Upper Hungary had little in common at the end of the war. The legacy of the dualist arrangement in the Habsburg Empire lived on in Czechoslovakia. Looking back in 1924, the British historian Robert William Seton-Watson (1879–1951), who played an active role in propagating the creation of Czechoslovakia, wrote:

> Thus when the Revolution came, Slovakia and 'the historic lands' were like two badly joined fragments: and even after the vital line linking Bratislava and Brno had been modernised, Slovakia remained without proper transversal communications, and her industries found themselves automatically at a disadvantage in the new Republic, as against the industries of the historic lands.[243]

Linking these fragments was the most pressing state-building problem for the Czechoslovak government throughout the inter-war period.

The authorities were well-aware of the significance of a functioning national infrastructure in their assertion of spatial power and keen to overcome these initial difficulties. This is illustrated by the fact that a 'general director of Czechoslovak railways' was named as soon as 30 October 1918, two days after the revolution.[244] The ministry of railways (under the temporary name Office of Transport Administration [*Úřad pro správu dopravy*]) was formed on 2 November 1918 and copied the organization and legal jurisdiction of the pre-war Austrian Ministry of Railways with only negligible administrative changes.[245] The railway historian Miloslav Štěpán argued in 1958 that 'nobody aspired for any kind of progressive reform. In the mentality of the administration of the day, a lick of red-and-white paint on the whole thing was enough.'[246] This assessment is undoubtedly coloured by a desire to conform to the official

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[243] R. W. Seton-Watson, *The New Slovakia* (Prague, 1924), p. 81.

[244] Jiří Vysloužil, 'Vývoj železniční sítě v Československu', in *150 let železnic v Československu: Sborník přednášek Mezinárodního symposia, Brno 5. – 7. července 1989. 1. díl*, ed. by Jiří Jelen (Brno, n.d.), pp. 71–81 (p. 80).

[245] NA, 813 ('Ministerstvo železnic I'): 'Úvod', in Jaroslav Kreč et al., *Inventář III. díl* (Prague, 1970–72), p. 1.

[246] Štěpán, p. 190.

communist criticism of the 'bourgeois-capitalist' First Republic. In fact, while the administrative structures were kept intact simply because they had worked well in the Habsburg Empire, the staff of the ministry – and, to a lesser extent, the Czechoslovak State Railways ČSD (*Československé státní dráhy*) themselves – was quickly and thoroughly Czechoslovakized.[247] Although Czechoslovakization was in line with the developments in other national institutions, the German press in Czechoslovakia called Zahradník a 'nationalist fanatic', who aspired to turn 'the state railways administration into a reservation intended for the ruling Czech nation [*tschechisches Staatsvolk*]'. The same author lamented in 1925 that 'among the eight state railways directors, their sixteen deputies and the sixty-eight department heads, there is not a single German'.[248] Indeed, far from being a Habsburg institution in a different guise, the Ministry of Railways acquired the role of one of the pillars of Czechoslovak nation-building throughout the inter-war years.

But before it could take on that role, the ministry needed to have the railway network under its control. In the days after the foundation of the state, the territory controlled by the Prague National Council barely reached forty kilometres north of Prague.[249] Given the wealth of the existing literature, it is not my intention to recount the history of the Czechoslovak military occupation of the Bohemian Lands, Slovakia and Ruthenia.[250] But it is important to note that the railways played a central role not only in the Czechoslovak takeover of power, but also in the resistance to the new rulers, as well as in later depictions of these processes.

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[247] As I discuss in detail in Chapter 5, all civil servants, including those serving at the ČSD, were required to learn the 'state language'. For a transitional period, however, the usage of languages other than Czech or Slovak was often tolerated. See e.g. NA, 813, Carton 2: 'Zatimní úprava užívání zemských jazyků u drah státních a v státních provozu jsoucích v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku', 3 July 1919.

[248] 'Eisenbahnpolitische Rückblicke', *Pilsner Tagblatt*, 31 March 1925, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 2.

[249] Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, p. 26.

[250] See Marián Hronský, *The Struggle for Slovakia and the Treaty of Trianon 1918–1920* (Bratislava, 2001); id., 'Priebeh vojenského obsadzovania Slovenska československým vojskom od Novembra 1918 do Januára 1919', *Historický časopis*, 32 (1984), 734–57; Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža (eds), *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918–1948* (Princeton, 1973), pp. 30–33; Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, pp. 39–57; regarding Bratislava, see Pieter C. van Duin, *Central European Crossroads: Social Democracy and National Revolution in Bratislava (Pressburg), 1867–1921* (New York, 2009), esp. pp. 207–93.

Not all German and Magyar railway workers were prepared to acknowledge the new

authorities without a fight. In Teplice (Teplitz), Ústí nad Labem (Aussig), Opava (Troppau) and

Krnov (Jägerndorf) – all towns along the republic's northern border with Germany – Bohemian

German officials attempted to create their own railway directorates which they declared to be

under the jurisdiction of Vienna. They managed to hold out for several weeks, but were

brought under control with the help of the Czechoslovak army in November and December

1918.[251] Even thereafter, the strong nationalist sentiment of many German railway workers in

northern Bohemia continued to be a source of complaints in the Czech press. In 1924, a Czech

paper reported that the employees of the Ústí repair workshop spoke only German, provoked

Czechs by ripping apart the state flag and attended Nazi ('hackenkreuzerovský [sic]')

meetings.[252]

In Upper Hungary the situation was even more difficult for the incoming Czechoslovaks

and began with a war against Hungarian forces. The process of occupying the territory of

future Slovakia took from November 1918 until January 1919. Given their strategic

importance, the Czechoslovak advance naturally followed the railway lines and the fiercest

battles of the war were fought for strategic railway nodes, such as the north-western towns of

Žilina (Zsolna, Sillein) and Vrútky (Ruttka, Rutteck). After these were secured, Czechoslovak

forces advanced southwards towards Pressburg and eastwards along the Košice–Bohumín line

on to Poprad (Poprád, Deutschendorf) with the help of an armoured train. Košice was

occupied without a fight on 29 December 1918, and Pressburg on 1 January 1919.[253]

Of course, the use of railways in war was not a Czechoslovak invention.[254] But they did

figure more prominently in the Czechoslovak military discourse than in that of other European

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[251] Jakubec, Transport Problems of a New State, p. 124; Hons, p. 229.

[252] 'Poměry v dílnách státních drah v Ústí nad Lab.', *Průkopník našeho severu*, 8 August 1924; 'Poměry ve stát. dílnách v Ústí n. L.', *Průkopník našeho severu*, 15 August 1924, both in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 1.

[253] Hronský, pp. 131–48.

[254] There is a vast amount of literature on the use of railways in specific wars. For an example of relevance here, see Kopper. For a recent general overview of the relationship between the railway and war, see Klaus-Jürgen Bremm, *Armeen unter Dampf: Die Eisenbahnen in der europäischen Kriegsgeschichte 1871–1918* (Hövelhof, 2013).

states. This was due mainly to the centrality of railway imagery in representations of the Czech

'Legions' that fought on the Allied side in the First World War. Caught up in Russia after the

October Revolution, these anti-Habsburg Czech troops evacuated to Vladivostok on the Trans-

Siberian Railway and had many skirmishes with the Red Army on the way. The last soldiers

reached Europe only in September 1920.[255] In the 'legionary' literature of the 1920s and 1930s,

the railways became a primary location of war. For the most part, they were action-packed

adventure novels characterized by their meagre quality and rabid nationalism. Most

contemporary literary scholars seem to agree with Heinrich Kunstmann's judgement that

Czech literature about the Legions constituted 'an almost mind-boggling avalanche' of books,

'most of which' made for 'a mighty heap of waste-paper'.[256] Not all of legionary literature was

set in Russia. For instance, the novel *Nem, nem, soha!* ('No, no, never!' – a reference to the

inter-war Hungarian revisionist slogan) by the pseudonymous writer František Maria takes

place on and around an armoured train during the campaign in southern Slovakia.[257] The novel

was part of a wider rise of hostility against Magyars in Czech society that came with the end of

the First World War and the struggle for Slovakia.[258] It shares its railway setting with many

legionary novels whose action takes place in Russia, such as Josef Kopta's *Třetí rota na*

magistrále (The third company on the Trans-Siberian Railway) of 1927. Indeed, Robert B.

Pynsent has argued that 'railways, essentially the Trans-Siberian railway, as used by

Czechoslovak legionaries in Russia, were more or less a sanctified location, for it was on or

from the railways that many heroic acts of the foundation myth were carried out, including the

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[255] František Pavlíček and Radovan Soušek, *Historie železničního vojska* (Pardubice, 2002), esp. pp. 6–10.

[256] Heinrich Kunstmann, *Tschechische Erzählkunst im 20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne/Vienna, 1974), pp 240–41. The translation is taken from Robert B. Pynsent, who evidently agrees with Kunstmann. See Pynsent, 'The Literary Representation of the Czechoslovak "Legions" in Russia', in *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe, 1918–1948*, ed. by Mark Cornwall and R. J. W. Evans (Oxford, 2007), pp. 63–88 (p. 63).

[257] František Maria, *„Nem, nem, soha!" Román z bojů o Slovensko* (Prague, 1938).

[258] Robert B. Pynsent discusses the novel as part of Czech anti-Magyar feeling in 'The Yellow Peril, Filthy Czechs, Tinkers and Yids: Literary Expressions of Czech, Slovak and Czechoslovak Nationalism in Novels concerning the Liberation of Slovakia from Hungarians and Communists' (unpublished essay). I thank Prof. Pynsent for sending me his essay and drawing my attention to the novel.

suicide of the martyr-hero Colonel Švec. In literary accounts of the Prague Uprising of 1945, once more railwaymen became particular heroes.'[259]

The fact that railways played such a major part in the Czech military discourse is ironic in the context of the conquest of Upper Hungary, where railway personnel had been among the most systematically Magyarized and patriotic employment groups.[260] Looking back in 1936, one Czech railway official wrote that 'the majority of railway staff in Slovakia were of inimical disposition towards the state, and where they did not sabotage openly, they carried out passive resistance'.[261] While most of the early railway development in Hungary had been carried out by German-speaking engineers, the post-1867 Magyarization of the railways was even more forceful than that of other public services. Not only were all workers on the Hungarian State Railways required to speak Hungarian, but, especially in areas where Magyars were in a minority, the company took on the guise of a patriotic organization. Cultural associations were connected to MÁV workshops, which organized lectures and Hungarian language tuition. The railways had the greatest impact on Magyarization in the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia, which was an autonomous part of Hungary, but whose railways were part of the MÁV network. Fourteen schools with Hungarian-language instruction were established by the MÁV throughout the province, ostensibly for the education of the Magyar railwaymen's children. However, considering the lack of other educational facilities in many areas, these were often attended by local Croat and Serb children as well, and thus turned into centres of

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[259] Ibid., p. 10. Josef Jiří Švec (1883–1918) was commander of the First Division of the Czech Legions in Russia. He committed suicide on 25 October 1918 in Aksakovo in Orenburg Oblast by shooting himself in the staff carriage at the town's station after his exhausted subordinates had refused to carry out a command. The process of turning him into a martyr-hero reached its peak in 1933, when his remains were exhumed and taken to Prague, where he was given a state funeral on the Vítkov National Liberation monument attended by 20,000 people. On the Švec myth, see Robert B. Pynsent, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality* (Budapest, 1994), pp. 205–07.

[260] *Slovenský železničiar*, Issue 12 (1920); Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, p. 40; Elena Mannová, 'Uhorská a československá štátna idea: zmena povedomia v slovenskej spoločnosti', in *První světová válka a vztahy mezi Čechy, Slováky a Němci*, ed. by Hans Mommsen, Dušan Kováč, Jiří Malíř and Michaela Marková (Brno, 2000), pp. 87–95 (p. 91).

[261] Vojtěch Mixa, 'O dopravním problému československém', *Prúdy*, 20 (1936), 484–95 (p. 485).

Magyarization.[262] C. A. Macartney has argued that 'it was through these railwaymen that

Hungary was making her chief effort to consolidate the Magyar element in Croatia'.[263] Schools

like these were unnecessary in Upper Hungary, where almost all educational facilities operated

in Hungarian in any case. But the patriotism of the railwaymen in the north of the country was

as much beyond doubt as of those in Croatia. Indeed, the trope of railwaymen as

untrustworthy Magyars or Magyarones was widespread in Czech legionary literature.[264]

Railway workers on the line between Košice and Bohumín, the only main line that

connected Slovakia to the Bohemian Lands, responded to the occupation of the territory by

the Czechoslovak army with a strike in February 1919 that lasted for several days and

coincided with a general strike against the occupation in (not yet renamed) Pressburg.[265] More

radical activists took to the sabotage of trains. Railway services were only upheld through the

emergency drafting of workers from the Bohemian Lands.[266] The Czechoslovak authorities

retaliated violently against the strike wave. The Pressburg general strike was abandoned after

the 'Bloody Wednesday' of 12 February 1919, during which Czech soldiers killed at least eight

protesting civilians.[267] Hungarian workers who had taken part in the strike were immediately

dismissed and expelled to Hungary. The economist Kornel Stodola (1866–1946), who was the

railway officer at the Ministry Plenipotentiary for the Administration of Slovakia (*Ministerstvo s

plnou mocou pre správu Slovenska*), explained the drastic step to Prague by arguing that 'the

strike is of a purely political character and was orchestrated by Pest'.[268] However, the demands

made by the striking railwaymen suggest that social grievances were at least as important as

political ones. The strikers made no mention of the national question, demanding instead that

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[262] János Majdán, 'A vasutak asszimilációs hatása', in *Tájak, tájegységek, etnikai kisebbségek Közép-Európában: Konferencia-kötet*, ed. by László Kupa (Pécs, 2007), pp. 53–61.

[263] C. A. Macartney, *Hungary and her Successors: The Treaty of Trianon and its Consequences 1919–1937* (London, 1937), p. 362.

[264] Pynsent, Yellow Peril, pp. 7, 10.

[265] Van Duin, p. 295; Mixa, p. 485.

[266] R. W. Seton-Watson, *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks* (London, 1943), p. 323.

[267] Van Duin, pp. 272–277.

[268] NA, 813, Carton 2: Telegram by Kornel Stodola to the Ministry of Railways.

wages be adjusted to those previously paid by the MÁV and that flour, fat, sugar, potatoes, soap and clothing be handed out to them.[269] Nevertheless, there is no question that most Magyar public servants looked upon the new state with more or less open distrust, and in the two years that followed the Czechoslovak occupation, a veritable exodus of Magyar officials took place. It has been estimated that between 50,000 and 100,000 Magyars left Czechoslovakia for Hungary in 1919 and 1920, 'mainly officials, but also some miners and workmen'.[270] The difficulty of obtaining Czechoslovak citizenship for many Magyar officials exacerbated the problem. The Czechoslovak constitution tied the right to Czechoslovak citizenship to the Austrian concept of *Heimatsrecht* (citizenship of a commune), which had been only haphazardly applied in the Kingdom of Hungary. Hence, many inhabitants of Slovakia, especially if they had temporarily lived in the territory of post-Trianon Hungary (as many Magyars had), could not prove their *Heimatsrecht* in a municipality in Slovakia and ended up stateless.[271]

The flight of Magyar public servants led to a dramatic shortage of railway workers in Slovakia and Ruthenia.[272] Since there were few qualified Slovak railwaymen, the Ministry of Railways turned to a measure that, as I will discuss in greater detail below, was to become a major controversy in Czech-Slovak relations: it recruited a large number of workers from the Bohemian Lands. The immediate repercussions were largely positive and helped alleviate the pressure on the system. At the same time, the problems of the incoming Czechs serve to illustrate the challenges that were faced when creating a unified nation-state out of the Bohemian Lands and Slovakia. Homesick and shocked by the foreignness of a land they had

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[269] Ibid.: Ministerial memo.

[270] Macartney, pp. 79. I. Sasek, *Les Migrations de la Population intéressant le territoire de la Tchécoslovaquie actuelle* (Geneva, 1932), p. 53, estimates a total of 56,000, while the Hungarian General Board for Refugee Questions cited in Hungarian Revision League's *Memorandum concerning the Situation of the Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia* (Budapest, 1934), p. 29, put the number at 106,841 individuals. Both sources are cited in Macartney, p. 158.

[271] Ibid., pp. 160–65.

[272] NA, 813, Carton 2: *Služební telegram Ministerstva železnic Provoznímu inspektorátu v Prešporku*, 10 February 1919.

expected to be similar to their own, many Czech newcomers to Slovakia returned as soon as they could. In a Czech-language letter to the ministry from October 1919, the Federation of Czechoslovak Railway Workers in Košice lamented that 'our lives in Slovakia will never be equal to our lives in the homeland [*v zemích domovských*] in terms of social and cultural opportunities, for the conditions here are just very different; it will take great work and indefatigable effort to rectify all past wrongs'.[273] The 'Czechoslovak' of the organization's title had apparently not yet changed the national identification of these workers, who clearly considered themselves foreigners in Košice. It seems even the weather worked against the Czechoslovaks: a flood in the Little Carpathian Mountains in the summer of 1919 caused huge damage to the railway infrastructure of western Slovakia and made repairs necessary that lasted until 1921.[274] Looking back in 1934, one commentator summed up the situation succinctly: 'The beginnings of the Czechoslovak State Railways in Slovakia were nasty.'[275]

Although the Czechoslovak territorial takeover of power was fraught with difficulties, it was successful. Attended by a Czechoslovak delegation led by Edvard Beneš and supported by Viktor Dvorský, the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 confirmed most of the Czechoslovak territorial claims. Many of these had been motivated by the strategic location of railway lines. Hence, the railway station and a small part of the Lower Austrian town of Gmünd (Cmunt, later renamed České Velenice) was awarded to Czechoslovakia, since it was the railway junction where the lines from Vienna to Prague and to Plzeň diverged. After an armed conflict with Poland over the territory of Těšín (Teschen, Cieszyn) in January 1919, Czechoslovakia received the railway line and the area south of it in July 1920. Těšín was traversed by the Košice–Bohumín line, which was all-important for the Czechoslovak government. But not all

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[273] NA, 813, Carton 1: Letter by the *Odbor spolku československých úředníků železničních v Košicích* to the Ministry of Railways, 23 October 1919. The author also mentions that 'the staff of the former Hungarian State Railways cannot be relied upon, for the lack of language qualifications as well as in national and state-political terms, irrespective even of the fact that the number of staff is completely insufficient as a result of their large-scale migration to Hungary.'

[274] Burian, p. 4.

[275] Ibid., p. 3.

Czechoslovak demands were met. The possession of the Lower Austrian town of Marchegg would have given access to the shortest railway connection from Prague via Brno to Bratislava. Since this was rejected, a new connection between the national and the Slovak capital had to be constructed.[276] As I discuss below, this became the first major task for the newly created Ministry of Railways.

The Railways in the Czechoslovak National Body

While Czech and Slovak commentators were understandably reluctant to use Seton-Watson's metaphor of Czechoslovakia as two 'badly joined fragments', they too argued that the country needed to be united physically by the railway. In their view, the Bohemian Lands and Slovakia formed a natural unit that had been artificially divided by Austro-Hungarian political hostility to their justified national aspirations. The first Czechoslovak president Tomáš G. Masaryk himself acknowledged the importance of infrastructural politics:

> An effective railway politics must rectify the flaws we have inherited from the
> centralization drive of Vienna and Budapest. In particular, the railway network of Slovakia
> and Ruthenia needs to be forcefully expanded and improved. We must adapt our railways
> to those of the neighbouring states and the new world railways.[277]

In 1921, the new railway minister Václav Burger (1859–1923) laid out the aims and tasks of the ministry to the members of Czechoslovak Central Railways Council (*Československá ústřední rada železniční*, ČÚRŽ), an advisory body formed of politicians and other leading public figures:

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[276] Ivan Jakubec, 'Die Regelung von Verkehrsfragen', in *Österreich und die Tschechoslowakei 1918–1938: Die wirtschaftliche Neuordnung in Zentraleuropa in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, ed. by Alice Teichova and Herbert Matis (Vienna, 1996), pp. 91–112 (pp. 92–93), and id., Transport Problems of a New State, p. 116.

[277] Quoted in Jindřich Rybák, *Naše železnice v prvém roce státní samostatnosti* (Prague, 1919), p. 13.

Considering the geographic shape of our state, spread over nearly 1,000 kilometres in

length from west to east, the speed and intensity of railway services is especially

significant for domestic traffic and the mutual communication of its constituent parts. […]

Not only the central offices, but also the [State Railway] Directorates and other railway

offices were to a large degree concentrated in Vienna and Budapest. Almost two-thirds of

Czechoslovak track fell under a directorate in Vienna or Budapest. […] The fact that our

state railway network was built in the interest of the centralizing efforts of Vienna and

Budapest became clear immediately after the revolution. Railway lines that run along the

longitudinal axis of the republic are inadequate in number and, in addition, are

predominantly of weak construction and lack the facilities necessary for heavy use. […]

Slovakia, especially its eastern part, must be economically attached to the motherland [*k*

mateřským zemím].[278]

Burger introduced several themes that were characteristic of the Czechoslovak spatial

discourse. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, concerns over the country's

uncommonly oblong shape were widespread at the time. In contrast to Hugo Hassinger, who

argued that Czechoslovakia was a 'monstrous body politic', Burger presented the country's

geography as a challenge for a transport network, which under Austria-Hungary had neglected

Czechoslovakia's national needs. Burger's call for more efficient railway lines to run the length

of the country was, as Dvorský's example indicates, a common demand to overcome the

fragmentation of the two parts of the country. At the same time, the usage of the term

'maternal lands/motherland' (*mateřské země*) for the Bohemian Lands, with which Slovakia

and Carpathian Ruthenia were contrasted, introduced a semantic fragmentation. This

formulation suggests a paternalistic and infantilizing attitude towards the formerly Hungarian

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[278] NA, 1081 ('Československá ústřední rada železniční'), Carton 1, Burger's speech, pp. 1–2, 6. The speech was later published as *O vývoji a úkolech československého železnictví* (Prague, 1921). The 69 council members of the first ČÚRŽ meeting on 30 May 1921 in Prague's Old Town Hall included the Prague mayor Karel Baxa, the head of the Club of Czechoslovak Hikers Jiří Guth, the inventor and electrical engineer František Křižík and the architect Josef Danda, who later became well-known for his railway buildings. Kornel Stodola and the architect Milan Harminc were among the few Slovaks. There was no representative of the minorities.

lands in the east. By implication, Burger was not merely calling for the economic integration of Slovakia and Ruthenia. These territories were new to the Czech discourse of the nation and its space and had yet to be integrated. Rather than prompting the development of a new national rhetoric, then, Slovakia and Ruthenia were merely added on to an already existing discourse of national space. The narrative imagined the Bohemian Lands as the mother, and Slovakia and Ruthenia as the children.

Rhetoric of this kind was commonplace in the early 1920s. In the 1919 study *Our Railways in the First Year of Independence*, the ministerial aide Jindřich Rybák even contrasted 'maternal railway lines' (*tratě mateřské*) with Slovak ones (*tratě slovenské*). Like Viktor Dvorský, Rybák equated the nation with a human body:

> In Carpathian Ruthenia, blood is still flowing from our veins. It will be necessary to muster all our strength so the railways may bring the wealth of culture even to the farthest corners, increase wealth and contribute to the exploitation of natural resources. […] Prague, the head of the homeland [*hlava vlasti*], will soon also become the heart of Europe – if we so desire. All conditions are met and it is up to us to turn Prague into such a centre.[279]

Rybák imagined a colonialist constellation in which Ruthenia would be the recipient of Czech paternalistic support and supplier of raw materials. Despite the clear division into centre and periphery, his organic imagery saw Czechoslovakia as a single body to be held together by the railway system:

> Our railway network is based on the triangle Prague–Bratislava–Košice, and all construction and operations rest on this frame [*na této kostře*]. Prague is our cultural centre, Bratislava our Hamburg on the Danube, and Košice the gateway to the east and

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[279] Rybák, p. 18.

entry point to Romania and Russia. We should hence focus our attention on these three

pivotal points.[280]

The use of the word *kostra*, which can also be translated as 'skeleton', once again invokes the

railway as the backbone of the nation. For these writers, the integration of Slovakia and

Carpathian Ruthenia into the state hinged on the development of an efficient railway that

would allow Czechs and Slovaks to 'rediscover' their natural brotherhood, but also give a body

to Prague, the head and heart of the nation.

Most texts on the tasks of the Czechoslovak railways use practical terminology and

take the significance of efficient infrastructure for nation-building – and nation-building itself –

for granted. But couched in the officialese of civil servants one often finds expressions that

illustrate the underlying Czech-centred discourse characteristic of the attempt to integrate

Slovakia and Ruthenia into the country. This discourse revealed the paternalistic attitude of

Czech writers and politicians, who set about to rectify the 'unnatural' mutual isolation of

Czechs and Slovaks. Commonly, Slovakia and Ruthenia were imagined as the passive recipient

of Czech civilization, which was articulated in expressions such as 'maternal lands' or, in the

words of the socialist MP Jan Pelikán, 'the trunk lands [*kmenové země*] of the republic', which

were contrasted with Slovakia.[281] Hence, the accusation of Czech centralism often vented by

Slovak separatists, especially in the late 1920s and 1930s, was justified by the discourse of the

day. Slovakia and Ruthenia were cast into the role of the 'other' and became objects of Czech

attention rather than actors in their own right. The rhetoric employed by the Prague press,

railway ministry and parliament showed signs of a benevolent colonialism with a clear

geographic hierarchy, often expressed in anthropomorphic terms. Prague was the undisputed

'head of the homeland', where railway lines were meant to converge in order to supply the

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[280] Ibid., p. 17.

[281] 'Těsnopisecká zpráva o 136. schůzi Národního shromáždění československého v Praze v úterý dne 30. března 1920 o 2. hodině odpolední', in *Společná česko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna* <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/ps/stenprot/136schuz/s136005.htm> [accessed 19 August 2015].

seat of political, cultural and symbolic power with the infrastructure necessary to sustain itself.

While this might seem like a self-evident role for a national capital, the proclamation of Prague

as the centre not only of a conceptual nation, but of a physical state with borders and

infrastructure by Czech national activists just after the First World War was politically loaded

and intended to assert independence from Vienna. Prague had risen to become a national

capital and it needed the infrastructure to demonstrate this change of status. On the other end

of the spectrum lay Slovakia and especially Ruthenia, the extremities of the body politic, which

needed to be connected to the rump by means of a railway backbone.

Building the Backbone of the Nation-State: Railway Construction in Slovakia

Though severely damaged by the war and lacking rolling stock and personnel, the railway

network in the industrialized Bohemian Lands had been one of the most highly developed in

the Habsburg Empire and could be transformed into an efficient network relatively quickly. By

contrast, mountainous Upper Hungary and Carpathian Ruthenia had been neglected by the

Hungarian transport planners and featured a railway network that was less than half as dense

as its Czech counterpart. Of the 29.5 per cent of Austro-Hungarian railways inherited by

Czechoslovakia, 71.4 per cent were located in the Bohemian Lands and only 28.6 per cent in

Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia.[282] In addition, since the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of

1867, the Austrian system had been polycentric and centred not only on Vienna, but also on

cities such as Prague, Brno and Lemberg (Lwów, Lviv). The Hungarian railway system, by

contrast, had been planned with the explicit goal of Magyarizing the country. All parts of the

country were to be connected to the centre Budapest, which also featured lines to Austrian

and international centres such as Vienna, Berlin and Galicia.[283] As a result, in 1919 only a single

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[282] Jakubec, Transport Problems of a New State, p. 123.
[283] Burian, p. 3; Andreas Helmedach, 'Integration durch Verkehr: Das Habsburger Reich', *Osteuropa*, 55.3 (2005), 18–31 (p. 25).

main line connected Slovakia to the Bohemian Lands, the privately-owned railway between

Slovak Košice and Silesian Bohumín. In the words of the railway historian Josef Hons, 'the new

state was faced with the task of dealing with the question of transport in Slovakia'.[284] The first

railway construction carried out by the new state was the conversion of the local railway

between Brno and Bratislava via Břeclav, Kúty and Devínska Nová Ves to Bratislava into a

double-track main line. One of the most important lines for the state, this was finished in mid-

1921 and represented a major step towards the integration of Bratislava, recently renamed

and made the capital of Slovakia.[285] Several other piecemeal improvements to the railways

were carried out in 1919 and early 1920. It soon became clear, however, that the adjustment

of the railway network to the new national space would require a more concerted effort.

In January 1920, the Ministry of Railways developed a study of the new lines that were

necessary to build in order to connect Slovakia and Ruthenia to the Bohemian Lands. Despite

the high costs associated with building in the mountainous terrain of central Slovakia, it was

regarded as a strategic and economic necessity to construct a 'Central Slovak main line'

(*Středoslovenská transverzála*). Its route had great similarity to the proposal submitted by

Dvorský. It was to run from Veselí nad Moravou (Wessely an der March) in Moravia into

Slovakia and through the centre of the country via Trenčín, Handlová, Horná Štubňa, Zvolen,

Banská Bystrica, Červená Skála, Margecany, Košice, Trebišov, Užhorod and Mukačevo to Hust

in Ruthenia. The total length of the new line – which would make use of existing railways – was

calculated at 673.5 kilometres. The cost was estimated at a staggering 541 million

Czechoslovak crowns.[286] This concept was then developed into a bill 'on the construction of

new railway lines at the expense of the state and a construction and investment programme

for the years 1921 to 1925', which the parliament passed into law on 30 March 1920.[287]

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[284] Hons, p. 228.

[285] Ibid., p. 229, and Seton-Watson, *The New Slovakia*, p. 91.

[286] NA, 813, Carton 113, no. 1009, doc. 38654: *Rozvahy příčného spojení středního Slovenska a Přikarpatské Rusi* (27 January 1920).

[287] *Sborník zákonů Republiky československé*, 1920, p. 524.

All subsequent major railway construction in inter-war Czechoslovakia followed the provisions of the law. It listed fifteen lines totalling 560 kilometres of new track to be built within five years. The focus on the republic's eastern half is immediately evident: ten lines were in Slovakia, two in Carpathian Ruthenia, one each in Moravia and Silesia and one crossed the border between Slovakia and Moravia. As the press release that accompanied the law put it, 'the principle that forms the foundation of this construction programme is the creation of adequate and – if possible – direct connections with Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia'.[288] The Hungarian regime was blamed for the lack of connections to the country's east, which was again presented as an historical abnormality caused by unfavourable politics:

> The endeavours of the Austrian and Hungarian governments led to Slovakia being isolated from its kindred countries Bohemia and Moravia and firmly attached to the centre of Hungary [*Maďarska*]. For the former government built lines towards Pest from north to south. Perpendicular lines were constructed only few and far between, were not connected to one another and were intended to contribute to the intensification of traffic towards the centre of Hungary. Hence, it is an important task to adapt the railway network so that Moravia be connected to Slovakia's north, centre, and south, and that in Slovakia a transport backbone (transversal main line) be built towards Carpathian Ruthenia, to which the rest of the railway network can be connected.[289]

The necessity for a closer link between Carpathian Ruthenia, Slovakia and the Bohemian Lands was seen as a matter of urgency by parliamentarians, and the bill was passed without debate. Jan Pelikán delivered a speech in which he stressed the strategic significance of the project.

> Our greatest attention must be given to Slovakia, where the west-east railway lines are close to the border in the north and extremely close, sometimes directly on the border, in the south. We lack a railway through the centre of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia, a

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[288] 'Zasedání Národního shromáždění československého r. 1920. Tisk 2585. Zpráva I. výboru dopravního a II. výboru rozpočtového o vládním návrhu zákona č. t. 2526', in *Společná česko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna* <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/ps/tisky/T2585_01.htm> [accessed 19 August 2015].
[289] Ibid.

very risky situation for Czechoslovakia. In the mooted bill this question is solved by means

of a great transport backbone from Veselí [nad Moravou] to Huszt through the entire

territory of former northern Hungary.[290]

The agrarian Otakar Hübner (1870–1929), speaking as a representative of the budget

committee, echoed Pelikán's sentiment and added that not enough had been done to achieve

Czechoslovak unity: 'It would not be right just to speak and write incessantly about our unity

with Slovakia. It is practical and just to demonstrate this love and unity of both sides in

action.'[291] As Pelikán and Hübner's rhetoric indicates, the bill was passed as a step towards

Czechoslovak unity.

The Czechoslovak railway programme was welcomed by much of the Slovak political

elite, not only by members of the government such as Kornel Stodola.[292] The Slovak agrarian

Bohuslav Klimo (1882–1952) said in parliament in 1922 that 'the Ministry of Railways is

spending 161,520,000 crowns on the construction of new railways'.

> Under Hungarian rule Slovakia was completely neglected in this regard […] and we had to
>
> wait for the Czechoslovak Republic to make up for these omissions. We know how
>
> railways were built then. Always only by promise. When elections came along and the
>
> government wanted to win this or that district for the government candidate, they
>
> promised a railway. […] But in the four years of its existence, the republic has proceeded
>
> to construct its tenth new railway line.[293]

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[290] 'Těsnopisecká zpráva o 136. schůzi Národního shromáždění československého v Praze v úterý dne 30. března 1920 o 2. hodině odpolední', in *Společná česko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna* <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/ps/stenprot/136schuz/s136006.htm> [accessed 19 August 2015].

[291] Ibid., <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/ps/stenprot/136schuz/s136007.htm> [accessed 19 August 2015].

[292] See Kornel Stodola, 'Economic Progress', in *Slovakia Then and Now: A Political Survey*, ed. by R. W. Seton Watson (London, 1931), pp. 252–67.

[293] 'Těsnopisecká zpráva o 169. schůzi poslanecké sněmovny Národního shromáždění republiky Československé v Praze v pátek dne 17. listopadu 1922', in *Společná česko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna* <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/stenprot/169schuz/s169010.htm> [accessed 29 February 2016].

The Slovak autonomists and its charismatic leader, the Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka (1864–1938), were more sceptical in judging how much work had actually been done by the government. When, in the same parliamentary session, Klimo mentioned a forest railway along the valley of the river Váh (Vág, Waag) that had recently been put into service by the government, Hlinka sneeringly interjected that the authorities 'just picked up the key and that was it!' At the same time, the development of the railway network was seen as a positive aim by the People's Party, promising greater economic development and prosperity for Slovakia. Indeed, in the course of the 1930s Hlinka acknowledged the government's successes in constructing new lines. As is demonstrated by the fact that there was no parliamentary debate over the 1920 bill, strengthening the railway network was an uncontroversial goal in inter-war Czechoslovakia. After all, no politician was opposed to economic development. However, the patronizing and hierarchizing rhetoric that accompanied it indicates that there was more at stake than economics. For Czechs like Rybák and Pelikán, the creation of a railway network in Slovakia was devised primarily as a means to turn Prague into the heart of an organic whole. Hence, policies intended to support Slovakia were undermined by their own rhetoric and thus provided Slovak autonomists with some justification that, as Hlinka alleged, Slovakia was being treated like a colony by the Czechs.[294]

Celebratory Czechoslovakism: Opening New Railway Lines

Josef Hons's assessment that the programme had an utterly unrealistic time frame seems plausible in view of its sluggish realization.[295] Only nine of the fifteen lines planned in the March 1920 law were actually constructed in the inter-war period, and none of those within the original time frame of 1921 to 1925.[296] The final section of this chapter will consider the

[294] Hlinka at an election rally in Nitra on 7 November 1925, quoted in Hoensch, *Dokumente*, p. 35.
[295] Hons, p. 229.
[296] These were: Bánovce nad Ondavou–Vajany (opened 20 October 1921); Zvolen–Krupina (16 January 1925); Petřkovice–Hlučín (15 June 1925); Vsetín–Bylnice-Brumov (21 October 1928); Veselí nad Moravou–Nové Mesto nad Váhom (1 September 1929); Handlová–Horná Štubňa (20 December

opening ceremonies for the new railway lines in more detail. These official celebrations

featured speeches by the Minister of Railways and other dignitaries, performances by local

choirs or other artistic groups, receptions offering food and drink, and special trains that gave

the guests the opportunity to inspect the new line. For the inhabitants of the predominantly

small towns and villages that hosted the openings, they became opportunities to showcase

their local culture to a state elite they might see for the only time in their lives. With newly-

built stations and other representative buildings decorated festively in the national colours,

these events turned into semi-official holidays for the local population dressed in national

costume or their Sunday best (see Figure 5). They were also well-attended by the local and

national press, which turned them into events of national significance. Film crews captured the

event for newsreels and gave cinema audiences in Czechoslovakia's urban centres the

opportunity to see with their own eyes the landscape of their homeland, now easily accessible

by train.[297] In the following, I will consider the line openings as discursive events that shaped

not only the Czechoslovak public's view of the railway network, but also of their country's

territory and landscape. I examine the way in which their representation in press and film

contributed to a notion of Czechoslovak national space. After giving an introduction to

recurring themes, I will deal in more detail with the opening of the railway between Handlová

(Nyitrabánya, Krickerhau) and Horná Štubňa (Felsőstubnya, Oberstuben) on 30 December

1931.

    The new railway lines were celebrated as expressions of Czechoslovakism in practice,

or, at the very least, as a promise of what was to come in the future. On occasion of the

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1931); Červená Skála–Margecany (26 July 1936); Horní Lideč–Púchov nad Váhom (2 May 1937); and Zlaté Moravce–Zbehy (1 May 1938). The construction of a further two lines was started in this period and finished during the Second World War: Banská Bystrica–Diviaky (19 December 1940) and Kapušany–Strážske (5 September 1943). All these lines formed part of the Central Slovak main line or connected it to the Moravian railway network. The Veselí–Nové Mesto link offered access to Prague from the north via Olomouc, while the Púchov–Horní Lideč line connected to Brno and thence to Prague (Štěpán, pp. 194–202).

[297] The National Film Archives (NFA) in Prague holds newsreels on the construction and/or opening of the following lines: Vsetín–Bylnice (1928), Handlová–Horná Štubňa (1931), Červená Skála–Margecany (1936) and Zbehy–Zlaté Moravce (1938). Personal correspondence with Jitka Kohoutová at the NFA, 9 May 2013.

opening of the Veselí–Nové Mesto railway in September 1929, the prominent ministerial aide

Josef Koněrza wrote: 'May this railway remain a permanent bond between two fraternal

branches [of the nation], a route to mutual blossoming and safety.'[298] An official ministerial

publication celebrating the opening connected the landscape passed by the train to figures of

Czech and Slovak history and politics. 'This railway […] connects Moravian Slovakia, the land of

Comenius, Palacký and Masaryk, with the land of Štefánik.' The train traversed the Hurban

Valley, where 'allegedly [the Slovak national activist Jozef Miloslav] Hurban went into hiding in

1848'. From the mountain range of Poľana, which was crossed by the railway through a tunnel

named after Milan Rastislav Štefánik (1880–1919), one of the three founding fathers of

Czechoslovakia, 'one can see Bradlo with the grave of General Štefánik on its steep limestone

peak, one can see his home village Košariská, and even Brezová, the hometown of MP [Štefan]

Osuský. These two names characterize this land, which is finally to be connected by railway to

the world.'[299] By loading the landscape with Czechoslovak nationalist mythology, the text

rejected other national claims to the same land, firmly grounding history in space.

This rhetoric intensified towards the end of the 1930s, as both more railways were

opened in quicker succession, and the rise of Slovak separatism and the growing threat from

neighbouring Nazi Germany led to a more aggressive Czechoslovakist reaction. For instance, in

the words of *Slovenský denník* (Slovak daily), the opening of the railway between the north-

western Slovak town of Púchov (Puhó, Puchau) and the eastern Moravian Horní Lideč

(Oberlitsch) on 2 May 1937 featured crowds of people 'in national costume and with songs on

their lips'.

> They were exhibiting their happiness about this achievement in the most joyful and
>
> unabashed manner. This is an accomplishment for the better connection of the western

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[298] Josef Koněrza, 'Proslov', in *Stavba jednokolejné hlavní dráhy Veselí n. Moravou–Myjava–Nové Mesto n. Váhom: Zahájení provozu v dílčí trati Veselí nad Mor.–Myjava* (Prague, 1927), n. pag.
[299] Ibid., p. 11.

lands of the republic with Slovakia, in good times and bad. All speeches featured the

leading idea of Czechoslovak unity, cohesion, and firm belief in the future.[300]

The author of the article might have been thinking of the speech made by the president of the

Slovak province Jozef Országh (1883–1949), who 'praised the new line as another important

artery for the economic transfusion of life between the western lands and Slovakia and as a

new significant contribution to the technical and material culture of Slovakia'.[301] *Robotnícke*

noviny wrote that the railway shortened the journey time from Slovakia to Prague by an hour.

'Every hour that we are closer to Prague has its great significance, for it represents the

attachment to all that is new, joyful, creative and progressive, that unites us and which we

need in our very own interest.'[302]

To an even greater extent, Edvard Beneš's official journey through Slovakia in

September 1936 was widely celebrated as an act steeped in Czechoslovakist symbolism. The

Severočeský deník (North Bohemian daily) encapsulated the general mood when it wrote that

'the president's journey through Slovakia is a veritable triumph of the state idea [*státní*

myšlenky]'.[303] Beneš began his journey by visiting Sučany (Szucsány), the birthplace of prime

minister Milan Hodža (1878–1944). He then continued on to Černová (Csernova), both the site

of a massacre in 1907, during which 15 Slovaks were killed by Hungarian gendarmes, and the

birthplace of the leading Slovak autonomist Andrej Hlinka. Beneš was welcomed warmly by

Hlinka, otherwise a vociferous critic of the government's Czech centralism. Hlinka espoused

the commonality of Czechs and Slovaks in his welcoming address: 'Blessed be your arrival in

our midst. May it mark a new era of fraternization between Czechs and Slovaks.' His reception

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[300] 'Nová železnica zo Slovenska na Moravu je 28 kilometrov dlhá', *Slovenský denník*, 4 May 1937, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 78.

[301] 'Nová železnica - symbol československej jednoty', *A-Zet*, 5 May 1937, in ibid. Országh's post, called *zemský president* in Czech and *krajinský prezident* in Slovak, was introduced after the administrative reorganization of Czechoslovakia into four provinces in 1928: Bohemia, Moravia-Silesia, Slovakia and Ruthenia. Országh held the largely ceremonial post from 1929 to 1938.

[302] 'Niet hôr tak vysokých, aby oddelily Čechov a Slovákov a zabránily československej jednote', *Robotnícke noviny*, 4 May 1937, in ibid.

[303] 'Není v Evropě síly, která by nás mohla zdolat, překonat, ovládnouť', *Severočeský deník*, 30 September 1936, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 59.

of Beneš indicates that a mere two years before the destruction of Czechoslovakia, the idea of

a united Czechoslovakia was still a powerful ideological force respected even by the party that

was soon to lead the semi-independent Slovak Republic.

Similarly, in its coverage of Beneš's ground-breaking ceremony, Hlinka's party organ

Slovák praised the significance of the railways for the unity of the state, albeit clad in criticism

of Prague centralism. The article attacked the paternalism of many Czech officials, whose

speeches at opening ceremonies 'mislead the president and other guests' by 'taking credit for

all innovations in Slovakia and present them as mere graciousness for the little Slovaks [*pre*

Slováčikov]. […] It is high time for a change […] in the improvement of the Slovak railway

network, which is a self-evident requirement also with respect to the needs of the state as a

whole.'[304] None the less, *Slovák* remained respectful to the president and the interest of the

state. As the paper's coverage and Hlinka's address indicate, Slovak independence – which was

achieved two years later under Nazi tutelage and with the support of Hlinka's party – was no

immediate goal of the Slovak autonomists in 1936. Developing the railway network as a means

towards the unity of the state was an aim that united nearly all Czech and Slovak politicians in

the inter-war period, if for different reasons: the government's priority was the unification of

the country, while the Slovak separatists supported the railways for the economic

development they promised.

In addition to rhetoric, the naming of railway lines and buildings for Czech and Slovak

politicians further cemented the Czechoslovakization of the landscape. The line between the

Moravian towns of Vsetín (Wsetin) and Bylnice-Brumov (Bilnitz-Brumow), completed in

October 1928, was christened the 'Masaryk Railway' after the president, who had been born in

the area.[305] The Púchov–Horní Lideč link bore the name of Milan Rastislav Štefánik and was

unofficially called the 'railway of Czechoslovak reciprocity' (*dráha československého*

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[304] 'Započatie stavby B. Bystrica-Diviaky', *Slovák*, 30 September 193, in ibid.
[305] *Dráha presidenta Masaryka: Hlavní dráha Vsetín–Bylnice. Pamětní spis o stavbě dráhy, vydaný na oslavu prvního desetiletí republiky při zahájení provozu* (Prague, 1928).

vzájemnosti) by the press.[306] The naming of tunnels for national heroes was even more

widespread. Considering the mountainous profile of the parts of Slovakia traversed by new

railway lines, many new tunnels had to be constructed, which ranked among the greatest

accomplishments of engineering carried out in inter-war Czechoslovakia. A column in honour

of Masaryk's eightieth birthday on 7 March 1930 was erected at Sklené station on the

Handlová–Horná Štubňa line (see Figure 6). The memorial stood outside a tunnel named for

Masaryk that was, at 3,012 metres, then the longest in the country and 600 metres longer than

the previous record-holder, the General Štefánik Tunnel near Myjava.[307] Such symbolic

appropriation of landscape is often associated with urban space. Historians have studied the

implications of renaming streets or erecting statues of national heroes on busy squares.[308] The

Masaryk memorial illustrates how the railways contributed to the nationalization of the entire

country, including the countryside. This ideologization had a great influence on the local

population, who, as I discuss below, had had little exposure to theories of nationalism.

Newspapers reported that the '*Slovak* and *German* population gathered by the memorial at

Sklené station' and when a railway official proclaimed the glory of the president, 'the crowd

reciprocated euphorically'.[309] In cities, the national appropriation of landscape tended to be

the domain of activists and, in some cases, the municipal authorities. In the countryside, this

nationalizing role was assumed by the Ministry of Railways.

Despite the overt symbolic Czechoslovakization of the countryside, even the

Hungarian-language press represented the railway policy in a generally favourable light. The

daily *Magyar Újság* (Hungarian newspaper), which was supported by the government, set the

tone in depicting the openings as celebrations of the economic development of Slovakia that

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[306] Štěpán, p. 199. See also e.g. 'Prvá cesta po novej trati generála M. R. Štefánika', *Slovenský denník*, 4 May 1937, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 78.

[307] Josef Koněrza, *Stavba jednokolejné hlavní dráhy z Handlové do Horní Štubně: Pamětní spis o stavbě* (Prague, 1933), p. 33. The opening of the tunnel was widely reported in the press, see e.g. 'Největší tunel v ČSR odevzdán dopravě', *Večer*, 21 December 1931, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 9.

[308] See Paces, Wingfield, and Sayer, The Language of Nationality.

[309] 'Největší tunel v ČSR. odevzdán dopravě', *Večer*, 21 December 1931, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 9. Emphasis in the original.

would benefit all its inhabitants. Describing the opening of the line between Červená Skála

(Vöröskő) and Margecany (Margitfalva) in July 1936, the paper suggested that the region's

population 'without national differences' gave expression to their delight at the new means of

transport.[310] The paper welcomed Beneš's visit to Slovakia and wrote that, even though the

new railway passed through 'territory inhabited by Slovaks', 'the Magyar minority can only

rejoice that, as demonstrated by the president's visit, the government's investment

programme in Slovakia is already showing positive results'.[311] These quotations are relativized

by the fact that the newspaper supported an activist role of the Magyar minority in

Czechoslovak politics.[312] But the discourse was similar in other Hungarian-language periodicals.

Gömör, a weekly newspaper from Rimavská Sobota (Rimaszombat, Großsteffelsdorf) in south-

central Slovakia, also evaluated the opening of the Červená Skála–Margecany line positively:

'This latest railway line […] will meet a long-felt need. This makes understandable the joy of the

local population that was demonstrated so refreshingly at the opening celebration.' The article

went on to praise justice minister Ivan Dérer's (1884–1973) promise, given at the opening, to

grant economic and cultural equality to all nationalities of Czechoslovakia.[313]

The notion that the expansion of the railway network would be beneficial to Slovakia's

regional economy and thus also to the Magyar minority was the overriding expectation in the

Hungarian press's response to the Czechoslovak railway policy. This is illustrated in the

coverage of the *Prágai Magyar Hírlap* (Prague Hungarian newspaper), the conservative

mouthpiece of the Hungarian opposition that is generally considered the leading Hungarian-

language newspaper in inter-war Czechoslovakia.[314] In contrast to its generally critical

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[310] 'Új szlovenszkói vasutak építését jelenti be Bechyne [sic] miniszter', *Magyar Újság*, 28 July 1936, p. 5.

[311] József Lukovich, 'Elnöki látogatás és kisebbségi magyarok', *Magyar Újság*, 1 October 1936, p. 1.

[312] On the Hungarian press in inter-war Czechoslovakia, see Pál Szvatkó, 'A sajtó', in *Magyarok Csehszlovákiában 1918–1938*, ed. by István Borsody (Šamorín, 2002), pp. 130–39; and Csilla Neszméri, 'A két világháború közötti szlovenszkói sajtó története', *Pro minoritate*, Winter 2009, 37–54; available online at <http://www.prominoritate.hu/folyoiratok/2009/ProMino09-4-03-Neszmeri.pdf> [accessed 19 August 2015].

[313] László Márkus, 'Egy miniszteri pohárköszöntő', *Gömör*, 2 August 1936, p. 1.

[314] Szvatkó; Neszméri.

approach to governmental policies, it often reported on new railway lines – like the Czech press did – as technological marvels that would stimulate the economy.[315] Unsurprisingly, however, its coverage only rarely touched on the celebrations of Czechoslovakist ideology that characterized the events, but even if it did, reported on them without critical evaluation. Rather, it highlighted instances of Czechoslovak statesmen reaching out to the Magyar minority. Thus, during Beneš's visit to Slovakia in 1936, it ran a story that the president was learning Hungarian.[316] The coverage of the Hungarian press therefore shares features with that of the autonomist Slovak press. Rather than criticizing the ideology evident in the discourse around the openings, it focused on the economic development it expected to follow in the railways' wake. The coverage suggests that even the *Prágai Magyar Hírlap* did not support revisionist goals. Rather than Czechoslovakization, the railway was seen to bring benefits to all nationalities. Railways, this once again illustrates, were open to interpretations from all sides that were often ambivalent and sometimes outright contradictory.

'Mountain Men' and the 'Iron Horse': The Railway between Handlová and Horná Štubňa

In the Czech press, the celebratory Czechoslovakism employed in this discourse can be contrasted with a simultaneous tendency to romanticize Slovakia and Ruthenia. These territories were portrayed as a romantic wilderness to be civilized by a railway system that had its centre in Prague and from there spread to the country's eastern half. The railway line between Handlová and Horná Štubňa, which was opened on 20 December 1931, passed through mountainous and inhospitable terrain. This made the construction technically demanding and costly. Although the linear distance between the two towns was just twelve

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[315] 'A handlova-felsőstubnyai vasutvonal átadták a forgalomnak', *Prágai Magyar Hírlap* [hereafter PMH], 22 December 1931, p. 2; 'Megnyitották a margitfalva-vöröskői vasutat', PMH, 28 July 1936, p. 4; 'Hétfőn kezdik el a Fátra-vasut építését', PMH, 26 September 1936, p. 3; 'Átadták a forgalomnak a puhó-lédeci [sic] uj vasutvonalat', PMH, 4 May 1937, p. 5.
[316] 'Az elnök magyarul tanul…', PMH, 25 September 1936, p. 3.

kilometres, the railway line measured some 18.6 kilometres as it snaked around the mountains to negotiate a 184-metre difference in altitude.[317] The route's five tunnels included the T. G. Masaryk Tunnel mentioned above, then the longest in the country. It was the single largest construction project in Czechoslovakia at the time and employed 4,220 workers daily on average in 1930. After railway construction projects had been repeatedly criticized for their reliance on non-local and especially foreign workers, the Ministry of Railways strove to employ as many local workers as possible.[318] Of those employed on the Handlová–Horná Štubňa line, 55 per cent were from the region, 36 per cent from elsewhere in Slovakia and from Carpathian Ruthenia, 7 per cent from Bohemian Lands and 2 per cent were foreigners.[319]

Before the First World War, the region traversed by the railway had been isolated from the transport routes through Upper Hungary and its predominantly German-speaking peasant population had become impoverished. The geographical isolation contributed to the development of an idiosyncratic German dialect that was the object of scholarly ridicule in the nineteenth century. In the comments to his 1824 epic poem *Slávy dcera* (The daughter of Sláva), the Slovak writer and pan-Slavist Ján (Jan) Kollár (1793–1852) explained that the term 'Handerburci' was the name given by Slovaks to 'the Germans who have been living in counties of Turóc, Nyitra and parts of Bars since ancient times and speak a clumsy [*nemotorné*] dialect. […] The name Handerburci or Krikehajci probably derives from their manner of speaking or shouting and jiggling the tongue [*křikání a burcování jazykem*].'[320] As Egbert K. Jahn notes, the terrain was also partly responsible for the fact that the local population had failed to develop a strong regional (much less national) sense of identity by 1918 and was divided into several

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[317] NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 3, Ministerial memo (*Stavba dráhy Handlová–Horná Štubňa*), p. 2 (1927). For a detailed description of the line, see Koněrza, *Stavba dráhy z Handlové do Horní Štubně*, pp. 29–35.

[318] 'K slávnostnému zahájeniu dopravy na železnici Handlová-Horná Štubňa', *Slovenská politika*, 20 December 1931, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 9.

[319] Koněrza, *Stavba dráhy z Handlové do Horní Štubně*, p. 36.

[320] Kollár also cites the Hungarian scholar Johann von (János) Csaplovics, who wrote in 1829 that the local Germans 'speak a strange gibberish, e.g. they call a piece [Stückl] Grimpele, a foal [Füllen] Miscapala, a plate Fressbrettal and a spoon Fresshölzal'. See Johann von Csaplovics, *Gemälde von Ungern: Mit einer ethnographischen Karte* (Pest, 1829), pp. 206–07; quoted in Jan Kollár, *Výklad čili přímětky a vysvětlivky ku Slávy dceře* (Prague, 1875), p. 422.

historically distinct groups of villages.[321] This set it apart from most other German settlements

in Hungary, where the government's aggressive Magyarization programme led to critical

discussions of their identity as Hungarian Germans. The creation of Czechoslovakia resulted in

the arrival of German nationalist teachers and scholars from Bohemia and Moravia in the late

1920s and especially the 1930s. Their influence led to the gradual development of a national

consciousness among the local population.[322] It was in this time, as well, that ethnographers

popularized the term *Hauerland* for the region as a whole, which was derived from the '-hau'

suffix common to many of the local German toponyms. Jahn suggests that the term was coined

by Josef Hanika (1900–1963), a Bohemian German ethnographer who made his name as

Professor of German Ethnography at Prague University during the Second World War.[323] It is

no coincidence that this ideological development coincided with the construction of a railway

that made it more easily accessible. Simultaneously, the discovery of natural resources in the

first decade of the twentieth century led to an economic boom and the arrival of many Slovak-

speaking mine workers. The workforce required in the coal mines of Handlová led to the

doubling of the population in the eleven years from 1910 to 1921. While according to the

Hungarian census of 1910, 87% of the town's 4,248 inhabitants were German speakers, in the

1921 Czechoslovak count, the ratio had dropped to 54% of 9,796.[324]

The industrialization and ethnolinguistic shifts experienced by the region shaped the

discussions around the Handlová–Horná Štubňa railway. In their description of the

construction, many articles describe the 'mountainous, forested region traversed by the

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[321] Egbert K. Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei in den Jahren 1918 bis 1929: Ein Beitrag zur Nationalitätenproblematik* (Munich, 1971), pp. 20–21. Ironically, in *Slávy dcera* Kollár portrays an inhabitant of the village that became Handlová as anti-Slovak. The description also illustrates the region's poverty. 'Byl ten Quadík zlostný z Krikerháje | Rozoký hled, vole, čepici | Červenou a Hans Schwarz jméno maje; | Slavské řeči vždy se posmíval, | Do školy když v městě Kremnici | V pacholectví ty jsi chodívával.' See Jan Kollár, *Slávy dcera: Lyricko-epická báseň v pěti zpěvích* (Prague, 1868), fifth canto, sonnet 60 (p. 316).

[322] An introduction to the area's history is given in Michal Švarc, 'Masová exekúcia v Sklenom 21. septembra 1944 v širšom dejinnom kontexte', *Pamäť národa*, 3.3 (2007), 4–13 (pp. 4–5). See also Martin Zückert, 'Veda a „riadenie identity": Sudetonemeckí etnografi a ich vzťah k Slovensku na príklade časopisu Karpathenland', *Historický časopis*, 56.1 (2008), 147–60 (p. 157).

[323] Jahn, pp. 20–21.

[324] Ibid., p. 22.

railway' as 'inhabited by German colonists', while stressing that the 'miners employed in the local mines are predominantly Slovaks'.[325] In addition to its romanticization of the wild Slovak countryside, this formulation reversed the historical settlement pattern, casting the Germans – whose settlements dated to the fourteenth century – as colonists. There is however no indication that the railway was received less positively among the German population than among the Slovak. Karl Bitterer, the priest and mayor of the 'large German village' of Sklené (Turócnémeti, Glaserhau) – the only stop on the line – received the delegation. 'Dr Bitterer's speech', wrote the *Slovenský denník*, 'was vivacious and bursting with loyalty and gratitude. He praised the president, the government and the creators of the railway.' The memorial column to Masaryk was then unveiled to mark the entrance to the eponymous tunnel. After a speech by the railway ministry official Josef Koněrza, who again invoked the glory of Masaryk, a laurel wreath adorned with ribbons in the national colours was laid and the national anthem played. Finally, 'the guests got on the train cheered on by shouts of "Živio" and "Hoch"' – in the local Slovak dialect as well as in German – and left Sklené for Horná Štubňa on the last leg of their journey.[326] At least on the level of official celebrations, the Germans of the *Hauerland* appeared as loyal Czechoslovaks. Provincial president Jozef Országh was satisfied with the event, remarking that 'this celebration will strengthen Slovak loyalty to and love for the Czechoslovak Republic, its president and its government'.[327] Despite the region's mixed ethnic composition, the rhetoric at the opening stressed the line's significance for the unity of the country, and thus did not differ greatly from that of other opening ceremonies. Characteristically, on a national radio programme broadcast on 15 December 1931, Jindřich Rybák praised the line as one of the greatest technical constructions carried out in Czechoslovakia since 1918.[328]

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[325] See e.g. 'Železnice Handlová-Horná Štubňa dokončena', *Národní politika*, 20 December 1931, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 9. Considering the ubiquity of this formulation, it is likely that it was used in a press release published by the Ministry of Railways.

[326] 'Divy modernej techniky ve službách verejnosti', *Slovenský denník*, 22 December 1931, in ibid.

[327] 'Největší tunel v ČSR. odevzdán dopravě', *Večer*, 21 December 1931, in ibid.

[328] 'Ze Slovenska', *Československá republika*, 19 December 1931, in ibid.

Due to its perceived geographic remoteness, however, this railway provides a prime example of the Czech-centred paternalism of the discourse. Bitterer's enthusiasm was shared by many Czech commentators, who expressed the hope that modern technology would lead to the development of this 'distant, sleepy back of beyond'. With apt pathos, Josef Otto Novotný commented on the opening day of the line in *Národní listy* that 'today this unjustly forgotten and sinfully neglected corner of Slovakia celebrates its resurrection'.

> Today, 20 December 1931, marks the beginning of a new era for the region, which will supply it with the opportunity to exploit its natural wealth and will also lead to its economic development. Its Slovak and German villages will be animated by previously unknown bustle. In the summer, they will become crossroads of tourists, who arrive for their virginal character, which is expressed in the colourful and expensively decorated folk costumes, the original wooden buildings and a primitive life interspersed with ancient legends and the customs of faithfully preserved traditions.[329]

Novotný's description is unabashedly exoticizing. He contributed to the development of the area into a tourist destination himself in 1937, when he published a guidebook for Central Slovakia.[330] He went on to express regret for what he considered the likely loss of the distinctive quality of the region, which had made it into 'a kind of authentic ethnographic reservation' before the incursion of modern technology. 'But that is the result and underside of culture and there is nothing to be done but resign oneself to the inevitable and at least rescue what can be rescued for museums.' The article closed with a synopsis of what Czechoslovak nation-building in Slovakia had already achieved and what remained to be done: 'Today's opening of the railway line from Handlová to Horná Štubňa has righted one of the many wrongs that the Magyars committed with impunity on the Slovaks. But how much remains to be set right until this veritable "land of the future" will deliver all its immeasurable

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[329] This and the quotations below are taken from J. O. Novotný, 'Handlová-Horná Štubňa: Slovenská zahrádka', *Národní listy*, 20 December 1931, in ibid.
[330] Josef Otto Novotný, *Střední Slovensko: Kulturně-historické kapitoly. Díl 1* (Prague, 1937).

riches.' Technology in the form of the railway was presented as a means of modernization brought to Slovakia from the west that would inevitably lead to the loss of Slovak distinctiveness. In inter-war Czechoslovakia, spatial nation-building was closely connected to spatial modernization.

Such an orientalist approach to Slovakia was far from isolated. For instance, the Bohemian German ethnographer Bruno Schier (1902–1984) remembered that 'with its preserved or half-forgotten dialects large parts of Slovakia at the time resembled one large open-air museum; thanks to its relict nature, the territory became a higher school of ethnography for an entire generation of scholars from Prague and Vienna.'[331] Whether with the tools of scholarship or technology, the Prague government was portrayed as a force of civilization. Railway construction, it was imagined, would abolish the discrepancy between Slovak tradition and Czech modernity. In the country's eastern half, national space was to be created by the modernization of space that was seen to be, as yet, nationally indifferent.

This becomes even clearer in the descriptions of the railway's construction, which is depicted as a battle between primeval nature and modern man. One journalist enthusiastically called the boring of the tunnel 'a genuine manifestation of the victory of man over the giant rocks, which was drilled with a machine and created the longest tunnel of our republic'.[332] A long reportage in the Brno newspaper *Lidové noviny* is even more explicit in pitting the (anthropomorphized) mountain against modern technology and civilization.

> Far from the quiet of the woods there are the offices of the engineers. Bral did not know they were talking about him there. Then came people with various tools, levers, maps. They did not look at Bral. They took measurements, put up bolts, and filled the forest with unaccustomed bustle. Cars arrived on paths cut through the trees, houses were built, there was life from morning to night and Bral never had a quiet moment. A tarmac road

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[331] Quoted in Zückert, *Veda a riadenie identity*, p. 148.
[332] 'U Handlové byl proražen největší tunel v ČSR', *Lid*, 15 July 1930, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 6.

took the place of the footpath through the forest, a track on the hillside, the grove

disappeared under a mountain of stone. The workers' settlement and school for their

children stand above, the offices of the construction company Kruliš, Jáchymek and

Schwarz below. Transformers, generators, drills, locomotives, a forge, engines, ventilators

and compressors, stores, tracks, locomotives with hundreds of small carriages –

civilization is having a great weekend here in the mountains and has been enjoying itself

for three years already. […] A clear, wild stream flows beneath the mountain of stone. […]

The people found it and use it for their needs. Bral doesn't defend himself. He is

unharmed at the top, by the sky, even though there's a deep black wound by his heel. The

enmity of the mountain towards the people remained within, at a length of three

thousand metres, the frontline of the war between the people and the soil is deep

underground. Man needed a path, and if the path leads through a mountain, the

mountain had to yield. The mountain yielded.[333]

In this description, the mountain becomes a symbol for Slovakia, while technology and

civilization stand in for the Czechs. It is no coincidence that the building companies mentioned

in the text clearly came from the Bohemian Lands.[334] While the text was ambivalent about the

value of the march of civilization across the countryside, its inevitability was never in doubt.

The author narrated the transformation of a landscape apparently untouched by civilization

into a territory of the state. It implied the government was a civilizing agent in the wilderness

of Slovakia, the loss of which was mourned as unavoidable.

Unconsciously if not consciously, then, Czech commentators tended to regard the

modernization of Slovakia as a Czech civilizing mission. This paternalistic colonialism became

blatant in a commentary published by the paper *Československá republika* (Czechoslovak

Republic):

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[333] F. K. Zeman, 'Tunel pod Bralem', *Lidové noviny*, 20 July 1930, in ibid.
[334] The firms of Kruliš and Schwarz were headquartered in Prague, Jáchymek in Brno. See Koněrza, *Stavba dráhy z Handlové do Horní Štubně*, p. 27.

If the mountain men […] could rise from their graves, they would be astonished at how the

beautiful Slovak countryside of mountains and hills has been torn open by smoking iron

horses that snake around ravines and valleys, and ram through mountains and hills, only

to briefly disappear like in a fairy tale from the sight of the stunned inhabitants of the

mountains and hills. And they would be even more astonished were they to find out that

all of this was created by people of flesh and bone like them, even of one and the same

blood [*krev jejich krve*].[335]

This text once again infantilized the Slovaks, granting them the role of awed spectators in a

spectacle of modernization carried out by the Czechs. This benign modernization by the

brother nation was contrasted to the modernization in the old Kingdom of Hungary, where 'all

roads led to Pest, and no other path offered redemption and life to anyone'.[336]

In general, then, the Czechoslovak railway discourse combined a celebration of

Czechoslovakia's unity, often expressed in organic imagery, with a romanticization of Slovakia

as a more authentic and natural, but also less civilized version of the Bohemian Lands. The

anticipated loss of Slovak cultural traditions was seen as a necessary evil of progress. In this

logic, technological modernization was expected to result in the Czechization of the

population. With their cultural traditions and peculiarities safely stored away in ethnographic

realm of museums, nothing would distinguish Slovaks from Czechs. The expectation that the

railways would act as an agent of national standardization was widespread, but was never

fulfilled. Instead, the Czechoslovakist rhetoric employed by the government and the press

contributed to the development of conflict in Czech-Slovak relations. The widespread use of

organic imagery in the railway discourse asserted the existence of a single Czechoslovak

nation, while nevertheless maintaining a clear hierarchy between its constituent parts. The

railway discourse thus played a part in the development of a national spatial ideology that

contributed to Slovak separatism. The destruction of inter-war Czechoslovakia had its primary

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[335] 'Pokrok na Slovensku', *Československá republika*, 20 December 1931, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 9.
[336] Ibid.

cause in Nazi Germany's expansionism. However, in its paternalism and benevolent colonialism, the Czechoslovak railway discourse was conducive to the country's breakup.

At the same time, Beneš was not completely wrong when, upon boarding the train back to Prague after opening the building site of the Banská Bystrica–Diviaky railway, he said that 'I leave for Prague satisfied and with the awareness that our seventeen years of freedom have been put to good use'.[337] In the public consciousness, the twenty years of Czechoslovak 'work on national space' had been successful in creating a territory for the Czechoslovak nation, which was a condition for the restitution of the state after the Second World War. The aim of forging a Czechoslovak nation from the tracks, which was implicit in the railway policy, failed. It did, however, contribute to forging a Czechoslovak spatial identity.

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[337] 'President republiky dr. Ed. Beneš skončil svou slovenskou cestu', *Národní politika*, 29 September 1936, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 59.

Chapter 3
'Germanized Territories' or 'Pure German Soil'? The National Conflict on the Railways

In the afternoon of 5 June 1929, Josef Jireš, the headteacher at the Czech school in the North Bohemian town of Chotyně (Ketten), took a train to return home from a town hall meeting in Liberec. The service from Liberec to Zittau (Žitava) in nearby Saxony was operated by the German state railway company *Deutsche Reichsbahn*. After the train's departure, the *Reichsbahn* conductor asked Jireš in German to show his ticket, but he refused and demanded to be addressed in Czech. After a brief discussion and a physical struggle between train staff and Jireš, he was taken off the train at the next station, Bílý Kostel nad Nisou (Weißkirchen an der Neiße). The incident sparked a public and vitriolic row that reached the local and national press, the courts, parliament, and led to a conflict between the Czechoslovak and German railway companies. The affair begs the question how an apparently insignificant incident on a small rural line could have become a symbol of the national struggle between Czechs and Germans. In the following chapter I will discuss this case within the context of the broader national conflict in inter-war Czechoslovakia, for it exemplifies the significance of trains as one of the primary public spaces in which it took place. The chapter's focus is therefore not on the Czechoslovak state's self-representation through the railways, which I have discussed in the preceding chapters. Rather, it is on the people who used the railways – as a means of transport, as a place of work, and as an arena to negotiate national conflict. I suggest that the national conflict shaped the role of the railways in the development of a Czechoslovak national and spatial identity as much as the construction of new railway lines in Slovakia. For nation-building was carried out not only as a normative gesture, but as a negotiation between the government and the population. In its railway policy, Czechoslovakia's government was in a limbo between the parallel tasks of representing the nation and expressing the country's cosmopolitanism. The Jireš affair and other examples will illustrate that, faced with the

national conflict on trains, the government was equally torn between its roles of representing

a Czechoslovak nation-state and acting as a neutral arbiter of all citizens, be they of Czech,

Slovak, German, Magyar, Polish or any other nationality. The first part of this chapter thus aims

to provide a microhistory of the national conflict on the railways in inter-war Czechoslovakia.

The second part will illuminate the conflict from the other side of the equation by considering

the national composition of the staff on ČSD trains. Although railway workers were often

considered representatives of the nation-state, I suggest that their relationship to

Czechoslovakization was ambivalent and often became a matter of criticism from Czech

nationalists.

The national conflict between Czechs and Germans is one of the most important

themes in the historiography of the Bohemian Lands.[338] Until the 1990s, there was a clear

dichotomy in the treatment of the subject in (West) Germany and in Czechoslovakia. Led by

Sudeten Germans expelled from their homeland, the German narrative emphasized instances

of Czech oppression and condemned the political system of inter-war Czechoslovakia.[339]

Literature by Czech as well as British and American historians tended to characterize inter-war

Czechoslovakia as a 'paragon of democracy' and typically cast the Sudeten Germans into the

role of Nazi Germany's third wheel.[340] Following the fall of the communism in Eastern Europe,

this dichotomy has disappeared. A number of recent studies in English, Czech and German

have re-examined the Czech-German relationship in innovative ways, shedding light not only

on party-political developments, but also on the grassroots antagonism. Drawing on Gary B.

Cohen's study of the Germans in Prague, historians have used urban and local history to trace

the processes by which citizens increasingly made use of national modes of identification and

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[338] Significant works emerged already during the period, such as Elizabeth Wiskemann, *Czechs and Germans: A Study of the Struggle in the Historic Provinces of Bohemia and Moravia*, 2nd edn (London, 1967 [1938]). See also Křen, among others.

[339] See e.g. Jörg K. Hoensch, *Geschichte der Tschechoslowakischen Republik 1918–1965* (Stuttgart, 1966) and Karl Bosl (ed.), *Handbuch der Geschichte der böhmischen Länder*, 4 vols (Stuttgart, 1967–1974), esp. vol. 4, *Der tschechoslowakische Staat im Zeitalter der modernen Massendemokratie und Diktatur* (Stuttgart, 1970).

[340] See e.g. Mamatey/Luža. A discussion of this dichotomy can be found in Bugge, Paragon or Parody.

the ways in which this changed social relations in the Bohemians Lands and Slovakia.[341] Others

turned their attention to the economy as a major setting of the conflict, to the construction of

new, nationalized spaces that were marked by national borders, islands, and even walls, and to

previously neglected historical actors such as soldiers and children.[342] They pointed out the

myriad instances of national indifference and ambivalence, as well as the differentiating the

reality of nationalisms on display. This literature has demonstrated that there were never

solid, antagonistic blocks of Czechs and Germans, as previous studies based primarily on party-

political sources might have one believe. Instead, the new historiography has supplied

evidence for Rogers Brubaker's suggestion that the nation should considered 'not as entity but

as contingent event'.[343]

As public spaces *par excellence*, train compartments provided a prime setting for these

events. To a greater extent than, say, theatres, public offices, parks, shops or streets, they

force strangers into close proximity to one another with little outside distraction. The novelty

of this social situation and the wealth of possible complications it offers prompted an entire

genre of literature set on trains in the nineteenth century.[344] Nicholas Daly has argued that

'the train, as harbinger of modernity, appeared to threaten not just to shake up the individual

body, but to erode the social barriers between the sexes in a way that was both tantalizing and

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[341] See Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914*, 2nd edn (West Lafayette, 2006); Babejová; Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2007); Iris Engemann, *Die Slowakisierung Bratislavas: Universität, Theater und Kultusgemeinden 1918–1948* (Wiesbaden, 2012); King; Koeltzsch; and Wingfield.

[342] See Catherine Albrecht, 'Economic Nationalism in the Sudetenland, 1918–1938', in *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe 1918–1948*, ed. by Mark Cornwall and R. J. W. Evans (Oxford, 2007), pp. 89–108; Christoph Boyer, *Nationale Kontrahenten oder Partner? Studien zu den Beziehungen zwischen Tschechen und Deutschen in der Wirtschaft der ČSR (1918-1938)* (Munich, 1999); Cornwall, The Struggle; id., *Devil's Wall*; Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, esp. pp. 358–84; Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*; id., Frontiers, Islands, Forests, Stones; Julia Schmid, '„Deutschböhmen" als Konstrukt deutscher Nationalisten in Österreich und dem Deutschen Reich', *Bohemia*, 48.2 (2008), 464–79; Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca, NY, 2008); and Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*.

[343] Brubaker, p. 16.

[344] Often these were crime novels, such as Emile Zola's *La Bête Humaine* or Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*. However, there was no great railway novel in Czech or Slovak literature; Martin Hrdina has called Czech railway-related literature of the nineteenth century 'average' (see his Diskurz o železnici v české literatuře 19. století, p. 63).

frightening'.[345] While fictional depictions of conflicts on trains often dealt with issues of gender, the railways also facilitated contact between members of different ethnic groups. Trains were not only one of the most important locations in which the national conflict took place, but also featured several characteristics that encouraged transnational encounters and distinguished them from other public spaces. Train compartments were unique in forcing people of different backgrounds together into a small space over an extended period of time. The need to purchase a ticket and show it to the conductor made it necessary to speak and thus to disclose one's preferred language. Furthermore, trains move in space and hence often transported Czechoslovak citizens to places where a language other than their own was spoken. This fact also means that trains move outside of nationality statistics; the ethnolinguistic composition of the passengers on a train may well be entirely different to that of the regions it passes through. However, due to the railways' ubiquity in the public space and the abundance of language associated with them – from tickets and station signs to the language spoken by conductors, they became significant symbols of nationality. Trains represented a unique environment for the development of national conflicts in inter-war Czechoslovakia.

The Czech-German Borderlands and the Jireš Affair

The strong symbolism of the language used on trains and in stations was at the heart of the Jireš affair. The incident as such was banal. According to the police report and Jireš's own testimony, he had been approached by the conductor of the train soon after its departure, who had asked for his ticket with the words 'Fahrkarten, bitte'.[346] Jireš replied that he did not

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[345] Daly, p. 44.

[346] This and the following information is taken from Josef Jireš, 'Co se děje v 11. roce Československé republiky na saské dráze', undated manuscript, in NA, 813, Carton 9, no. 1546 ('Naléhavá interpelace posl. J. Davida, Fr. Buřívala, L. Pechmannové, Chvojky a druhů předsedovi vlády o národní nesnášenlivosti Němců v ČSR a ztýrání řídícího učitele Josefa Jireše z Chotyně zaměstnanci saské dráhy, čís. t. 2357').

understand and demanded the conductor ask him in Czech. The latter, in turn, repeated his words several times 'in an aggravated tone and a heightened voice', adding that they were on the German railways and that he did not and was not obliged to know Czech. Other passengers now joined in the discussion: one informed the conductor that he knew that Jireš, as the Chotyně schoolteacher, spoke German fluently, while another proceeded to interpret into Czech. Jireš rejected those services, for the *ad hoc* interpreter was 'neither an employee of the Saxon railway nor employed to carry out the duties of an interpreter'. Spurred on by the negative attitude towards Jireš that prevailed in the carriage, the conductor sought the help of two more train staff, one of whom, according to Jireš's testimony, 'shouted the words "Fahrkarten, bitte!" at me in that Saxon German of his'. The staff were later identified as three German citizens resident in Zittau.[347] When Jireš declined to produce his ticket again, the decision was made to eject him from the train at the following station.

Jireš maintained that following this altercation, he sat quietly in his seat reading the newsletter of the Czech nationalist gymnastics organization *Sokol*, of which he was a prominent member.[348] He alleged that he was violently pulled from his seat after the train had stopped at Bílý Kostel station. The head conductor shouted 'Out with him!', grabbed him and attempted to pull him out of the train. A lengthy struggle ensued, during which Jireš grabbed hold of seats and the door frame as he was dragged onto the platform by the three train staff; he found himself covered in bruises and with a dislocated finger from the treatment of the 'savages'. The jeering crowd on the train threw his belongings through the window as the train pulled out of the station with an eight-minute delay. Supported by a fellow passenger, a schoolgirl with the unlikely (if apt) name of Božena Němcová, and another Czech witness, Jireš went to report the case to the stationmaster at Bílý Kostel – 'in German, so I could be properly understood'. He then travelled on to his hometown on the next train, where the matter was

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[347] NA, 813, Carton 9, no. 1546. Letter by the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Railways, 9 July 1929.

[348] For a history of the origins of the *Sokol*, see Claire E. Nolte, *The Sokol in the Czech Lands to 1914: Training for the Nation* (Basingstoke, 2002).

reported to the police and a doctor issued a confirmation that he had suffered severe bodily

harm.

The incident illustrates the bitterness of the national conflict in Czechoslovakia. This is

despite the fact that by the late 1920s the previously strict rejection of the Czechoslovak state

by many Sudeten German politicians had softened. In 1926, two German parties – the

Farmers' Union (*Bund der Landwirte*) and German Christian Social People's Party (*Deutsche

Christlich-Soziale Volkspartei*) – had joined the government coalition. In 1929, the German

Social Democrats joined, as well.[349] However, the calming of Czech-German relations only

partially affected the border area, where the national atmosphere continued to be charged

and symbols were eagerly guarded. The linguistically mixed area along the Bohemian Lands'

northern, western and southern border had been the locus of the national conflict between

Germans and Czechs since the second half of the nineteenth century. As the historian Mark

Cornwall has written, 'it was here', on the so-called language border, 'where the Czechs and

the Germans rubbed against each other, that sparks could most easily fly and extremist politics

planted deep roots. Local frictions then had a wider impact.'[350]

The existence of a linguistic frontier within the Bohemian Lands was asserted from at

least 1880, when the first Austrian census was taken that featured language as a category. The

census results were invoked by demographers on both sides of the national divide, such as the

Austrian Heinrich Rauchberg (1860–1938) and the Czech Antonín Boháč, who had been a

member of Viktor Dvorský's ethnographic subcommittee at the Paris Peace Conference. They

published treatises that not only analysed the census results, but argued for ways in which the

territorial position of their respective national groups could be defended and expanded. A

spate of organizations was founded with the same goal. The most aggressive of these was the

Bund der Deutschen in Böhmen (Union of Germans in Bohemia, founded in 1894) and four

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[349] Hoensch, *Geschichte*, pp. 54–64.
[350] Cornwall, The Struggle, p. 916.

Národní jednoty (National unions) covering all parts of the borderlands.[351] After the foundation

of Czechoslovakia the Czech groups were in the ascendancy, aggressively pursuing the cultural

and economic support of Czechs in the border regions. None the less, both Germans and

Czechs in the area considered themselves to be in a defensive position *vis-à-vis* the other.

German nationalists felt stranded in a foreign state and zealously guarded their *nationalen*

Besitzstand – their 'national assets', which was often equated with territory along the language

border – against any encroaching Czechization.[352] Czechs, on the other hand, aimed to return

the, as they called them, Germanized (*zněmčené*) border regions to the Czech nation. They

were opposed by a hostile German population that in their eyes still wielded political power

despite the liberation of the country from Austrian rule.

The National Unions maintained an ambivalent relationship with the Czechoslovak

government and with Czechs from the country's interior. Although the Czechoslovak

authorities supported them when it suited their interests, Czech borderland nationalists often

expressed frustration at being abandoned in their fight to assert the primacy of the Czech

nation in a territory they considered theirs by historic right. The republic, a nationalist

periodical complained already in 1922, is 'a neither loving nor considerate mother' to the

borderland Czechs.[353] At a conference organized by the National Unions in Prague in the same

year, they bitterly complained to ministerial representatives 'about the insufficient state

support provided for winning back "Germanized areas"'.[354] The historian Jaroslav Kučera has

argued that 'the notion of reducing the German *nationalen Besitzstand* was not alien [to Czech

politics], but it was evidently not prepared to use the state explicitly for the ends of national

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[351] The *Národní jednota severočeská* (1885) covered northern Bohemia, the *Národní jednota pošumavská* (1884) its southern half, the *Národní jednota pro jihozápadní Moravu* (1886) south-western Moravia and the *Národní jednota pro východní Moravu* (1885) eastern Moravia. See Cornwall, The Struggle, p. 919.

[352] *Der nationale Besitzstand in Böhmen* was the title of Rauchberg's book on the demographics of Bohemia (3 vols, Leipzig 1905).

[353] *Naše menšiny*, 2 (1922), p. 83; quoted in Jaroslav Kučera, *Minderheit im Nationalstaat: Die Sprachenfrage in tschechisch-deutschen Beziehungen 1918–1938* (Munich, 1999), p. 248. See also Albrecht, p. 108.

[354] Cornwall, The Struggle, pp. 929–30.

expansion'.[355] Faced with, in their view, official indifference to their demands, many Czech nationalists on the language border even after 1918 adopted a siege mentality. This is illustrated by the name they came to be known by, *hraničáři* (border guards).

The Chotyně schoolteacher Josef Jireš (see Figure 7) was very much part of this Czech nationalist scene on the language frontier. Born in Chomutice (Groß-Chomutitz) in Eastern Bohemia on 4 March 1896, he had arrived in Chotyně as the first teacher at the newly-opened Czech-language school on 15 September 1919.[356] The school was an unsubtle measure of Czechization, since the town was almost entirely German-speaking. The school's chronicle reports that Jireš had to spend the first half of the school year giving basic Czech language instruction to his pupils before any other topics could be covered.[357] The municipality only received a Czech name ('Chotyň') in 1919 by decree from Prague. Czechs had only known it by variations of its German name of Ketten (such as 'Ketyň') before and the final name was only settled in 1923.[358] Championing the Czech cause in the town, then, was no mean feat. None the less, the beginnings were promising: Jireš was welcomed at the railway station upon his arrival not only by 'practically all members of the Czech minority', but also by eighty children and their parents, most of whom spoke only German. He was district head of the *Sokol* and as headteacher he did his best to convert his pupils to Czech patriotism, organizing evenings of poetry and song on national holidays such as 28 October (the day the republic was founded) and on Tomáš G. Masaryk's birthday.[359] He also gave Czech lessons to members of the Czech

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[355] Kučera, *Minderheit im Nationalstaat*, p. 249.

[356] On Jireš's biography, see Josef Juna and Josef Nesvadba, *...a přece zvítězili: Památník obětem boje za svobodu ze sokolské župy Ještědské. K odhalení pamětní desky a vložení prsti dne 27. října 1946 v Turnově* (Turnov, 1946), p. 13; and 'Náš medailonek: Josef Jireš', *Česká beseda v Liberci*, 37 (January 1985), 6–8. I am grateful to Petr Kolín at the Regional Archives in Liberec for sending me these articles.

[357] František Vydra, 'Z chotyňské školní kroniky', *Bulletin Společnosti přátel historie města Chrastavy*, 152 (September 2007) <http://www.chrastava.cz/muzeum/cesky/bull152.htm>. See also '90 let české školy v Chotyně', *Chotyňáček*, September 2009, p. 1. Available online at <http://www.mschotyne.cz/archiv/prilohy/m_clanek/64-27-09--gapxvf.pdf> [both accessed 20 August 2015].

[358] Vydra.

[359] He is identified as the *náčelník* of the *Sokol* branch in Hrádek nad Nisou in a letter from the *Sokol* branch in Hořice to the Ministry of Railways of 5 August 1929 (in NA, 813, Carton 9, no. 1546).

minority in Zittau and neighbouring Pethau, for which he was awarded a certificate of merit by the Czechoslovak General Consulate in Dresden.[360] Jireš worked in Chotyně until 1936, when he was transferred to a school in Liberec. His engagement for Czech nationalism had a tragic outcome. Like many Czech national activists, he fled across the new border into inner Bohemia after the town was occupied by German troops in October 1938 along with the rest of the Sudetenland. He joined the resistance movement, but was arrested in November 1941 and deported to Auschwitz, where he was murdered in April 1942. A post-war *Sokol* publication commented that 'in him the nation lost a loyal son, an uncompromising champion of the oppressed, and a courageous guardian of our borderland'.[361]

The Czech nationalist community in the area identified with Jireš and quickly rallied in his support after the incident on the train. The affair hit a nerve among the local Czechs, who, as so often, cast themselves into the role of an embattled minority. In their eyes, Jireš had defended the achievements of the republic in a hostile environment. He was thus portrayed as a hero in the daily struggle against German intransigence. Letters in support of Jireš arrived at the Ministry of Railways, including one by a delegation of Czech teachers in northern Bohemia.[362] The local *Sokol* branch in Hořice (Horschitz) in north-eastern Bohemia sent a note calling upon Minister of Railways Josef Najman (1882–1937) to use his influence 'in order to thoroughly investigate this case of boundless hatred against the Czechs, so that the culprits may be called to account'.[363] On 15 June 1929 a meeting called by the *Národní jednota severočeská* (North Bohemian National Union) was held in Hrádek nad Nisou (Grottau). A broad range of the Czech political spectrum was represented, including the Social Democrats, the National Socialists, the National Democrats, the *Sokol* and the Legionaries' organization. They issued a joint memorandum condemning the conductors' behaviour:

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[360] Juna/Nesvadba.

[361] Ibid.

[362] NA, 813, Carton 9, no. 1546: 'Návrh odpovědi pro pana ministra', 26 June 1929.

[363] NA, 813, Carton 9, no. 1546: Letter of the *Sokol* chapter in Hořice to the Ministry of Railways, 5 August 1929.

We have become used and callous to German outrages of all kinds in the Germanized

territory. But when a Czech is dragged out of a train only because he does not want to

speak German, and by a foreigner to boot, all bounds of tolerance for a Czech citizen of

the nation-state are exceeded. Therefore we call upon the authorities to put a stop to the

insolent, provocative and violent behaviour of these troublesome foreigners. This should

have been done a long time ago. If foreigners do not care to respect our laws and enjoy

the hospitality of our republic, they should be taken where they belong – beyond the

borders of our state!

The xenophobia of the memorandum's authors did not only target *Reich* Germans. Bohemian

Germans were depicted as disloyal despite having been given every opportunity to prosper in

the state: 'the Czechoslovak nation-state generously awarded the right to the Germans to use

a minority language in all state and local offices in qualifying districts. But neither the state nor

the nation has seen any gratitude!' The text closed with an open threat of revolt to the

government. If the 'boundless indignation' of the Czech public was not placated, it warned, the

'outraged' populace would enforce their own solution.[364] The aggressiveness of the National

Unions was on full display here, but also the ambivalent relationship with the government is

evident. The guardians of the borderland felt abandoned by what they saw as their nation-

state, and thus threatened to take the law into their own hands.

Czech Provocation or German Hatred? The Jireš Affair in the Press and the Parliament

Although the National Unions regularly complained about the indifference towards their cause

of Czechs living further from the border, the national conflict in the borderlands certainly had a

wider impact; it set the tone for the discourse in the country as a whole. The Jireš story was

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[364] NA, 813, Carton 9, no. 1546: Memorandum of the meeting of 15 June 1929 called by *Národní jednota severočeská*, n.d.

quickly picked up by the press, both local and national. German and Czech newspapers reported on the incident with remarkably few factual differences considering they came to diametrically opposed conclusions. The *Reichenberger Zeitung* (Reichenberg newspaper) highlighted the politeness of the conductors on the *Reichsbahn* and the fact that Jireš knew German. The paper argues that his denial of this fact was not only an unnecessary lie, but a deliberate 'provocation of a Czech teacher in the German linguistic area'. In view of Jireš's behaviour, it presented his ejection from the train as the only possible solution of the conflict. 'The matter will be brought to the attention of the Ministry of Education, so that it may instruct the "honourable head teacher" how to behave as an educator of youth.'[365]

For the Czech press, by contrast, the outrage lay in the fact that the conductor had not spoken Czech. *Národní listy* presented it as a matter of course that Czech should be spoken in trains in Czechoslovakia; accordingly, Jireš was portrayed as an upstanding citizen for insisting on his right. 'Apparently peculiar conditions prevail on the *Reichsbahn* railway line Liberec–Žitava. The cheek of the German railway staff on the soil of our republic is undoubtedly characteristic.'[366] *České slovo* (The Czech word), the organ of the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, was even more sensationalist and ran the headline 'Czech headteacher thrown out of train and assaulted by German railway employees'. The article pandered to fears of German revisionism and disloyalty, alleging that the conductor on the train had 'the voice of a pre-revolution [Austrian] sergeant'.[367] *Večerní list* (Evening paper) featured a similar story and added that 'the German press of northern Bohemia approves of the criminal behaviour [*jednání gaunerů*] and has labelled Jireš a provocateur'.[368] Both sides saw Jireš's case as indicative of a broader attempt by the other national group to deprive them of their natural rights: for the Germans, the right to speak German in the 'German linguistic area'; for the

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[365] 'Die Provokation eines tschechischen Lehrers im deutschen Sprachgebiete', *Reichenberger Zeitung*, 8 June 1929, p. 2.
[366] 'Podivné poměry na říšskoněmecké dráze Liberec–Žitava', *Národní listy*, 15 June 1929, p. 2.
[367] 'Český řídící učitel vyhozen z vlaku a ztýrán německými zřízenci', *České slovo*, 13 June 1929, p. 4.
[368] 'Němci vyhodili z vlaku českého říd. učitele a těžce ho zranili', *Večerní list*, 13 June 1929, p. 2.

Czechs, the right to speak Czech in the Czechoslovak nation-state. The affair also demonstrates the mutually exclusive concepts of space held by the two sides. Jireš considered himself to be travelling on Czechoslovak soil, and speaking Czech on the train became an assertion of national identity. The jeering crowd on Jireš's train, on the other hand, promoted an alternative spatial identity for northern Bohemia. Their local landscape was, first and foremost, a 'German linguistic area' and only then part of the Czechoslovak state.

Given these incompatible views, individual incidents quickly took on a symbolic significance that belied their banality. The German railway staff on the line had been antagonized by Jireš's behaviour and the situation was exacerbated by another incident recorded on 10 June. Accompanied by his wife, the local postmaster and another teacher from his school, Jireš was travelling on a local train from Hrádek nad Nisou to Chotyně when the original incident repeated itself. Asked by the conductor Karl Staretz for his ticket in German, Jireš refused and demanded to be addressed in Czech. Staretz then lost his temper and reportedly shouted at Jireš that 'you won't travel on this train anymore. This was the last time. You speak German very well!' Jireš alleged that he had seen Staretz plotting against him with the station dispatcher before the train's departure, and that he was the only person on the train subjected to a ticket control. In the words of the policeman on duty: 'It appears that the behaviour of the conductor towards Jireš was deliberate. Undoubtedly Staretz intended to repeat the scene [of 5 June].' The police noted that 'leading members of a number of political parties' would be informed of the matter so they could 'intervene through the appropriate channels'.[369]

After this second outrage, the matter reached parliament on 13 June 1929. In an urgent interpellation submitted to the lower house, twenty-two deputies decried the 'harassment' of Jireš, arguing that it illustrated the widespread 'national intolerance of the Germans in Czechoslovakia'. Twenty-one signatories of the interpellation were members of

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[369] NA, 813, Carton 9, no. 1546: Police report, 'Co se děje na saské dráze, Liberec–Žitava', 14 June 1929.

the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, one belonged to the conservative People's Party

fraction. The text reproduced Jireš's testimony nearly verbatim. In addition to his case, it

deplored the German nationalism on display at Hrádek nad Nisou station (which, like all

stations on the line, was also run by the *Reichsbahn*). It alleged that the local stationmaster

had recently barred the waitress of the station restaurant from using Czech when advertising

refreshments to passengers, and that he had replaced the bilingual signage with signs in

German only. It closed with the query whether Prime Minister František Udržal (1866–1938)

was 'aware of these conditions, and what he intends to do to put a stop to the brutal

behaviour and intolerance of the Germans in our state'.[370] The national symbolism of language

use on trains meant that, in little more than a week, the case had gone from a local railway

station in northern Bohemia to parliament.

To some extent, the interpellation had the effect the National Unions desired, since it

sent the government scrambling to respond appropriately to the query and thus raised

awareness of the borderland Czechs' plight. The Ministry of Railways sent two officials to the

line between Liberec and Zittau in order to prepare a report on the linguistic situation. It was

ascertained that all signage on trains was only in German and that 'generally the employees in

all trains speak only German, for most of them do not know any Czech'. However, the

ministerial officials found that, when faced with a query in Czech, the employees did their best

to answer in the same language. Indeed, 'none of the employees the ministerial representative

came into contact with behaved outside the bounds of decency'.

The report was more critical with regard to the situation in the station at Hrádek nad

Nisou, where the 'flaws are indeed the most flagrant and convey the impression that they

were created systematically'. With the exception of one bilingual sign and some Czechoslovak

timetables in inconspicuous places, all signs and reading material on display in the station were

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[370] NA, 813, Carton 9, no. 1546: 'Naléhavá interpelace posl. Jos. Davida, Frant. Buřívala, L. Pechmannové, Chvojky a druhů předsedovi vlády o národní nesnášenlivosti Němců v ČSR a ztýrání řídícího učitele Josefa Jireše z Chotyně zaměstnanci saské dráhy', 13 June 1929.

reported to be in German. A number of posters that showed German landscapes and were inscribed 'Deutschland' and 'An den Rhein' advertised Germany as a tourist destination. The report confirmed that the Czech name 'Žitava' on the sign that pointed passengers towards the trains to Germany had been deleted with white paint. The report characterized stationmaster Alexander Haase as a 'staunch German'. Haase was a *Reich* German citizen, like many other workers on the line. He readily admitted that he had prohibited the waitress of the station restaurant from using Czech when advertising refreshments on the platform, citing the irritation of German passengers as justification. Similarly, Czech posters and signage in the station were avoided, he said, so as not to provoke the local German population. The local police chief asserted that Haase had made his station into 'a centre of the anti-Czech activities of German nationalists'.[371] A police report that had been submitted in May 1929 additionally indicated that – while local Germans might well have complained about the use of Czech at the station – Czechs had repeatedly protested the fact that only German was used in the station restaurant.[372] Haase had previously come to the attention of the authorities only two weeks before the Jireš incident, when a police report alleged that he was using his position to spread German propaganda. It was reported that Hans Hartl (1858–1939), a Czechoslovak MP for the German National Party, often stopped by Haase's office on his frequent trips to Germany while passport controls were being conducted on the train. In addition, the report stated that Haase was a member of several nationalist organizations and organized weekly meetings with local nationalists in a separate room of the station restaurant. When challenged about the event by the ministry officials, he provided the dubious explanation that he was meeting friends to play cards. Thus, the stationmaster was portrayed as disloyal and as having transformed his station into a den of German nationalist and subversive activity.

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[371] NA, 813, Carton 9, no. 1546: Ministry of Railways report, 'Zpráva o poměrech na dráze Liberec–Žitava', 1 July 1929.

[372] NA, 813, Carton 9, no. 1546: Police report, 'Müller Karel, hostinský z Hrádku n./N., závady při provozování hostinské živnosti v nádražní restauraci', 24 May 1929.

The problems on the Liberec–Zittau line were not unique. The line between Bohemian

Cheb and Bavarian Oberkotzau was also operated by the *Reichsbahn* and was the scene of

frequent similar conflicts between Czechs and German railway workers. In July 1925, for

instance, a German railway official at Cheb station was charged with insulting the Czech

language. A station dispatcher admitted at an inquiry held by the Ministry of Railways that

when presented with a document in Czech, he had wondered aloud 'who is supposed to

understand this vile Chinese?!'. The press commented that 'the insolence [of the Germans] is

boundless', though the official was relieved of duty after a Czechoslovak complaint.[373] But little

had changed by October 1927, when two Czech railway workers were insulted by the

Reichsbahn conductor for trying to purchase a ticket in Czech. Decrying this 'unheard-of

German provocation', the Czech press asked indignantly if 'a passenger of Czech nationality

may use his state language when communicating with German railway offices that lie on the

soil of our state without fear of being insulted?'.[374]

The Jireš incident thus also indicates the state of German-Czechoslovak relations and

the role of the *Reichsbahn* in Czechoslovakia. Judging by these reports, the German company

had little interest in sending its employees to Czech classes even if they spent most of their

working day across the border. The Czechoslovak authorities repeatedly protested against the

'linguistic flaws' on the line, including signs that were in German only and monolingual train

attendants. Rather than give in, the *Reichsbahn* launched a formal protest against the

repeated demands of the Czechoslovak railway ministry. The ministry was not deterred and

took Jireš's side. In the draft reply to the parliamentary interpellation prepared on 26 June

1929, railway minister Jan Říha (1875–1962) declared that if the case had actually occurred in

the way it was reported, then 'the Reich German conductors' behaviour was unduly arrogant,

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[373] NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 2: Letter by the Plzeň Directorate of State Railways to the Press Department of the Ministry of Railways, 10 August 1925. In the same collection, see V. H., 'Soustavné urážení československého národa bavorskými úředníky na chebském nádraží', *Český směr*, 15 July 1925.

[374] 'Kdy se už vyřeší otázka bavorských drah na Chebsku?', *Český deník*, 21 October 1927, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 3.

provocative and criminal'. In addition to reporting its intervention with the *Reichsbahn*

towards the punishment of the persons involved, the Ministry also promised it would seek to

expedite the purchase of the of the section of the Liberec–Zittau line that lay in

Czechoslovakia.[375] The line's operation by the *Reichsbahn* facilitated an alternative spatial

identity for northern Bohemia that was clearly a thorn in the ministry's side. However, it could

not do much more than protest, and in the end, the affair fizzled out unspectacularly. No reply

to the interpellation was ever formally submitted to parliament, since the National Assembly

was dissolved on 27 June in preparation for early elections, which took place on 27 October.

The trains between Liberec and Zittau continued to be run by the *Reichsbahn*. Despite the

public pressure, the line was only transferred to the Czechoslovak State Railways after the

Second World War (as was the route between Cheb and Oberkotzau).

The Jireš affair created much indignation both on the Czech and the German side of

the national conflict and was a matter of intense discussion over a few weeks in the summer of

1929. However, it had few tangible consequences. In retrospect, the story might seem like an

insignificant local spat in a national conflict that lasted for decades and was brought to a

violent conclusion in the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the post-war expulsion of the

Germans from Czechoslovakia. There are several reasons why it is nevertheless central to

understanding the role of the railways in inter-war Czechoslovakia. For one, it offers a

microhistory of the Czech-German national conflict in the border area. It illustrates the

mentality that characterized the interaction between the republic's nationalities and turned

them into a spearhead of the situation in the country as a whole. In retrospect, it is difficult to

disagree with Catherine Albrecht when she dismisses the 'petty behaviour' of the National

Unions and, by extension, all national activists on the language frontier.[376] Of course, Jireš

could have spoken German, a language he conceded he was fluent in, and avoided the entire

incident. Equally, the German conductors could have defused the situation had they exhibited

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[375] NA, 813, Carton 9, no. 1546: 'Návrh odpovědi pro pana ministra', 26 June 1929.
[376] Albrecht, p. 93.

a more moderate behaviour. And even after the fact, the press and public could have

dismissed the incident as a hardly newsworthy triviality about a railway ticket. However, this

would miss the point. It was precisely the conflict's pettiness, and the stubbornness with which

both sides insisted on what they considered their right, which characterized the national

conflict and precluded a compromise. The self-portrayal of both sides as being on the

defensive *vis-à-vis* the other allowed them to justify such behaviour. The article in *České slovo*

quoted previously warned that 'German audacity is growing from day to day' and forecasted

ominously that 'soon we will be afraid to speak Czech'.[377] Czech nationalists therefore

contributed to creating a discourse of fear, in which the defence of national interests became

paramount for the survival of the republic. Jireš's justification that he was merely 'defending

the rights of Czechs in Czechoslovakia' becomes more plausible in this context.[378] This

discourse was extreme and did not represent the interactions between Czechoslovaks and the

minorities in general. However, the reactions of the press and parliament indicate that the

population was generally receptive to such rhetoric, and that therefore the national conflict in

the border areas did indeed have an impact on the country as a whole.

The Conflict over Language Use on Trains

The Jireš affair was not an isolated case. Conflicts about language on the railway were a

common occurrence, especially in the early days of the republic until the late 1920s. In June

1924, the Ministry of Railways introduced a 'Press Department' (*Tiskový referát*), which

collected news clippings with a bearing on its work.[379] As the articles collected the department

demonstrate, the German, Czech and Slovak press published a vast number of articles that

dealt with linguistic grievances. In the following section, I will give an overview of the recurring

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[377] 'Český řídící učitel vyhozen z vlaku a ztýrán německými zřízenci', *České slovo*, 13 June 1929, p. 4.
[378] NA, 813, Carton 9, no. 1546.
[379] See the introduction to M. Kunt, *Ministerstvo železnic – Tiskový referát 1924 – 1942: Sdružený a skupinový inventář (část) 1924 – 1942* (Prague, 1997) at the National Archives in Prague, available online at <http://badatelna.eu/fond/1867/> [accessed 20 August 2015].

themes that characterized this discourse. This analysis of the press representation of the national conflict on trains will not only put the Jireš affair in perspective, but also substantiate the point that the railways unwittingly took on the role as one of the most important locations of the national conflict. None the less, it is important to note that presumably, inter-ethnic encounters on trains passed off without conflict in the vast majority of cases and left no historical traces. Stanislav Kostka Neumann's (1875–1947) travel account to Carpathian Ruthenia provides an example of such encounters arousing, if anything, irritated bemusement (aside from indicating his tendency to virulent antisemitism). While travelling to Rachov on a Saturday, Neumann's carriage was subjected to 'a flood of raucous men, whose noisy Yiddish chatter filled the whole train'. When they started singing and clapping, Neumann was convinced that 'this is the way they would welcome their Messiah today'.[380] In a multi-ethnic country like inter-war Czechoslovakia, trans-national encounters like these were unavoidable on trains, but most did not lead to open conflict.

Judging by the press coverage, however, there were still many that did. The German media used complaints of German railway passengers to illustrate the official oppression they considered themselves subjected to throughout the 1920s. For instance, the papers reported on a passenger in Česká Lípa (Böhmisch Leipa) confused by the Czech signage, who was directed to the wrong train by the conductor and then fined double for not having the right ticket and not speaking Czech.[381] In the same town, the waiter in the station restaurant rudely ignored his German-speaking guests, who were then asked to identify themselves by Czech railway officials.[382] On a train between Česká Lípa and Filipov (Filippsdorf), a passenger was insulted and shouted at for not showing his ticket in time, which he interpreted as an act of chauvinism by Czech conductors – 'most of whom are employed only for being Czech and not

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[380] Stanislav K. Neumann, *Enciány s Popa Ivana: Letní dojmy z Rachovska* (Prague, 1933), pp. 100–01.
[381] 'Die Folgen der tschechischen Zugsaufschriften [sic]', *Deutsche Leipaer Zeitung*, 27 March 1925, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 2.
[382] 'Was einem auf der Staatsbahn in einer deutschen Stadt passieren kann', *Deutsche Presse Prag*, 29 April 1925, in ibid.

for their qualifications, and aspire to reach an extraordinary level of rudeness, national

provocation and arrogance'.[383] At Hradec Králové station in 1925, a passenger was first ignored

by the ticket clerk and then treated to a barrage of insults, including 'damned German'.[384] In

Prague, a Swiss man was assaulted by a porter after he had asked for information in

German.[385] The signs on the new trains between Karlovy Vary and Jáchymov (Joachimstal)

were in Czech only, 'a lack of consideration towards the population and the non-Czech spa

guests that probably has no equal anywhere in the world'.[386]

This small selection of reports illustrates that the grievance most often voiced by

German newspapers was the perceived linguistic discrimination in the so-called German

linguistic area.[387] The national conflict affected most, if not all, railway lines in the borderland.

The express train service between Cheb and Liberec was especially often the object of anger. It

led in a long curve along the border of the country from the very west of Bohemia to the

north-east and was perceived by German representatives to lie entirely within monolingual

German territory. Indeed, the railway historian Ivan Jakubec has suggested that 'ethnic

divisions' were a factor in the routing of the line during the Habsburg Monarchy.[388] In a long

article in August 1925, the German party organ *Sozialdemokrat* praised the connection as 'very

practical and good', allowing travel between the two cities in seven hours and furthermore

connecting 'the most important German towns Eger, Falkenau, Karlsbad, Komotau, Brüx, Dux,

Teplitz, Aussig, Bodenbach, Bensen, Böhm.-Leipa, Reichenberg'.[389] Almost incidentally, the

author provided his readers with a partial geography of so-called German Bohemia, the ethno-

geographic construct promoted by nationalist scholars such as Rauchberg. The article alleged

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[383] 'Da ham me schun vill gemocht', *Rumburger Zeitung*, 12 July 1925, in ibid.

[384] 'Ein Staatsbürger zweiter Klasse', *Nordböhmisches Tagblatt*, 12 September 1925, in ibid.

[385] 'Erlebnis eines Schweizers am Prager Wilsonbahnhof', *Deutsche Presse Prag*, 12 January 1927, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 3.

[386] 'Der Chauvinismus der Eisenbahnverwaltung', *Bohemia*, 27 May 1928, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 4.

[387] This is also noted by Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, p. 306.

[388] Jakubec, Integration or Decentralization, p. 187. He does not, however, offer a source for this claim.

[389] 'Kultur des Dr. Kramař [sic]', *Sozialdemokrat*, 25 August 1925, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 2. The Czech names of the towns on the line were Falknov nad Ohří (renamed Sokolov in 1948), Karlovy Vary, Chomutov, Most, Duchcov, Teplice, Ústí nad Labem, Podmokly, Benešov nad Ploučnicí and Česká Lípa.

that carriages of lower quality than in Czech areas were used on the line, but the thrust of its

argument targeted linguistic Czechization allegedly carried out by ČSD staff.

> Every German word, every German sign on this train, which only runs in the German area,
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> has been removed. […] All inscriptions on the inside of the carriages, every German word,
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> has been rendered illegible; and this was not an effortless affair in the case of those on the
>
> radiators and the emergency brake, which had had the German inscription moulded in.
>
> The bilingual signs inside the carriages have either been replaced by monolingual Czech
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> ones or *white paper has been pasted over the German text*.[390]

The Directorate of State Railways Prague-North, under whose remit the Cheb–Liberec line fell,

rejected the *Sozialdemokrat*'s criticism. It reported that the carriages used on the line looked

'decent' and that by displaying all signs in Czech only it was merely following the ministry's

guidelines.[391] The *Sozialdemokrat* further reported that one passenger had written 'This is the

culture of Dr Kramař [sic]!' on one of these pieces of paper, referring to the Czech nationalist

politician who was Czechoslovakia's first prime minister until July 1919. The newspaper

suggested that the graffiti should rather read 'This is Czech culture', or even 'This is also Czech

socialist culture', 'for the railway minister under whose leadership all this […] is happening,

calls himself a Czech socialist'. Acting railway minister at this time was the sober railway

engineer Emil Franke (1880–1939), who had replaced the more colourful politician Jiří Stříbrný

(1880–1955) a month earlier. Stříbrný, one of the 'men of 28 October', had been forced to

resign over a bribery scandal that involved his ministry buying overpriced coal from a mine

owned by his brother. At the time, both Stříbrný and Franke were members of the National

Socialist Party, although Stříbrný was expelled in 1926 and became infamous in the late 1920s

as a fascist and co-founder with Radola Gajda (1892–1948) of the *Národní liga* (National

league).[392]

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[390] Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

[391] NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 2: Letter of the Directorate of State Railways Prague-North to the Ministry of
    Railways, 28 August 1925.

[392] Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, pp. 113–19.

The paper's comments illustrate that for the *Sozialdemokrat*, national unity took precedence over class unity. Indeed, the newspaper compared the situation in the late Habsburg Empire favourably with that of the republic. Then, it asserted, such a wholesale removal of a language from the landscape would not have occurred. 'In all of Bohemia bilingualism was mandatory and realized, and tickets were in German and Czech. Nothing is left of it now in the German areas but a sign in German on one side of the station buildings.'[393] The article in the *Sozialdemokrat* was not the only sign of German left-wing opposition to the Czechoslovak railway policy: often social democrats were as scathing in their critique of what they saw as state-sanctioned repression of the Germans as conservative voices.[394] This is perhaps not surprising, considering the fact that politics in inter-war Czechoslovakia were organized strictly along national lines (the Communist Party was the only party that crossed ethnic boundaries). None the less, the fact that a Social Democratic newspaper expressed nostalgia for the monarchy in a republic governed by a socialist party indicates that the national conflict in inter-war Czechoslovakia was strong enough to drown out most other political discussions.

In addition to these grievances of linguistic symbolism, German media reported on what they regarded as the mass transferral of ethnic Czech railway officials to the borderland. Under the headline 'The Czechization of the railways', the *Sudetendeutsche Tageszeitung* (Sudeten German daily) reported in May 1925 that 'the number of Czech state railway employees in the German linguistic area is rising every day', alleging that many refused to communicate in German with passengers.[395] The press repeatedly voiced suspicions that the dwindling number of German-speaking railway employees was a sustained policy in violation of their minority rights. A report in December 1925 alleged that the State Railway Directorate Prague-South deliberately sought out slanderous information about German and Magyar

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[393] 'Kultur des Dr. Kramař [sic]', *Sozialdemokrat*, 25 August 1925, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 2.
[394] Van Duin, pp. 342–43.
[395] 'Die Tschechisierung der Eisenbahnen', *Sudetendeutsche Tageszeitung*, 24 May 1925, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 2.

employees from their neighbours and acquaintances in order to justify their dismissal.[396] The

grievances of the German railwaymen were encapsulated in the demands made at a

conference of the *Verein deutscher Eisenbahnbeamten* (Association of German Railway

Employees) in June 1929. Gustav Peters (1885–1959), an MP for the *Deutsche Arbeits- und

Wahlgemeinschaft* (German Labour and Voting Union), gave the address. He had co-founded

the party a year earlier as a more moderate counterweight to German National Party, which,

however, did not stop it from being incorporated into Konrad Henlein's *Sudetendeutsche

Partei* (Sudeten German Party) in 1935. Peters was predictably critical of the state's policies:

'What we have at the moment is the eradication of the German element among civil servants.

German candidates are not hired. Under no circumstances can we accept this treatment of the

German element any longer.' The association passed a resolution that called for improving the

situation of those who had lost their jobs, repealing the consequences of the language

examinations, the re-deployment of German railwaymen who had been transferred away from

the interior of the country, and the use of national proportionality in the hiring process. It

demanded, in short, 'the elimination of the injustice suffered by the German railway workers

since the revolution'.[397] The view that the German-speaking borderlands were 'flooded' with

Czech bureaucrats was widespread even among the German parties that had joined the

government and among some Czech politicians. A parliamentary interpellation submitted by

the Czech social democrat Josef Kříž in November 1923, for instance, deplored the social

impact of transferring Czech railwaymen to German areas and *vice versa*, often at very short

notice.[398] Hence, there certainly were numerous instances of transfers and unwittingly or not,

Czech railway workers in the German-speaking borderlands became representatives of the

nation-state and champions of Czechoslovak space. But as Jaroslav Kučera has demonstrated,

[396] 'Die Entfernung der deutschen Beamten bei der Staatsbahndirektion Prag-Süd', in *Reichenberger Zeitung*, 27 October 1925, in ibid.

[397] 'Das Recht auf deutsche Staatsbeamte', in *Bohemia*, 17 June 1930, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 6.

[398] 'Naléhavá interpelace poslance Josefa Kříže a soudruhů ministru železnic o přesazování železničních zaměstnanců z důvodů národnostních', Print 4329 (28 November 1923), in *Společná česko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna* <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/tisky/t4329_00.htm> [accessed 4 March 2016].

the view that the borderland was being overrun with Czech civil servants was never supported

by statistics, and at the turn of the 1930s, there were still more German civil servants in

German majority regions than Czechs.[399]

The German media's criticism of the linguistic situation on the railways thus had three

main trajectories: the language spoken by conductors, the signage on trains and platforms and

the transferral of railway employees to areas outside of so-called German Bohemia. The

quantity of German and Czech complaints against one another among the articles collected by

the Ministry of Railways was roughly balanced in the 1920s. The three main themes of the

German media were replicated by its Czech counterpart. Throughout the 1920s, the fact that

German speakers continued to be employed as railway workers was the source of considerable

indignation for Czech nationalists. For instance, in February 1925, *České slovo* reported that

two unmarried Germans who spoke no Czech were employed as signalmen on the line

between Podmokly (Bodenbach) and Duchcov (Dux). 'The efforts of the track inspector to have

them replaced with our people were in vain. This is why Czech workers, among them several

legionaries, continue to work on the line for 2.75 crowns an hour, from which they have to

provide for their families and are the object of ridicule for those little protégés [*oněm*

protekčním dětem].'[400] Even in Prague, another paper reported, employees continued to speak

German, 'ostentatiously' and while on duty, which made some Czech colleagues adapt to them

rather than *vice versa*.[401] This was no different in the eastern half of the country. One railway

official lamented in 1919 that 'Slovak railway terminology has not been fully developed yet and

thus many officials continue to use Hungarian, which of course contributes in no way to raising

the self-esteem of our small people [*našich drobných lidí*]'.[402] Even nine years later, in 'ancient

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[399] Kučera, *Minderheit im Nationalstaat*, p. 252.
[400] 'Jak se provádí "počešťování" drah', *České slovo*, 10 February 1925, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 2.
[401] 'Smutné jevy', *Československé železniční listy*, 5 (10 February 1925), in ibid.
[402] Rybák, p. 21.

Slavonic Nitra' (Nyitra, Neutra), some railwaymen who had already served under the

Hungarian authorities continued speaking Hungarian or German both in public and on duty.[403]

Just like in the German press, signage was a major point of concern for the Czech

media. Several Czech and Slovak town names in Czechoslovakia were declared 'untranslatable'

in the early 1920s, with sometimes bizarre consequences. For instance, until reprimanded by

the government, some post offices refused to accept letters addressed to recipients in

'Pressburg' rather than the newly official 'Bratislava'.[404] For *Národní listy*, the fact that bilingual

tickets were sold for trains on the line between Ostrava (Ostrau) and Hulín (Hullein) was

unacceptable considering that those names had also been declared untranslatable. 'Why don't

the authorities display these Austro-imperial [*rakušácké*] ultra-German contortions on the

station buildings of the lines around Ostrava?', the paper asked sarcastically. 'In the seventh

year of the republic this is simply inconsiderate towards the Czech public and towards the

state itself.'[405] The fact that the German versions of 'untranslatable' town names were printed

on tickets was reported again a few months later for the line between Ostrava-Přívoz (Ostrau-

Oderfurt) and Bílá (Bila). 'It is unbelievable negligence, if not malice, that the names of towns

that are untranslatable are translated anyway. It is well-known that no "Oderfurt" exists, there

is only Přívoz', the paper stormed.[406] Czech papers repeatedly objected to bilingual notices and

announcements when they felt that the use of German was not warranted. One paper

reported that a conductor on a train between Brno and Olomouc asked for tickets in Czech and

German. The paper expressed outrage at this 'disgraceful' behaviour by a Czech conductor in a

'purely Czech area'.[407] A clerk from the Press Department placed a large question mark next to

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[403] 'Kam to až spejeme?', *Slovenský železničiar*, 5 (15 February 1928), in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 4.
[404] Peter Bugge, 'The Making of a Slovak City: The Czechoslovak Renaming of
    Pressburg/Pozsony/Prešporok, 1918–19', *Austrian History Yearbook*, 35 (2004), 205–27 (p. 223).
[405] 'Ostrau-Witkowitz–Hullein', *Národní listy*, 14 May 1925, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 2.
[406] 'Jak řeší ředitelství státních drah v Olomouci jazykovou otázku', *Moravsko-slezský deník*, 19 August
    1925, in ibid.
[407] 'Bez vědomí úřadů chtějí zavádět na našich drahách dvojjazyčnost', *Express*, 28 June 1929, in NA, MŽ-
    TR, Carton 5.

the expression 'purely Czech area'. Indeed, both Brno and Olomouc had, of course, large

German-speaking communities.

My discussion has dealt almost exclusively with the Czech-German conflict in the

Bohemian Lands and paid little attention to the relations of Hungarians to Slovaks and Czechs

in Slovakia. This is due to the fact that until the mid-1930s, the Press Department did not

collect articles of the Hungarian-language press. However, judging by parliamentary records,

this neglect seems to have been due to a lack in linguistic expertise in the Ministry rather than

to any difference in discourse. For instance, in 1926 a group of Magyar and German MPs

submitted an interpellation to parliament that criticized the 'Czechization' of station names in

southern Slovakia and demanded they be returned to their original names (something the

railway minister expectably rejected).[408] As late as April 1937 Kálmán Füssy (1878–1939), an

MP for the United Hungarian Party, still lamented that station names in 'purely Magyar towns'

were not also displayed in Hungarian.[409]

Slovak discontent with Czechoslovakism had been brewing and became more vocal

from the late 1920s. Throughout the 1920s, Slovakia saw an influx of Czechs to take on posts

that had been abandoned by Magyars. For instance, the previously Hungarian university in

Bratislava was re-founded in 1919 as the first Slovak institution of tertiary education, but the

large majority of lecturers employed were Czechs.[410] Similarly, the performances of the Slovak

National Theatre (*Slovenské národné divadlo*) were entirely in Czech until 1932.[411] Even in the

republic's early days, the stream of Czechs to Slovakia was not accepted without criticism.

Writing in 1919, the Czech left-wing journalist Vojtěch Lev (1882–1974) alleged that the Czech

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[408] 'Interpelláció a vasutügyi miniszter úrhoz: A község illetve állóná s neveknek a szinmagyar területeken való elcsebesitése illetve eltüntetése tárgyában', Print XI/351 (25 May 1926), in *Společná česko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna* <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/tisky/t0351_03.htm> [accessed 20 August 2015].

[409] 'Auch der Senat vertagt: Verabschiedung des Eisenbahngesetzes am 11. Mai', *Prager Presse*, 30 April 1937, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 78.

[410] Daniel Luther, *Z Prešporka do Bratislavy* (Bratislava, 2009), p. 40.

[411] Milena Cesnaková-Michalcová, *Geschichte des deutschsprachigen Theaters in der Slowakei* (Cologne, 1997), p. 182.

bureaucrats were an obstacle to Czechoslovak unification. 'The large majority of Czech civil

servants in Slovakia behave as if they were in a vanquished country, in a colony, where

everything is allowed and the population has to put up with it.'[412] As an example, he cites the

habit of Czech railway employees, adopted from the Hungarians, of transporting groups of

Slovak workers in military transport carriages instead of normal compartments. While the

Hungarians had at least granted them a discount for their discomfort, the Czechs charged

them the normal ticket price.[413] In view of these conditions, Lev suggested, the Czechs should

not be surprised that 'the majority of Slovaks have no national feeling, do not endorse us and

are indifferent to the words Czech or Czechoslovak Republic'.[414] Immediately after the end of

the First World War, Lev's outright criticism of Czech rule in Slovakia was unusual. Czechs and

most politically active Slovaks accepted the influx of Czechs as a necessity in view of the lack of

a Slovak intelligentsia, despite their often patronizing attitude.[415] However, Lev's clear

distinction between 'us' Czechs and 'them' Slovaks was widespread. As I have discussed above,

Czech railway literature on Slovakia often contrasted the Bohemian 'homeland' with Slovakia,

and even referred to the Bohemian railways as 'maternal tracks'.

In the course of the 1920s, however, rhetoric of this kind combined with the

preponderance of Czechs on the railway in Slovakia increasingly became a source of conflict in

Czecho-Slovak relations. It led to an autonomist reaction spearheaded by Hlinka's Slovak

People's Party. His main aim was the implementation of the demand for Slovak autonomy

within Czechoslovakia made in the Pittsburgh Agreement, which was signed by Masaryk and

representatives of Slovak Americans on 31 May 1918.[416] Autonomist publications close to the

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[412] Vojtěch Lev, *Neznáma* [sic] *pevnina: Epištoly ze Slovenska* (Žilina, 1919), pp. 8–9.

[413] Ibid., p. 29.

[414] Ibid., p. 4.

[415] Ismo Nurmi, *Slovakia – a Playground for Nationalism and National Identity: Manifestations of the National Identity of the Slovaks 1918–1920* (Helsinki, 1999), p. 89.

[416] On the development of Slovak autonomism in the inter-war period, see Bakke; Jan Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století: Spolupráce a konflikty, 1914–1992* (Prague, 2012); Hoensch, Tschechoslowakismus oder Autonomie; Dušan Kováč, 'Die Frage der Loyalität der Slowaken zur Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik', in *Loyalitäten in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik 1918–1938: Politische, nationale und kulturelle Zugehörigkeiten*, ed. by Martin Schulze Wessel (Munich, 2004), pp. 61–68; Carol Skalnik Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia: The Making and*

party repeatedly drew attention to the high proportion of Czechs among railway workers in Slovakia and linguistic concerns that were comparable to the conflict in the Czech-German borderland. Hlinka himself addressed the topic in a 1920 article, when he favourably compared the employment policy of the Kingdom of Hungary with Czechoslovakia:

> Slovaks used to be able to become clerks, field guards, signalmen or postmen. They would have to change their names, but their hearts stayed the same, their hearts remained Slovak. […] Today all stationmasters of the State Railways are Czechs or Czechoslovaks.[417]

Despite Hlinka's perception, Slovak railway workers were actually reputed to be especially ardent supporters of autonomy.[418] Their press displayed a strongly anti-Czech stance. The *Sväz železničiarov na Slovensku* (Union of Railwaymen in Slovakia) routinely reported in its journal on the transferral to Slovakia of any 'Honza', the diminutive of the common Czech name Jan used pejoratively for Czech workers. For instance, on 31 January 1927 the journal drew attention to the transferral of one Josef Šesták from Plzeň (Pilsen) in western Bohemia to Zvolen (Zólyom, Altsohl) in central Slovakia. 'Is wretched Slovakia so poor that they have to import workers to our railway all the way from Plzeň?', the article asked sarcastically.[419] In August 1928, the journal reported that the majority of employees at the Bratislava Directorate of State Railways were Czechs, and even the porter welcomed visitors in Czech. It added that 'at the main railway station [in Bratislava] almost all signs and official notices are in Czech. Is this Prague?! When a foreigner arrives in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, he won't be able to tell immediately that he really is in Slovakia. […] In keeping with the slogan "Slovakia for the Slovaks", we demand that this be addressed!'[420] The union was led by Štefan Surovjak (1892–

Remaking of a State, 1918–1987 (Princeton, 1988); James Ramon Felak, *"At the Price of the Republic": Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, 1929–1938* (Pittsburgh, 1994); and from a Slovak nationalist perspective, Kirschbaum, pp. 155–83.

[417] Quoted in Hoensch, *Dokumente*, p. 141.

[418] Ibid., p. 35.

[419] 'I v tomto páde je úbohé Slovensko zas bohatšie', *Hlas slovenských železničiarov*, 31 January 1927, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 3.

[420] 'Slovenčina a Slováci pri štátnych železniciach v Bratislave', *Hlas slovenských železničiarov*, 1 August 1928, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 4.

1950), a railway official from Žilina and MP for Hlinka's party from 1925 until the destruction of

Czechoslovakia. Surovjak repeatedly intervened with the railway minister to raise the question

of the number of Slovak railway workers in Slovakia, but, if the negative coverage of the *Hlas*

slovenských železničiarov (Voice of Slovak railwaymen) is to be believed, to little avail.[421]

This backlash in the press indicates that the large number of Czech civil servants in

Slovakia increasingly became a political liability for the government. In October 1933, it

proudly announced that of 23,200 railway employees in Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia,

only around 5,000 were Czechs.[422] But the actual proportion of Czechs had not decreased by

much since 1923. The *Hlas slovenských železničiarov* accused the government of window

dressing, arguing that most of the best-paid positions were still in the hands of Czechs. 'Czech

railway employees need to leave Slovakia, for there are now enough qualified Slovaks', the

journal demanded.[423] However, Czechs in high positions were rarely transferred to the

Bohemian Lands and typically only replaced with Slovaks after their retirement. The

Directorates of State Railways in both Bratislava and Košice were only headed by Slovaks from

1936.[424] This was seen as insufficient by the Slovak autonomists and the debates increased in

intensity from the mid-1930s, finding their way onto the pages of the main organ of the Slovak

People's Party, *Slovák*. In May 1937, for instance, the party's senator Andrej Janček described

in a column how he had seen a train in Ružomberok (Rózsahegy, Rosenberg) with the Czech

notice 'Školní mládež' rather than the Slovak 'Školská mládež' (Schoolchildren). 'It is a

provocation, or at the very least tactless, to use Czech signs on carriages for schoolchildren in

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[421] 'Dar pána ministra Neumanna [sic] pod vianočný stromček slovenskému železničiarstvu', *Hlas slovenských železničiarov*, 24 December 1927, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 3. The journalistic integrity of the journal is put into doubt not only by its sensationalist tone, but also by the fact that this article consistently misspelt the name of railway minister Josef Najman as 'Neumann'.

[422] 'Pomer Čechov a Slovákov u železníc na Slovensku', *Slovenský denník*, 15 September 1933, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 16.

[423] 'Pomer Čechov a Slovákov u žel. na Slovensku', *Hlas slovenských železničiarov*, 1 November 1933, in ibid.

[424] 'Slováci v čele slovenských železníc', *Slovenský denník*, 22 July 1936, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 55.

central Slovakia, on a local train', he grumbled.[425] The petty outrage so typical of the Czech-

German conflict had spread to Czech-Slovak relations, as well.

Language use on the railways became a highly significant and eagerly guarded symbol

of language use in the wider public sphere. Even when the newspapers voiced serious

grievances that were investigated by the Ministry of Railways, they were quick to draw

conclusions of official discrimination that, in hindsight, seem disproportionate. The tone used

by Czech, German and Slovak newspapers was one of shrill, self-righteous outrage. Again and

again, the unacceptable linguistic 'conditions' (*poměry* or *Zustände*) on the railways were

bemoaned. In content and in the tone, the articles represented two sides of the same coin,

giving expression to a shared fear: that their national and linguistic rights were being violated

by the respective other. Czechs, Slovaks and Germans felt abandoned by the government.

They thus cast the state into the role of an unwilling arbiter for their cause. For the Czech

newspapers reviewed here, it failed in its essence as a nation-state, while for the German side,

it did not provide the minority protection the Germans felt entitled to. Autonomist Slovaks, in

turn, felt neglected in their rights as a nation separate from the Czechs. In the case of the

Czech-German conflict, this back-and-forth of mutual accusations was to a large part confined

to the border regions, but it was reported on by both the regional and often also the national

press. The national conflict in the borderlands thus had a significant impact on that in the

country as a whole.

Railway Employees and the State

The Czechoslovak state was often caught between radical Czech, Slovak and German demands,

unable and unwilling to satisfy any of them. Rogers Brubaker has identified inter-war

Czechoslovakia as one of the classic cases of a 'triadic relational interplay between national

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[425] Andrej Janček, 'České nápisy na vagónech', *Slovák*, 13 May 1937, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 78.

minorities, nationalizing states, and external national homelands' that defined nationhood in practice.[426] Czechoslovakia was certainly a nationalizing state and afforded the so-called Czechoslovak nation a privileged position. This was most evident in the language law, which had been enacted together with the Constitution in 1920 and declared 'Czechoslovak' the official state language, thus assigning German, Hungarian and other languages the status of minority languages.[427] But due to the large number of national minorities in the country, the state had to walk the tightrope between the role of representing that nation defined on an ethnolinguistic basis, on the one extreme, and that of an impartial arbiter between all inhabitants, on the other. The often negative attitude of the 'external national homeland' of Germany added to the potential for conflict. The Jireš case provides a prime example for this dilemma. After much back-and-forth between various ministerial departments, it was decided that the necessity that Czech be spoken by the employees on all trains in the territory of the country was not due to the language law, but rather to the fact that all train movements in the country were governed by the Ministry's Rules of Operations (*Provozní řád*) in the interest of safety. This is reflected in the formal letter of complaint sent by the Ministry of Railways to the Reich Railways Directorate (*Reichsbahndirektion*) in Dresden. 'If for safety reasons only', the letter reads, 'it is absolutely necessary that all employees and clerks who work on [this] line and come into contact with the public know the state language well enough in order to be able to communicate with the public'.[428] Rather than invoking a natural right of the Czechs to speak their own language in their state, as the National Unions did, the ministry was more reserved. It simply presented the use of Czech as a condition for safe railway operations.

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[426] Brubaker, p. 6.

[427] Regarding the language law, see Kučera, *Minderheit im Nationalstaat*, esp. pp. 36–61; id., 'Koncepce národního státu Čechů a Slováků a jeho realita v životě první republiky', in *Československo 1918–1938: Osudy demokracie ve střední Evropě*, ed. by Jaroslav Valenta, Emil Voráček and Josef Harna (Prague, 1999), pp. 602–10 (p. 604); Andrej Tóth, Lukáš Novotný, and Michal Stehlík, *Národnostní menšiny v Československu 1918–1938: Od státu národního k státu národnostnímu?* (Prague, 2012), pp. 259–87; and Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budování státu*, 4 vols (Prague 1933–36), volume 3, pp. 1542–77.

[428] NA, 813, Carton 9, no. 1546: Letter transcript sent by the Ministry of Railways to the Directorate of the German *Reichsbahn* in Dresden on 20 July 1929, 'Jazykové poměry na trati německých říšských drah Liberec–Žitava'.

The Jireš affair thus illustrates that the state did not occupy a fixed position between the two extremes. As Jaroslav Kučera has argued, 'Czech politics did not have a comprehensive and politically sustainable conception of the place of the minorities in the Czechoslovak nation-state'.[429] While its Czechoslovak identity was never in doubt, policies towards the minorities fluctuated and depended strongly on circumstance. The Ministry of Railways did not portray Jireš's behaviour as laudable for championing the Czech cause in the borderland, as the Czech press did. It accepted Jireš's claim that he did not speak German and merely denounced the German conductors' behaviour for not allowing him to finish his journey despite being in possession of a valid ticket. At the same time, the Ministry's internal memoranda indicate the extent to which it struggled to find a legal justification to demand the *Reichsbahn* conductors use Czech within Czechoslovakia, finally settling on the safety of railway operations. This suggests that, especially under the pressure of the parliamentary interpellation, ministerial representatives were only too aware of the public expectation that they uphold the 'rights' of Czechoslovaks, and did so to the best of their abilities within the legal framework. Czechoslovakia was thus caught in a dilemma that was a continued source of tension: in the context of inter-war Central Europe, its rule of law offered relatively generous minority rights and invited Germans, Hungarians, Jews and others to take full part in the civic life. But at the same time, it remained the nation-state of Czechs and Slovaks, which by definition excluded the minorities from full identification with it. These two roles made for an uneasy balancing act.

The way the use of language was regulated for railway workers – most of whom, as employees of the Czechoslovak State Railways, were also civil servants – further illustrates this tension. Along with other front-line state employees such as postal workers, railway employees were among the most visible representatives of the state in the public sphere. They certainly looked the part, with uniform caps that sported a Czechoslovak coat of arms adorned

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[429] Jaroslav Kučera, Koncepce národního státu, p. 609.

with stitched linden twigs (the Czech and Slav national tree).[430] One of the first decisions of the newly-formed Ministry of Railways was a decree passed on 22 November 1918 that all correspondence by state authorities was to be answered only in Czech, while correspondence from 'autonomous' offices – i.e. the German regions in the north of Bohemia that were rejecting Czechoslovak rule – could be responded to in their language.[431] This decree set the tone for the ministry's attitude. Pragmatic considerations of ensuring train traffic in the chaotic months after the end of the war took precedence over nationalist language policies. In July 1919, the ministry passed a temporary guideline to regulate language usage on the railways in the Bohemian Lands. It stipulated that Czech be the sole official language for internal use within the ČSD, but allowed for German to be used 'on a temporary basis' by 'employees of German nationality who do not speak Czech'. For communication with the public, the ministry divided the country into areas that were deemed Czech (less than 20 per cent Germans), mixed (between 20 and 80 per cent Germans) and mixed with German predominance (more than 80 per cent Germans). The existence of purely German areas was thus negated. Most communication was to be carried out in Czech only in Czech areas, and bilingually in mixed areas. This applied, for instance, to timetables, tickets and other printed matter, rubber stamps, signs and notices on stations and on local trains. The names of stations were to be called out on trains in both languages only in 'predominantly German' areas. Trilingual notices in Czech, German and French were to be displayed on express trains regardless of the route.[432] Since the language law was ambiguous regarding its validity for state enterprises such as the railways and the postal service, there was much controversy and inconsistency regarding the actual implementation of these guidelines. For instance, the main station in Brno had Czech

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[430] Krejčiřík, *Železniční móda*, p. 83. Regarding the linden tree, see Robert B. Pynsent, '"The Heart of Europe": The Origins and Fate of a Czech Nationalist Cliché', *Central Europe*, 11.1 (2013), 1–23 (pp. 21–23).

[431] NA, 813, Carton 1: Decree of the Ministerial Council of the Ministry of Railways, 27 November 1918. Promulgated before the occupation of Slovakia, the text is untypical for not referring to the 'state language' (*jazyk státní*), the phrase generally used officially to refer to Czech and Slovak, but simply the 'Czech language' (*jazyk český*).

[432] NA, 813, Carton 2: 'Zatímní úprava užívání zemských jazyků u drah státních a v státním provozu jsoucích v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku', 3 July 1919.

signage only throughout the inter-war period, despite that fact that more than 20 per cent of

the citizenry was German. None the less, the linguistic practice described above remained

essentially unchanged throughout the First Republic.[433]

The ministerial sources indicate that the goal of Czechoslovakizing the railway staff

was never in doubt. It was expected from the beginning that non-Czechoslovak railway

workers would eventually learn Czech or Slovak and prove their knowledge of the language in

a formal examination.[434] The language law of 1920 declared the 'Czechoslovak language' the

sole internal language of administration, and several decrees intended to regulate the

implementation of the law were passed between 1920 and 1926. From 1922, civil servants

unable or unwilling to take a language examination could be dismissed from their jobs.[435] From

the early 1920s, then, knowledge of the state language became an official condition for

working for the ČSD. In addition to the enforcement of Czech and Slovak as the state

languages, the authorities aimed to purge the railways of workers who did not speak the state

language as quickly and thoroughly as possible, especially in border areas with large minorities.

'In principle', the Director of State Railways Prague-North described the policy in 1925, 'we fill

vacated posts in the Germanized areas with employees of Czech nationality'.[436] However, this

aim continuously came up against the reality that there were simply not enough qualified

workers with the appropriate language skills to fill all the positions vacated by Germans and

Magyars. In February 1919, for example, the ministry produced a report on the unsatisfactory

linguistic conditions of Frýdek (Friedeck) station in Silesia. Nine of the twelve station staff were

Germans, of which five had poor or no Czech. The report notes that the local Directorate of

State Railways in Olomouc suggested 'transferring the Germans at the earliest opportunity to

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[433] Kučera, *Minderheit im Nationalstaat*, pp. 205–09.

[434] Ibid., p. 189, and NA, 813, Carton 2: 'Zatímní úprava užívání zemských jazyků u drah státních a v státním provozu jsoucích v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku', 3 July 1919.

[435] Kučera, *Minderheit im Nationalstaat*, p. 258. In previous versions of the implementation regulation, not knowing the state language had been an impediment to promotion.

[436] NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 2: Response to a newspaper article by the Directorate of State Railways Prague-North, 19 March 1925.

Czech areas. For the moment, however, the exchange is unthinkable due to the lack of Czech staff.'[437]

In Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia, the situation was even worse for the authorities. This was due both to the fact that railwaymen had been among the most Magyarized employment groups in the Kingdom of Hungary, and to the railway strike of February 1919, as a result of which large numbers of railway workers had been dismissed and deported to Hungary.[438] In January 1919, the railway ministry sent guidelines regarding which former MÁV employees were to be taken over by the ČSD to Kornel Stodola, the Slovak ministry's railway officer. It declared that only Slovaks could be immediately taken on, as well as those Magyars who 'have not committed any offence against the Czechoslovak government, have taken an oath to the Czechoslovak government, and speak the Slovak language'. Aware of the fact that this formulation might not leave many railway workers in Slovakia, the text added that Magyars who did not know Slovak but fulfilled all other requirements could temporarily remain in employment, but recommended their transferral away from posts that required contact with the public.[439] By December 1921, seventy-seven courses in the 'state language' had been organized throughout the country for those employees who needed to prove their proficiency in it.[440]

Despite these measures, a large number of Magyars were laid off, but could not be immediately replaced. In October 1919, the staff of Čop (Csap) station wrote to the railway minister to protest against their collective dismissal, arguing that they were now 'exposed to

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[437] NA, 813, Carton 1: 'O služeb. poměrech ve Frýdku', 29 January 1919.
[438] See Chapter 2 of this thesis.
[439] NA, 813, Carton 2: 'Panu Kornelu Stodolovi, poslanci a členu vládní správy na Slovensku v Žilině', January 1919. The formulation of the oath was made official in April 1919; a copy can be found in the same archival file. It read: 'I swear and promise on my honour and conscience that I will always remain loyal to the Czechoslovak Republic and obedient to its government, that I will abide by all state laws, that I will diligently, conscientiously and impartially perform all my official duties in accordance with the valid laws and regulations, that I will not reveal official secrets, and that in all my actions I will heed only the welfare of the state and the interest of office.'
[440] NA, 813, Carton 197, no. 1012, doc. 401: 'Přehled činnosti státní železniční správy za rok 1920 a 1921', and NA, 1769, Carton 1: Minutes of the ČÚRŽ meeting of 2 December 1921, p. 1.

the whole misery of winter'.[441] Since few Slovaks worked on the railways in the early years of

the republic, senior positions in particular were most often filled with Czechs from the

Bohemian Lands. Patriotic reasons often played a part in their decision to move to Slovakia,

but the ministry also created financial incentives. From 1920, newcomers received a bonus to

their wages and pension, in addition to other benefits.[442] As a result, railway employees were a

particularly large group among the Czech civil servants who moved east after 1918. Writing in

1919, one Czech journalist observed that 'Slovakia is literally being flooded with Czech civil

servants and employees, especially on the railway'.[443] In his memoirs, the literary scholar and

later Czechoslovak diplomat Eduard Goldstücker (1913–2000) confirms this view. When, as a

teenager in the late 1920s, he moved with his family from rural northern Slovakia to Košice, he

was first struck by the city's 'unfamiliar Magyar-Jewish character'. None the less, his school

had 'some Czech pupils, mainly the children of railwaymen from a housing estate generally

called "Little Prague".'[444]

The ethnic composition of the Czechoslovak civil service also became of interest to the

League of Nations. Like other Habsburg successor states, Czechoslovakia had signed a Minority

Protection Treaty at the Paris Peace Conference, which was 'guaranteed' by the League

(though in practice, it had few sanctions to use against offenders).[445] Based on this guarantee,

representatives of the German minority submitted a series of petitions to the League's

Secretariat, objecting, amongst other grievances, to the inadequate position of German in

public affairs and especially to the terms of the Czechoslovak land reform. Since the latter

targeted the estates of the old Bohemian and Upper Hungarian aristocracy, it led to the

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[441] NA, 813, Carton 2: Letter signed by the members of the Čop station staff to the Minister of Railways, 22 October 1919.
[442] Burian, p. 7.
[443] Lev, *Neznáma pevnina*, p. 29.
[444] Goldstücker, pp. 38–40.
[445] C. A. Macartney, *National States and National Minorities* (London, 1934), p. 2; Mark Mazower, 'Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe', *Daedalus*, 126.2 (1997), 47–63 (pp. 50–51).

expropriation of many Germans and Magyars.[446] Although the petitions were ultimately

unsuccessful, the League instructed the Czechoslovak government to send statistical

information regarding the national proportions so that the land reform's progress could be

monitored.[447] In preparation for the submission of this information to the League, the railway

ministry was tasked by the Ministry of the Interior to compile a detailed list of the nationalities

of all workers employed by the ČSD in April 1923 (see Tables 1–8).[448] Along with data on other

civil servants, this information was passed on to the League by Foreign Minister Beneš in a

memorandum on 15 March 1924.[449] Notwithstanding the fact that the League's guarantee only

covered the minority treaty, Beneš's memorandum actually related to section 128 of its

Constitution, which stated 'any difference in religion, creed, confession and language shall not

be a hindrance to any Czechoslovak citizen in terms of access to public employment, offices

and honours […]'.[450] The minority treaty had a similar clause, but limited its stipulation to

religious difference and did not mention language.[451] Considering the fact that the League of

Nations had no legal basis on which to enforce (or even monitor) Czechoslovakia's adherence

to its own constitution, the fact that government provided this information shows that it was

prepared to go to considerable lengths in order to bolster its international standing.[452]

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[446] Regarding the land reform, see Mark Cornwall, '"National Reparation"?: The Czech Land Reform and the Sudeten Germans 1918–38', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 75.2 (1997), 259–80 and Daniel E. Miller, 'Colonizing the Hungarian and German Border Areas during the Czechoslovak Land Reform, 1918–1938', *Austrian History Yearbook*, 34 (2003), 303–17.

[447] Martin Scheuermann, *Minderheitenschutz contra Konfliktverhütung? Die Minderheitenpolitik des Völkerbundes in den zwanziger Jahren* (Marburg, 2000), pp. 151–57, 423.

[448] NA, 813, Carton 314, no. 5727 ('Národnost zaměstnanců čs. státních drah'): Letter from the Ministry to the Interior to the Ministry of Railways, 4 April 1923.

[449] Archives of the League of Nations, Digitized Collections, League of Nations Official Documents, C.161.1924.I, 'Mémoires du gouvernement tchécoslovaque relatifs à la situation des minorités en Tchécoslovaquie', 22 March 1924, with the attached memorandum *La question des minorités en Tchécoslovaquie au point de vue administratif*, 2nd edn (Prague, 1923) <http://biblio-archive.unog.ch/Dateien/CouncilDocs/C-161-1924-I_FR.pdf> [accessed 18 February 2016].

[450] *La question des minorités en Tchécoslovaquie*, p. 19. The text of the 1920 Constitution is accessible at Parlament České republiky, Poslanecké sněmovna <http://www.psp.cz/docs/texts/constitution_1920.html> [accessed 19 February 2016].

[451] Macartney, *National States*, p. 504.

[452] See also Scheuermann, pp. 194–95; and Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, esp. pp. 136–73.

Since the ministry did not hold records on nationality centrally, it ordered its eight regional Directorates of State Railways to gather the requested information.[453] The sources of the data that was subsequently collected are not always clear. Since nationality statistics had generally not been kept for the railways in the Kingdom of Hungary, the directorate in Košice had to start collecting data from scratch at individual workplaces, and as a result only returned the results with a delay of several months. The liquidation authority of the previously private railway between Ústí nad Labem and Teplice, which was part of the Prague directorate, based its data on conscription records supplied by the army. The Brno directorate noted that its data was based on a self-assessment made by workers in 1919. It added the wary disclaimer that 'on numerous occasions, however, we discovered that in many nationally mixed areas many employees registered as Czechs despite sending their children to German schools, for the most part speaking German privately and associating almost exclusively with Germans'. Other directorates did not comment on their sources. For these reasons, the statistics must be treated with caution. They are not an objective ethnolinguistic snapshot, but in many cases represent the national aspirations of individuals. In addition, it has to be assumed that even in a highly politicized environment like the railways, the concept of nationality simply did not apply to many workers fluent in more than one language.[454]

Despite these caveats, the data returned gives some insight into the extent of the Czechoslovakization on the railways four years after the foundation of the republic. In contrast to the state censuses, these statistics also differentiated between Czechs and Slovaks and thus provide an impression of the number of Czech workers and bureaucrats that had migrated to the country's eastern half.[455] The total number of ČSD employees was recorded at 164,537;

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[453] The directorates were headquartered in Prague, Plzeň, Olomouc, Hradec Králové, Brno, Bratislava and Košice. From 1923 to 1932, Prague had two directorates, one for Prague-North and one for Prague-South. For more information on the Ministry of Railway's internal structure, see Jaroslav Lexa, 'Vývoj správy Československých státních drah v letech 1918–1938' (unpublished master's thesis, Charles University in Prague, 2012), esp. pp. 68–92; available online at <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/download/120094753/> [accessed 20 August 2015].

[454] Regarding the concept of 'national indifference' in the Bohemian Lands, see esp. Zahra.

[455] On the census policies in inter-war Czechoslovakia, see Koeltzsch, pp. 29–87.

more than one per cent of the country's roughly thirteen-and-a-half million inhabitants were employed on the railways. This underlines the significance of this infrastructure for the lives of Czechoslovaks. Of these, roughly 64 per cent were registered as Czechs, 20 per cent as Germans, 12 per cent as Slovaks, 2 per cent as Magyars, 1 per cent as Poles and 1 per cent as Rusyns, leaving only a small number of 'others'.[456]

The proportions differed substantially by region. Only a small fraction of Magyar workers remained on the ČSD. In Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia – i.e. in the combined domains of the Košice and Bratislava directorates – they made up 11 per cent of workers. Slovaks accounted for the majority of 59 per cent. The Bratislava directorate suggested that the increase of Slovaks to the detriment of Magyars could be explained by the fact that 'many real Slovaks (especially manual labourers), who were previously registered as Magyars, expressed the wish to be registered as Slovaks instead. Furthermore, many real Magyars registered as Slovaks.' In a territory where only a tiny fraction of Slovaks had been active nationalists in 1918, the reality of being a Slovak or a Magyar were, however, much more porous than the directorate liked to believe.[457] Furthermore, the authorities failed to mention that precisely those Magyars who had a strong national consciousness and thus were sceptical of Czechoslovak authority were deported from the country *en masse* after the railway strike of 1919. The figures also indicate that many Magyars had been replaced by Czechs, who now accounted for almost a quarter of Slovakia's and Ruthenia's railway workforce.

The Czech influx among the upper echelons of the railway bureaucracy is demonstrated when the figures are weighed according to pay rate. Among all non-manual labourers in Slovakia and Ruthenia – including office workers, and clerks such as conductors and station staff – Czechs accounted for almost 36 per cent of employees, Slovaks for 45 per

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[456] NA, 813, Carton 314, no. 5727 ('Národnost zaměstnanců státních drah').

[457] Robert William Seton-Watson states that 'the number of educated and nationally conscious Slovaks in 1918 did not exceed 750 to 1,000' (see *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks*, p. 323). C. A. Macartney considers even this estimate 'the highest which I have heard from any source' (see p. 94).

cent and Magyars for 14 per cent. The relative number of Czechs rose exponentially by salary. Of the 306 employees receiving the highest pay rate in Slovakia and Ruthenia, 249 (81 per cent) were Czechs. While the numbers of Slovaks was relatively stable between the Bratislava and the Košice directorates, in the country's easternmost region relatively more Magyars and fewer Czechs were employed. These numbers confirm that there was both a radical Czechoslovakization and a radical Czechization among the railway staff in Slovakia and Ruthenia.

Despite the rapid development of railways in the country's east, almost 80 per cent of all Czechoslovak railwaymen worked in the Bohemian Lands, where the network was much denser and the shortage of workers less intense. Roughly three quarters were registered Czechs and one quarter Germans. In contrast to Magyars in Slovakia and Ruthenia, Germans in the Bohemian Lands were able to hold on to positions in the higher railway administration. More than two fifths of workers in white-collar jobs were German. None the less, among the most prestigious positions, Czechs dominated throughout Czechoslovakia. About 73 per cent of those holding posts in the highest wage bracket in the Bohemian Lands were Czechs, compared to only 27 per cent Germans. In the country as a whole, 1,480 ČSD employees received the highest salary possible within the railway administration. Of these, 1,163 (79 per cent) were Czechs, 242 Germans (16 per cent), 25 Slovaks (2 per cent), 19 Magyars (1 per cent) and thirty-one were of another nationality.[458] This data confirms that the Czechoslovak railways provided, like the state they criss-crossed, a multi-ethnic environment. The memorandum submitted to the League of Nations argued that 'there is not the slightest doubt that the fact of belonging to this or that nationality is no impediment to attaining public employment' in Czechoslovakia.[459] The text then breaks down employee data by nationality

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[458] The category of 'others' includes twenty-seven Jews by nationality. However, not all directorates used this category in their data and it would thus be misleading to include it here. It is likely that more than twenty-seven of these employees were Jewish and would have registered their nationality as such had they been given the chance.

[459] *La question des minorités en Tchécoslovaquie*, p. 19.

not only for the railways, but also several other public services, seeking to demonstrate that

'members of linguistic minorities are represented, and in considerable proportion, in all

branches of administration.'[460]

None the less, the railway administration was overwhelmingly run by Czechs. The

memorandum also acknowledged that the minorities were represented in higher

administration only 'in relatively modest numbers'; it argued that those offices had been set

up at a time when many Germans and Magyars held a 'hostile attitude' towards the new state

and had preferred to offer their services to the governments of neighbouring countries.[461] Be

that as it may, the preponderance of Czech newcomers among the railway staff in regions that

were not Czech-speaking soon proved problematic and was the source of some of the linguistic

conflicts I have discussed above. There are indications that this problem was acknowledged

and hesitantly addressed by the Ministry of Railways. As mentioned above, two Slovaks

headed the directorates in Bratislava and Košice from 1936. On 18 February 1937, faced with

the increasing threat of Nazi Germany and the rise of Henlein's *Sudetendeutsche Partei*, the

government agreed with the German activist parties to introduce proportional representation

of Germans in the civil service.[462] In May, newspapers reported that new German workers had

been hired by the ČSD.[463] However, the sources indicate that the ethnic distribution among

ČSD remained roughly the same throughout the inter-war period. Only the German annexation

of the Sudetenland in autumn 1938 and the subsequent pseudo-independence of Slovakia

under Nazi tutelage in March 1939 radically altered the ethnic composition of railway workers

on the formerly Czechoslovak lines.

The national conflict on the railways was thus exacerbated by the government policies

of posting Czechs to non-Czech areas as it sought to enforce a single spatial identity for the

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[460] Ibid., pp. 21–22.
[461] Ibid.
[462] Tóth/Novotný/Stehlík, pp. 353–54.
[463] 'Es geht vorwärts', *Volksbote*, 5 May 1937, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 78.

whole of Czechoslovakia. At the same time, the extent of the influx of Czech civil servants was often exaggerated by minority representatives keen to highlight Czech oppression. Especially in the border areas, the government also acted as a moderating force among more radical Czech nationalists, who longed to see the borders of the nation extend to the borders of the state. Although the Ministry of Railways intervened with the *Reichsbahn* on behalf of Josef Jireš, it did not engage in aggressive rhetoric of the kind common among the National Unions. The state hovered between Czechoslovak nationalism and the role of a neutral arbiter between the parties in the national conflict on the Czechoslovak railways. None the less, the ČSD were clearly an instrument of Czechoslovakization. In many areas where few Czechs or Slovaks lived, stationmasters and conductors – as well as other civil servants such as postal workers and the police – upheld Czechoslovak rule. Signage on stations, trains and the language spoken by ticket clerks and conductors were highly visible signifiers of state power and enforced a Czechoslovak spatial identity. As such, they were resented by those who championed alternative spaces, such as the 'German linguistic area'. On the other hand, Czech and Slovak nationalists interpreted any use of German or Hungarian on the railway as a sign that the nationalization of the country had not gone far enough. The railway discourse makes clear that the national conflict in inter-war Czechoslovakia was not just a conflict over linguistic and social rights, but also a conflict over spatial identities.

Chapter 4
Stations between the National and the Cosmopolitan
Railway Buildings and De-Austrianization

Like the other Habsburg successor states, inter-war Czechoslovakia faced the task of

transforming the built environment in its territory in order to reflect its status as a

nationalizing state. A construction boom had seized the whole industrialized world from the

mid-nineteenth century and attempts had been made prior to the First World War to create

'national styles' of architecture both in the Bohemian Lands and in Hungary. Czechoslovak

architects in the inter-war period drew on this tradition, but could also count on the support of

the government, which now had the financial wherewithal and the political will to put these

ideas into practice on a large scale. As a result, towns and cities in Czechoslovakia were

transformed in the 1920s and 1930s and, especially in the areas immediately adjacent to the

largely medieval old towns, gained many characteristic features that set them apart from cities

in neighbouring countries. Prague and the new regional centres of the country – such as Brno,

Ostrava, Bratislava and Košice – saw the building of entire new neighbourhoods. This building

boom was characterized by an effort to create a modern built environment that would mark

cities as Czechoslovak rather than Austrian or Hungarian.[464]

For Tomáš G. Masaryk, 'de-Austrianization' (*odrakouštění*) was a key element in the

Czechoslovak nation's path to independent citizenship. He wrote that by leaving behind the

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[464] The literature on urban culture and the development of cities in inter-war Czechoslovakia is vast and only a brief overview can be given here. The standard reference works of architectural history are Rostislav Švácha, *The Architecture of New Prague 1895–1945* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), and Otakar Nový, *Česká architektonická avantgarda* (Prague, 1998). For an account of Czechization in the Bohemian Lands that pays close attention to material culture in cities, see Wingfield. On Prague specifically, see for example Koeltzsch; Paces; and Peter Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold: The History of a City* (London, 1997). On other cities, see King; Luther; Engemann; and Rostislav Koryčánek, *Česká architektura v německém Brně: město jako ideální krajina nacionalismu* (Šlapanice, 2003.

shackles of passivity inherited from the Habsburg political system, Czechoslovaks would 'attain a sense of state and statehood [*státnost*], of democratic statehood'.[465] The term gained currency among the political elite especially in the early years of the republic to describe the general processes of change that Czechoslovak independence brought about.[466] Indeed, the country demonstrated the will to de-Austrianize and modernize not only the political and social system, but also its public space. This chapter will explore the de-Austrianization of the urban landscape, focusing on railway buildings. A great many overground and underground station buildings, tram stops, signal boxes and other infrastructure were built in this period. Scholarly interest in these has, however, been limited to their technical characteristics, and little has been written about their significance in cultural tendencies to de-Austrianization.[467] I argue that despite (or because of) their mundane nature, station and other railway buildings played a major role in the Czechoslovakization of the country's built environment. I will begin with a discussion of plans for an underground railway in Prague developed by the Czech avant-garde around its leading theorist Karel Teige (1900–1951). I will then move on to the various and arguably contradictory narratives of Czechoslovak distinctiveness expressed in the new stations of Hradec Králové and Uherské Hradiště.

There was no uniform style that characterized the new architecture. In the words of the architectural historian Rostislav Švácha, 'several architectural styles competed for the privilege of becoming the official style of the new republic'.[468] In the early years of the republic, neoclassicism was the most prominent among them, especially since it was the style chosen for the refurbishment of Prague Castle by the Slovene architect Jože Plečnik (1872–

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[465] Karel Čapek, *Hovory s T. G. Masarykem* (Prague, 1946), p. 196; quoted in Igor Němec, 'Masarykovy výrazy spjaté s budováním demokratického státu', *Naše řeč*, 73.4 (1990), 169–73 (p. 170). It is unclear when Masaryk first used the term *odrakouštět* (or *odrakouštit*). Drawing on Josef Korbel, Andrea Orzoff mentions that he used it in his 1919 address to the Czechoslovak parliament; see Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, p. 237 (note 2).

[466] Lemberg, p. 20.

[467] The most significant work in this genre is Mojmír Krejčiřík, *Česká nádraží: Architektura a stavební vývoj*, 4 vols (Litoměřice, 2003–), a comprehensive technical and architectural history of all railway stations in the Bohemian Lands.

[468] Švácha, p. 174.

1957). Plečnik, who also designed the striking Church of the Most Sacred Heart of Our Lord in

the capital's suburb of Vinohrady, aimed to re-appropriate neoclassicism as a 'Slav style',

believing the ancient Etruscans to be the original settlers of Slovenia.[469] The building of the

Ministry of Railways by Antonín Engel (1879–1958) in Prague on the bank of the river Vltava

(Moldau) was built in a neoclassicist style, too. It was a monumental palace to transport, and,

in Otakar Nový's words, 'the most extensive monument of the First Republic'.[470] However, it

was the so-called 'rondocubist' style – also known as Czech art deco – that came to be

generally regarded as the national style. Made famous by Josef Gočár's (1880–1945) building

of the *Banka československých legií* (Bank of the Czechoslovak Legions) in central Prague, its

characteristic ornamentation was widely used on apartment blocks throughout Prague during

the building boom of the 1920s. Švácha comments that 'its crest-shaped, circular, and

rectangular ornaments with white-and-red or yellow-and-red color schemes evoked Czech folk

art and appealed to the patriotic circles in Czech society'.[471]

At the same time, with the rise of the avant-garde movement in Czechoslovakia, the

country emerged as the main centre of functionalist architecture in Europe outside Germany.

Functionalism was used for communal buildings such as schools, hospitals, post and telegraph

offices, public baths and banks.[472] In one of the first attempts to define the style for a 1932

exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip

Johnson featured six buildings in Czechoslovakia, more than in any country outside the United

States and Germany. In his introduction to the 1966 edition of *The International Style*,

Hitchcock praised the Tugendhat House, built in Brno in 1930 by the German architect Ludwig

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[469] Anthony Alofsin, *When Buildings Speak: Architecture as Language in the Habsburg Empire and Its Aftermath, 1867–1933* (Chicago, 2006), p. 167.

[470] Nový, p. 362. He continues that 'it is not too surprising that the Central Committee of the Communist Party [ÚV KSČ] adapted the building for their purposes after 1948'. It houses the Czech Republic's Ministry of Transport today.

[471] Švácha, pp. 186–87.

[472] Iris Meder, 'Neuere Forschung und Forschungslücken zur Architektur in der Tschechoslowakei', *Bohemia*, 43 (2002), 412–31 (p. 414).

Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969), as one of the 'two finest houses in the new style'.[473] Brno

became a European centre of modernist architecture in this period. While in the nationalist

atmosphere of Prague, German and Jewish architects found it hard to realize projects, the

bilingual and economically prosperous Brno was much more open to them.[474] The

representation of Czechoslovakia in the built environment was neither centrally controlled nor

developed evenly across the country. Historicist neoclassicism, rondocubism and functionalism

were merely three rough markers that characterized the new architecture of inter-war

Czechoslovakia. Despite the great differences between the styles and their utilization in

various Czechoslovak cities, they all facilitated de-Austrianization and the portrayal of

Czechoslovakia as an independent and confident country.

A Metro in New Prague

For the purpose of this chapter, I approach architecture as spatial representations of ideology.

Due to the immediacy of the built environment, buildings often had an equally strong effect on

citizens' understanding of political and social realities than, say, the mass media. A walk

through the 'New Prague' of the 1920s and 1930s would have made the new political

significance and prestige of the national capital immediately clear. Markers such as buildings,

street names, flags and signs were employed to symbolize the political power structure.

Through immigration from the Czech-speaking countryside, incorporation of neighbouring

towns and villages, and assimilation (often of Jews), Prague had gradually become an ever

more Czech city since the 1860s. After 1918, the municipal administration of Mayor Karel Baxa

(1863–1938) launched an aggressive attempt to further Czechize the city.[475] The creation of

Greater Prague through the incorporation of previously independent suburbs on 1 January

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[473] Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (New York, 1966), pp. viii–ix and
    133–90. The other building mentioned by Hitchcock is Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye in Poissy on the
    outskirts of Paris.
[474] Meder, pp. 420–21.
[475] Koeltzsch, pp. 125–51.

1922 greatly enlarged the city and reduced the German minority to statistical insignificance.[476]

Since the German inhabitants of Prague thus numbered far fewer than the twenty per cent

necessary for bilingual signage as decreed by the Czechoslovak language law of 1920, action

was taken to remove all traces of German from the urban landscape. The municipality went as

far as objecting to bilingual tickets issued for the Old Jewish Cemetery.[477]

But also in a positive sense, there was an effort to throw off the mustiness of a

provincial Habsburg town and turn Prague into the representative capital of a nation-state. In

addition to the refurbishment of the Castle, this is perhaps best symbolized by the National

Liberation Memorial, which Otakar Nový has called 'the most distinctive political monument'

of inter-war Czechoslovakia.[478] Designed by the architect Jan Zázvorka (1884–1963) and

erected on Vítkov Hill between 1927 and 1938, it was crowned by a monumental equestrian

statue of the Hussite warrior Jan Žižka.[479] The monument as a whole was devoted to the

Czechoslovak Legions during the First World War, and was to include columbaria for the

remains of an Unknown Soldier and military dignitaries.[480] It thus combined a celebration of

de-Austrianization with the glorification of Hussitism as the source of Czech nationhood. The

monument's façade has the stark and unadorned appearance of functionalism. It illustrates

that the roles in this modernization effort were not allocated in a straightforward way. Despite

the fact that rondocubism was generally regarded as the national style, Prague's central

monument to Czech(oslovak) nationalism could be erected in a functionalist style without

contradiction. At the same time, of course, it was not functional, but designed as a symbolic

celebration of explicitly national history and of the military struggle for independence. Karel

Teige, the leading theorist of architectural functionalism in Czechoslovakia, rejected not only

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[476] Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 177–78.
[477] Koeltzsch, pp. 126–36.
[478] Nový, p. 372.
[479] Švácha, p. 147.
[480] Matthew S. Witkovsky, 'Truly Blank: The Monument to National Liberation and Interwar Modernism in Prague', *Umění*, 49.1 (2001), 42–60, and, especially for the post-war period, Paces, pp. 69–72 and 170–88.

this memorial, but the possibility of building a modernist monument altogether. 'Monuments are not architecture', he wrote, when people 'need a roof over their head'.[481] He compiled his views on functional architecture in the 1932 book *Nejmenší byt* (The minimum dwelling).[482] In a study on the Žižka Monument, Matthew S. Witkovsky has noted that 'the "modernist monument" was and is held to be an oxymoron, for the core values commonly attributed to modernism – ephemerality, experimentation, fragmentation, revolution – are eminently antithetical to the permanence, durability, and expression of unity associated with monuments'.[483] Turning to the spate of functionalist crematoria built in inter-war Czechoslovakia, he argues that they 'exemplify the possibility of a utilitarian "modern monument", in the original sense of that word: *monere*, to remind or remember'.[484] While the Žižka Monument was not itself a crematorium, it featured two large spaces to store and display the cremated remains of national heroes. In terms of its aesthetic symbolism, then, it simultaneously served as a beacon of Czechoslovak modernity and connected the nation to a medieval past.

The Žižka Monument used a style that was by definition international and made it into a symbol of the nation. Witkovsky likens it to the Casa del Fascio in Como (1933–36), which used very similar forms to express Italianness. This illustrates that it was not the uniqueness of architectural form that was at issue, but rather the goal of turning Prague into a worthy representation of the nation. This was a consensus in Czechoslovak architecture across political and aesthetic attitudes. The aim was pursued in Teige's programmatic essay *Rekonstrukce Prahy?* (A restoration of Prague?), published in the popular illustrated fortnightly journal *Světozor* in four instalments in 1937.[485] In it, he presented his case for the construction of an underground railway in Prague. Teige was the theoretical head of the avant-garde group

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[481] Karel Teige, 'Památník osvobození a Völkerschlachtdenkmal', *Stavba*, 4.9 (April 1926), 148–50; quoted in Witkovsky, p. 50.
[482] Karel Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*, trans. by Eric Dluhosch (Cambidge, MA, 2002).
[483] Witkovsky, p. 43.
[484] Ibid., p. 54. Emphasis in the original.
[485] Karel Teige, 'Rekonstrukce Prahy?', *Světozor* (1937), pp. 125, 142–43, 158–59, 182.

Devětsil, and a radical left-wing critic of the political and cultural *status quo*. None the less, his

call for the modernization of the Czechoslovak capital was reminiscent of traditional

nineteenth-century nationalism in both its imagery and content. His judgment on the current

state of Prague was damning:

> The comparatively narrow and crooked streets of the centre are crammed with vehicles,
>
> feature dangerous crossings and the racket of trams and cars, which grates the nerves of
>
> office workers and of those who live on the main traffic arteries. The speed of the trams is
>
> irredeemably slow, which truly shortens the lifespan of hundreds of thousands of Prague
>
> citizens who are forced to waste much time on their journey from their homes in the
>
> outskirts to work in the centre, or from the centre to reach places of recreation in the
>
> outskirts (swimming pools, parks, woods, excursions, sport). All this contributes to making
>
> life in one of the world's most beautiful cities sometimes appear like life in limbo [*pobytu*
>
> *v předpeklí*].[486]

Teige painted a picture of Prague as a dark, cramped and unhygienic medieval city ill-adjusted

to the needs of modern life. Although he called it 'beautiful', he decried the lack of an urban

plan that would turn it into an open and airy city allowing for the easy circulation of its

inhabitants. 'It is clear that the dynamic urban arteries can only maintain their speed when

there is no interference from friction.'[487]

Time and again, then, Teige used imagery of disease and cleansing to describe problems

of urban regeneration. This metaphor was widespread in the nineteenth century, when large

construction projects were launched in order to create spacious and hygienic cities. The

modernization of cities followed a similar narrative of healthy circulation as the geographic

theory of Friedrich Ratzel. Cramped buildings, streets and alleys were razed and replaced with

large apartment buildings and thoroughfares, such as the *Champs d'Elysées* in Paris, the

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[486] Ibid., p. 125.
[487] Ibid., p. 142.

Ringstraße in Vienna or *Andrássy út* in Budapest.[488] Prague lacked such a grand avenue as the outcome of this characteristic nineteenth-century urban renewal, but had had its share of representative building projects, of which the most prominent was the razing (*asanace*) of the former Jewish ghetto of Josefov.[489] And indeed, perhaps surprisingly considering his avant-gardist attitudes, Teige did not see the key to Prague's modernization in the large-scale razing and rebuilding of the city's built environment. He criticized the city's Regulation Plan of 1931, which led to many such proposals, as a 'palliative'.

> In this respect, Prague is in a precarious situation and its transportation is paralysed. The sick, ancient cities of Europe can no longer be healed by piecemeal alterations and the construction of a few new roads. Furthermore, these are frequently proposed for reasons of pomp and representation, or else for the purpose of property speculation that does not benefit either transport or housing.[490]

However, he regarded the 'radical urbanistic chirurgical operation' he envisaged to be unfeasible in a capitalist society. Until the economic system could be changed, he argued, efforts should focus on improving the city's 'sclerotic transport system' by building a metro. 'All large cities – and Prague has become one – need an underground railway'.[491]

Thus, Teige invoked the organicist metaphor of the medieval city as a diseased body and modernization as cleansing. He refers to principles of urban planning that, as Richard Sennett has argued, became popular during the Enlightenment.

> Enlightened planners wanted the city in its very design to function like a healthy body, freely flowing as well as possessed of clean skin. Since the beginnings of the Baroque era,

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[488] See also Chapter 1.
[489] Cathleen M. Giustino, *Tearing down Prague's Jewish Town: Ghetto Clearance and the Legacy of Middle-Class Ethnic Politics around 1900* (Boulder, 2003).
[490] Teige, Rekonstrukce, p. 142.
[491] Ibid., p. 158.

urban planners had thought about making cities in terms of efficient circulation of people

on the city's main streets.[492]

Since Teige considered a large-scale rebuilding of the city unfeasible, a metro system would at

least be a relief – if not a cure – to Prague's clotted bloodstream. In this image, the railways

once again became arteries and veins in an anthropomorphizing metaphor. As such, they

ensured that the healthy blood corpuscles of the urban body – i.e. the people of the city – had

the ability to move around freely. This is why he argued that all large cities needed an

underground railway, so they would be hygienic, open and, most importantly, modern. His

argument sits squarely in the tradition of nineteenth-century urban renewal and the railway

writing of Széchenyi, Dvorský and Ratzel. As Cathleen M. Giustino argues in her book on the

asanace, the project was spurred by concerns about public health and the rhetoric of progress

within an overarching ideology of Czech nationalism.[493] While he was no nationalist, Teige's

emphasis on hygiene, progress and representability would have been as timely in the

nineteenth century as it was in 1937.

Teige considered the railways crucial to the transportation of a growing urban

population. This goal was shared by other members of *Devětsil*, such as the architect Jaromír

Krejcar (1895–1950). In his project submission for the Prague Regulation Plan of 1931, Krejcar

proposed to ban all private vehicles from the city centre, which would instead be made

accessible by overground fast trains that were to run on the wide boulevards now devoid of

cars. These were to connect large parking towers scattered around the edge of the city that

allowed drivers to commute quickly and easily to the centre from suburbs. Unsurprisingly,

Teige supported Krejcar's project and called it 'very original, feasible and thoroughly

democratic'.[494] The attention given by Teige and Krejcar to problems of transport in Prague

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[492] Sennett, p. 264.

[493] Giustino, *Tearing down Prague's Jewish Town*. For a review of Giustino's book and other urban renewal projects in the region, see Egbert Klautke, 'Urban History and Modernity in Central Europe', *The Historical Journal*, 53.1 (March 2010), 177–95 (esp. pp. 189–90).

[494] Teige, Rekonstrukce, p. 143.

demonstrates that trains – at least those that ran within cities and thus contributed to making them more accessible – were still considered symbolic of the modern even a hundred years after their invention. In the modernists' eyes, they were functional, could transport masses of people quickly and efficiently, and thus contribute to hygienic and open cities.

The question if and when Prague should receive a metro was a hotly debated topic in the 1920s and 1930s, due partly to the general post-1918 endeavour to turn 'New Prague' into a city worthy of that epithet.[495] The discussion was also influenced by the construction of the Moscow metro, the first line of which opened on 15 May 1935.[496] *Rudé právo* (Red justice), the organ of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, ran a long portrait of the metro written by Julius Fučík (1903–1943), who was then the Moscow correspondent of the paper. Fučík was murdered by the Nazis and his martyrdom was turned into a centrally organized cult by the communist regime after 1948.[497] His description of the metro construction was a heroic narrative of victory of the Soviet people against the odds of poor soil structure and malicious western propaganda. He also praised the 'palace-like beauty of the underground stations', which quickly became the primary claim to fame of the metro.[498] Although Teige was a committed communist himself and praised the technical quality of the Moscow metro, he derided its architecture: 'The exalted aspiration for beauty and splendour brought forth only pomposity and bad taste.'[499] The underground palaces did not conform to the functionalist requirement of architecture.

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[495] For instance, *Světozor* ran a story about the subway in New York City in December 1927, ten years before Teige's article discussed here, which refers to the 'our constant debates about an underground railway'. See *Světozor*, 28.12 (22 December 1927), p. 226.

[496] For a detailed discussion of that underground railway project, see Neutatz.

[497] Generations of Czechoslovak schoolchildren were required to read his prison diary *Reportáž psaná na oprátce* (Report written on the noose, 1945), he was awarded the posthumous title National Hero, and organizations, schools, streets, mines and parks were named after him (see Pynsent, *Questions of Identity*, pp. 207–09).

[498] Julius Fučík, 'Stručné dějiny moskevského metra', *Rudé právo*, 1 and 5 May 1930, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 28.

[499] Teige, Rekonstrukce, p. 159.

This rejection of pomp in railway architecture suggests that even aesthetically,

traditional railway construction – ostensibly based on function rather than any pretensions of

architectural style – continued to be an important point of reference for the modernists. Trains

were not only used as motifs in avant-garde art because they symbolized modern and hygienic

cities, but also because they represented perhaps the greatest architectural value of the time:

functionality. Functionality, durability and 'avoidance of all unnecessary splendour' had indeed

been the driving principles of the construction of railway structures for the Habsburg

authorities.[500] In one of the defining publications of *Devětsil*, the collective volume *Život:*

Sborník nové krásy (Life: An anthology of new beauty) of 1922, Krejcar defined the 'new

beauty' of the volume's subtitle as the beauty of function: 'It is the aesthetic feeling that

derives from the *harmony of purpose and external form*.'[501] The book abounded with examples

of such a harmonious relationship in imagery of machinery and travel, such as steamboats,

aeroplanes, typewriters, skyscrapers and even a snowplough train. Krejcar also contributed a

sketch for a 'provincial railway station' in Vichy, later to become infamous as the seat of the

Pétain government during the Nazi occupation of France. The sketched station was limited to a

bare steel construction of roofs and railings with no evident closed station building at all (see

Figure 8).[502]

Krejcar's design again demonstrates that trains had not yet run their course as symbols

of modernity. In the 'futurist' manifesto published by the avant-garde writer Stanislav Kostka

Neumann in 1913, the future lies in machines, modern technology and railway stations.

> Long live: Machinism, sports-grounds, [Gustav] Frištenský, the Bohemian-Moravian
>
> Engineering Works, the Central Abattoir, Laurin & Klement, the crematorium, the cinema

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[500] Strach, p. 198.

[501] Jaromír Krejcar, 'Made in America', in *Život: Sborník nové krásy*, ed. by Jaromír Krejcar (Prague, 1922), pp. 189–95 (p. 189). Emphasis in the original. On the book, see Peter A. Zusi, 'The Style of the Present: Karel Teige on Constructivism and Poetism', *Representations*, 88 (2004), 102–24 (pp. 119–20, note 20).

[502] *Život*, pp. 174, 196.

of the future, the Henry Circus, military bands playing on Střelecký Island and in

Stromovka Park, world fairs, railway stations, artistic adverts, iron, and concrete![503]

Neumann invoked popular culture (such as Gustav Frištenský [1879–1957], a famous body-builder and wrestler) and structures of everyday life as the pinnacle of modernity. The fact that railway stations are placed alongside 'steel and concrete' here accentuated their status as non-architecture, as a prime example of the fusion of form and function. Images that fuse machines and travel are recurring motifs in the Czech avant-garde. Teige himself created many collages with travel motifs, including some of his most famous graphic works, such as *Odjezd na Cytheru* (Departure for Cythera) and *Pozdrav z cesty* (Greetings from a journey), both of 1923.[504] The collages feature ships, postal imagery, maps and a characteristic use of typography.

Academic attention has often focused on their nautical content: Derek Sayer has argued that a six-page photo-spread of an ocean liner in *Život* 'was intended to demonstrate the beauty of form following function, but one cannot help but wonder whether the nautical images do not equally testify to the longings of a little land locked away in the heart of Europe whose only coastlines were those of the mind'.[505] The cliché of the Czechs as a landlocked small nation at the heart of Europe was so widespread in Czech culture that it might indeed have contributed to the avant-garde's obsession with the sea. None the less, although trains were the standard means of transport for Central Europeans like Teige and Krejcar and thus lacked the exoticism of the ocean, they were repeatedly invoked as signifiers of the modern along with ships, aeroplanes and sometimes the telegraph. In *Foto Kino Film*, one of the

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[503] Stanislav Kostka Neumann, 'Open Windows', trans. by David Short, *Art in Translation*, 5.3 (2013), 409–17 (p. 416). First published as 'Otevřená okna' in *Lidové noviny* (August 1913). The text is discussed in Sayer, *Coasts*, p. 158.

[504] 'Teige Karel: Odjezd na Cytheru, 1923' and 'Teige Karel: Pozdrav z cesty, 1923', in *Galerie hlavního města Prahy: On-line collections* <http://www.ghmp.cz/on-line-collections/detail/4165/> [accessed 20 August 2015].

[505] Derek Sayer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century: A Surrealist History* (Princeton, 2013), p. 212.

earliest manifestoes in favour of the cinema that was first published in *Život*, Teige explicitly

links these four means of communication to modernity:

> Modernity is not an empty word, but a prerogative and an achievement. There is no need
>
> to prove this claim at length. Every single reality of the world confirms it, everything is an
>
> argument *in favour*. The Red Star Line is somewhat more perfect than the vessels of the
>
> Argonauts. The Goliath aeroplane is somewhat more perfect than both the mythological
>
> wings of Icarus and the first Montgolfière balloons. I am sure you prefer to travel in the
>
> Pullman carriages of express trains than in an idyllic stage-coach. Radio-telegraphy is more
>
> than signalling with torches or carrier pigeons. […] Yes, modernity, being a prerogative and
>
> an achievement, simply means advancement and progress.[506]

If Teige's use of vessels taken from Greek mythology is curious considering he is arguing for

historical progress, his belief in the superiority of modern travel is clear. Other members of the

avant-garde also invoked ships, planes and trains as the technological trinity of modernity. The

actor and writer Jiří Voskovec (1905–1981) began his poem *Mal du Pays* with exactly these

images:

> The speed of | thousands of trains | creates gigantically small | Einsteins. | They are
>
> spinning. | And boats shine | into black expanses | of water | that | are no longer
>
> expanses. | They are sailing | and cruising. | Aeroplanes cut | thin and broad slices | of
>
> nourishing air. | Planes shine during the day, | for free | wide | far | deep | and high.[507]

In visual art, as well, trains and other railway imagery figured prominently. The writer,

graphic artist, architect and *Devětsil* member Antonín Heythum (1901–1954), for instance,

created a collage in 1924 using Edward Johnston's famous typography of the London

Underground, adding a map of London, a number of train ticket stubs and a young woman in a

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[506] Karel Teige, 'Foto Kino Film', in *Život*, pp. 153–62 (p. 153). Emphasis in the original.
[507] J. Voskovec, 'Mal du Pays', in *Život*, pp. 92–93. The original reads: 'Tisíceré vlaky | tvoří svou rychlostí | giganticky malé | Einsteiny. | Předou. | A lodi svítí | do černých vodních | dálek, | jež | nejsou již dálkami. | Plují. | Křižují. | Aeroplány řežou, | tenké a rozsáhlé krajíce | výživného vzduchu. | Létadla svítí ve dne, | zdarma | široko | a daleko | a hluboko | a vysoko.'

swimsuit by a pool.[508] Teige himself designed the cover for the Czech translation of *Umsteigen ins 21. Jahrhundert* (Change for the twenty-first century), a fictionalized travel account to the Soviet Union by the Prague German novelist Franz Carl Weiskopf.[509] It is a visual representation of the thesis of the book, which represents the Soviet Union as the future of humankind: a stylized train speeds towards the reader superimposed on an abstract, geometrical background dominated by the colour red (see Figure 9).

The association of trains with modernity was not only the domain of art, but also pervaded the mass media. In 1937 Praguers were faced with modernist murals advertising the bread company Sana. They featured the slogan 'Fresh Every Day' and showed three trains leaving a busy factory, the smoke of the one forming the stylized S of the company name. The trains invoked hygiene, reliability and industry in a monumental piece of urban art.[510] A 1926 issue of *Světozor* was even more explicit. It covered the eighth central rally of the Czech nationalist gymnastics organization *Sokol* (*Všesokolský slet*) in June 1926, but was devoted to the railways that made these mass events possible. For the first time that year, the meeting was held on Strahov Hill overlooking Prague, on a ground that could accommodate 14,000 athletes and 130,000 spectators – to use Siegfried Kracauer's term, a 'mass ornament' if there ever was one.[511] Participants and members of the audience travelled to Prague by train from all over the country and from abroad. The issue's cover featured a close-up photograph of a locomotive, with a worker dwarfed by the machine can be seen kneeling on the frame oiling the wheels. The caption read 'The railway – the steel nerve of the modern world'. The following pages carried various contemporary and historical railway photographs, with captions praising the work of the train drivers for bringing 'millions of people […] to Prague for

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[508] Discussed in Sayer, *Prague*, pp. 211–12.

[509] See Weiskopf. The German original was published with an introduction by Wieland Herzfelde as *Umsteigen ins 21. Jahrhundert: Episoden von einer Reise durch die Sowjetunion* (Berlin, 1927).

[510] A photograph of the mural is reproduced in Jaroslav Bitnar [Záviš Kalandra?], 'Monumentální malířství naší doby', *Světozor* (1937), p. 139.

[511] See Siegfried Kracauer, 'The Mass Ornament', in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. and ed. by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA, 1995), pp. 75–88.

the *slet*.[512] *Světozor* indicated that crowds of people, such a central feature of modern mass politics and aesthetics, were impossible without the railway.

These examples illustrate that throughout the first half of the twentieth century, trains and railway buildings continued to be referenced widely as symbols of modernity. This might come as a surprise, considering they had been around for a hundred years by the 1930s. However, the imagery of the metaphor had changed. Nineteenth-century depictions of trains often presented them as 'iron horses' that flew through the countryside, bringing about irreversible change in the common perception of time and space. The avant-garde's functionalist impetus identified beauty with function, and machines were thus regarded as the central representations of the new beauty. The eclectic mixture of styles characteristic of nineteenth-century historicism was thus made redundant. Aesthetically then, the railway was represented as an ideal marriage of function and form, and thus a model for functionalist architecture. The literary critic František Xaver Šalda (1867–1937) had already done so at the turn of the century, praising the impression made 'by a huge railway bridge, bare, desolate, without ornament, the sheer embodiment of constructive thought'. He concluded that 'the new beauty is above all the beauty of purpose, inner law, logic and structure'.[513] This was by no means only common in the avant-garde. The liberal nationalist German thinker Friedrich Naumann (1860–1919), more famous for developing the idea of a German-dominated *Mitteleuropa*, considered railway stations, ships, gasworks, bridges and market halls as the new constructions of the machine age that had 'no stuck-on decoration, no mere frills', but instead true 'purpose'.[514] In addition, trains as means of mass transportation were expected to contribute to healthy and flourishing cities. Hence, the railways were seen as modern not only in the nineteenth century, but throughout the inter-war years. Rather than being appreciated for their function as such, they were now appreciated for their functional aesthetic. This

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[512] *Světozor*, 26.20 (17 June 1926), pp. 381–85.
[513] Quoted in Zusi, p. 106.
[514] Friedrich Naumann, 'Die Kunst im Zeitalter der Maschine', *Schweizerische Bauzeitung*, 43.10 (3 September 1904), 112–17 (p. 116); partially quoted in Kern, p. 156.

transformation played a major role in the planning of new railway buildings in inter-war

Czechoslovakia.

New Railway Buildings: Hradec Králové and Uherské Hradiště

Railway buildings have always played a significant role as representations of their locations.

Due to their centrality and high visibility in the urban environment, stations were built as

monumental symbols of power in the nineteenth century. As an 1877 publication put it,

'railway termini and hotels are to the nineteenth century what monasteries and cathedrals

were to the thirteenth century'.[515] These steel, glass and concrete palaces of commerce and

travel certainly displaced churches as the focal points of towns and cities, if not as their

spiritual centres. In Alessia Ferrarini's words, 'railway stations were the "monuments" around

which large modern cities developed, structures that reflected the nature and embodied the

characteristic features of their urban location'.[516] In Prague, this function was assumed by the

main railway station, then named for Emperor Francis Joseph, which underwent extensive

reconstruction from 1901 until 1909 by Josef Fanta (1856–1954). Along with the Municipal

House (*Obecní dům*), completed three years later, the station became the most prominent

public building in the *Art Nouveau* style in Prague.

Especially for large termini, various historicizing styles were employed to make them

appear more representative. At the same time, stations in smaller towns in Austria-Hungary

were frequently constructed according to standardized plans for financial reasons, which

arguably gave them the functional character praised by modernists. However, standardization

also garnered criticism by those who believed that railway stations should be harmoniously

integrated into the landscape. In 1901, Karel Špaček, an architect at Prague's Technical

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[515] *Building News* (1877), quoted in Meeks, p. 90.
[516] Alessia Ferrarini, *Railway Stations: From the Gare de l'Est to Penn Station* (Milan, 2004), p. 5.

University, argued that station buildings should be constructed 'in harmony with the building styles that are common in the local area so that they may become models for simple rural buildings, for it is universally known that near new railways private buildings of the same outward character as the railway buildings will appear soon after their completion'.[517] This idea was pursued on the line between Kassa in Hungary and Oderberg in Austrian Silesia, later one of the most important Czechoslovak lines, where the stations were built in the style of Hungarian aristocratic country houses.[518] Špaček's circular logic – local houses as models for stations in order for them to be models for local houses – unwittingly illustrates the artificiality of so-called vernacular architecture. His line of argument forces the question of what stations were supposed to represent. Was it the central state or local culture? Were they glass-and-steel manifestations of technological progress or brick-and-thatch displays of rural building skill? For whom was this representation intended, locals departing or strangers arriving?

The Ministry of Railways did not give a unified answer to these questions. A number of new railway stations were built after 1918. In terms of style, most were attempts to represent the newness and modernity of Czechoslovakia and thus mirrored the overall trend towards de-Austrianization. The most common style for new railway stations was purist functionalism, as is evidenced by the stations in Kolín, Poděbrady, Náchod, Roudnice nad Labem, Teplice nad Bečvou, Valašské Meziříčí and Jičín.[519] However, no major station in a large town was built in this style, where more subtle references to modernism were preferred. For instance, the station in the former Moravian capital of Olomouc was rebuilt in 1936 in a monumental modernist style. The three main stations in Prague were, of course, most significant in terms of symbolic representation. While they were left architecturally intact, they were given new names to reflect the new relations of political power. The State Railway Station, the city's

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[517] Quoted in Mojmír Krejčiřík, *Česká nádraží: Architektura a stavební vývoj. 1. díl* (Litoměřice, 2003), p. 22.

[518] Mihály Kubinszky, *Bahnhöfe Europas: Ihre Geschichte, Kunst und Technik* (Stuttgart, 1969), pp. 299–300.

[519] Krejčiřík, *Česká nádraží I*, p. 18.

oldest station, became Masaryk Station (which it has been called again since 1990, after it was known as Prague Central [*Praha Střed*] during the socialist period); Franz Josef Station became Wilson Station (now the Central Station); and the North-Western Station, also known as Prague Těšnov, was renamed Denis Station after the French historian and Czechophile Ernest Denis (1849–1921).[520] The nomenclature was also represented in the material space. A large statue of Woodrow Wilson adorned the forecourt of the eponymous station and Masaryk Station featured the president's statue in the governmental (previously imperial) lounge. Material residues of the old order led to complaints by patriotically minded Czechs. As late as 1927, a newspaper protested that the initials 'F. J. I.' of Emperor Francis Joseph still embellished ten decorative hoops beneath the ceiling of the station's main hall. 'The ten gold "Francises" [*Frantíků*] will immediately catch the eye of every foreigner who comes to Prague and gets off the train at Wilson Station', the paper lamented.[521] Notwithstanding these minor imperfections, the national symbolism imposed on railway stations formed part of a successful strategy to Czechoslovakize the country's territory and built environment, a strategy aimed both at citizens and foreign visitors.

Of course, similar strategies were employed elsewhere in the inter-war period. In Ankara, the new capital of republican Turkey, a new station was constructed between 1935 and 1937. In Segah Sak and Inci Baka's words, the station's 'monumental and modern aesthetic represented both the power of the republican ideology and the young Turkish Republic's radical break with the Islamic Ottoman culture'.[522] Although built by a Turkish architect, the style of the station was based on the international modernism that had been made popular in Turkey primarily by German architects in the preceding years. Similarly, the

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[520] For an historical overview of railway stations in Prague, see Kubova. Denis Station reverted to its original name in 1953, but was closed down in 1972 and the building was demolished in 1985.

[521] 'F. J. I. na Wilsonově nádraží', *Český směr*, 11 November 1927, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 3. The exasperated railway ministry replied that it was well aware of the initials and that they would be removed once the hall as a whole was refurbished (12 December 1927).

[522] Segah Sak and Inci Basa, 'The Role of the Train Station in the Image Formation of the Early Republican Ankara', *Journal of Urban History*, 38.4 (2012), 777–802 (p. 779).

most important stations in Japanese-occupied Korea, including that in Seoul in 1925, were built in a style emulating the station in Tokyo. Since Korea was a colonial subject rather than a nationalizing state, the image to be conveyed was different. It linked Seoul into a common, meaningful space that extended from the imperial centre in Tokyo via Korea to Manchuria and beyond. Hong Kal has commented that

> the station displayed various signs which were not merely devices to represent spatial
>
> domination of the imperial power of Japan, but an ordering process which allowed
>
> 'Koreans' to compare and imagine themselves in relation to other national subjectivities.
>
> Beneath the modality of comparison and imagination is the idea that the nation is not
>
> merely based on ethnic connection but cosmopolitan interconnection between different
>
> places and between home and abroad.[523]

Despite the geographical distance between these and the Czechoslovak case, they show remarkable similarities. The paradox between 'national connection' and 'cosmopolitan interconnection' was a particular concern for railway planners in Czechoslovakia. Railway buildings had to adhere to an aesthetic of de-Austrianization, while at the same time representing their city, the nation and their status as a window to the world. The new stations at Hradec Králové in north-eastern Bohemia and Uherské Hradiště in south-eastern Moravia represented ostensibly contradictory narratives of Czechoslovak uniqueness. The former is an example of monumental international architecture not unlike the stations at Ankara and Olomouc, while the latter was built to resemble a Moravian-Slovak farmhouse. Based on a discussion of these two case studies, the following section of this chapter will argue the symbolism of nationalism and cosmopolitanism was not as straightforward as it might seem. Indeed, it became inverted in the Czechoslovak case: the ostensibly national was dismissed as international and the ostensibly international hailed as national.

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[523] Hong Kal, *Aesthetic Construction of Korean Nationalism: Spectacle, Politics and History* (London, 2011), pp. 54–55.

Making the 'Salon of the Republic': Hradec Králové

The station at Hradec Králové was constructed between 1928 and 1936 by the architect Václav

Rejchl (1884–1964). Thanks to a large degree to the efforts of František Ulrich (1859–1939),

who was the town's mayor from 1895 to 1929, Hradec Králové experienced a stronger building

boom than other towns of comparable size in the country. Due to its status as a magnet for

modern architects and artists, it became popularly known as the 'salon of the republic' (*salon*

republiky) in the inter-war period, a term coined by the art historian Karel Herain (1890–1953)

in 1930. Calling it a 'practical school of our local government', Herain presented the town as a

model of modern urban development to be emulated by other cities in Czechoslovakia.

> City representatives from Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia come here to study questions of
>
> regulation, building development, road lay-out, motorized cleaning etc., and never leave
>
> without having been enlightened and encouraged. This beautiful role is a bonus of a kind,
>
> given to honour Hradec Králové. For the central authorities of the state are turning it into
>
> a kind of salon of the republic, where they regularly take distinguished guests and groups.
>
> The city's reputation has deservedly crossed the state border and it ranks among the
>
> pioneers of a new era in Central Europe, if only in its own small way.[524]

The foundation for this development was laid before the First World War. The removal of the

city's medieval fortifications at the end of the nineteenth century created the space necessary

for urban redevelopment. With Ulrich as his patron in the city administration, the 'father of

modern Czech architecture' Jan Kotěra (1871–1923) designed the new building of the

Municipal Museum (built 1909–1912) on the bank of the river Labe (Elbe). The stark building,

which the architectural historian Anthony Alofsin has interpreted as a moment of transition

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[524] Karel Herain, 'Ulrichův Hradec Králové', in *Umění: Sborník pro českou výtvarnou práci* (Prague, 1930), pp. 289–356; quoted in Veronika Singerová, 'Hradec Králové jako „salon republiky": Architektura v rámci kulturní reprezentace' (unpublished master's thesis, Masaryk University Brno, 2010) <http://is.muni.cz/th/109921/ff_m/> [accessed 20 August 2015], p. 11.

from secessionist art deco to functionalism, not only coincided with the end of the Habsburg

Empire, but ushered in a new era in the history of the city.[525]

After the war, Ulrich gave Kotěra's student Josef Gočár almost free rein to create a

modern, integrated urban plan for the city, in the interest of turning it into a showcase of

modern Czechoslovakia. Gočár's urban plan corresponded to functionalist doctrines in his

predilection for clear, straight lines and the use of wide roads and green spaces. Other aspects

were less in tune with the avant-garde, especially the monumentality of many of his

buildings.[526] None the less, the city soon became synonymous with modern construction in the

public discourse. The local newspaper *Osvěta lidu* (The people's enlightenment) repeatedly

ranked it the second city of the country, calling it 'the most well-built city after Prague,

harmonious in its urban plan', and 'the most cultured city after Prague'.[527] While there was

perhaps an amount of local patriotic hubris in such statements, Hradec Králové was widely

regarded as one of the most modern cities in the country.[528] In addition, it could be turned into

a symbol of Czechoslovakia more easily than other large cities in the country due to its relative

ethnic homogeneity. In the census of 1910, some 98.6 per cent of citizens had declared

themselves as Czechs.[529] Although Plzeň, Brno, Ostrava, Bratislava and Košice were also

modernizing rapidly in this period, their large German and Magyar communities made it more

difficult to unequivocally declare this a Czechoslovak achievement.[530]

The urban planning of the city focused on the development of a state-of-the-art

transport infrastructure. In an endeavour to cater for the fledgling car traffic, the architect

Josef Fňouk constructed a functionalist three-storey car garage on the embankment of the

Labe with space for up to three hundred motorcars in 1923.[531] Although attempts to construct

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[525] Alofsin, pp. 90–94.
[526] Nový, p. 243.
[527] *Osvěta lidu* (6 February 1925); quoted in Singerová, p. 20.
[528] Rostislav Švácha, 'Hradec jako vzor', preface to Jakub Potůček, *Hradec Králové: Architektura a urbanismus 1895–2009* (Hradec Králové, 2009), p. 6.
[529] Singerová, p. 18.
[530] For a counter-example, see Koryčánek.
[531] Singerová, pp. 72–73.

a tram network failed, the city developed a dense network of municipal and long-distance bus

services from 1928. It also became a major railway centre in the inter-war period, in large

measure due to Mayor Ulrich's personal interest. In 1920, he reached his goal of turning

Hradec Králové into the seat of a Directorate of State Railways, which he had been pursuing for

over a decade (in February 1911, he had unsuccessfully lobbied with the Austrian Minister of

Railways in Vienna to this end).[532] After it had been temporarily housed in an old army

barracks, a new monumental building of the directorate was constructed by Gočár from 1928

to 1932 in Ulrich Square.[533] The mayor was a member of the Czechoslovak Central Council of

Railways, which, as the main advisory body to the Ministry of Railways, exercised considerable

influence on railway policy.[534] The construction of a new station building was a project

especially dear to Ulrich.[535] In January 1924, an advisory committee consisting of Gočár and

fellow architects Zdeněk Wirth, Alois Kubíček and Bohumil Hübschmann recommended that

'selected bids be invited for the construction of station buildings, so that the city may have a

railway station worthy of the architectural standard of the city's buildings. […] The station

question is very pressing.'[536] The previous station, built in 1854 and expanded in 1894, was

considered inadequate to the town's rising railway traffic.[537]

On 18 October 1927, the Directorate of State Railways in Hradec Králové

commissioned Rejchl to design the building.[538] The new station building formed part of Gočár's

conception of a modern Hradec Králové and fit smoothly into his plan in terms of style (see

Figure 10). Similarly monumental as Gočár's directorate building, it was 152 metres long and

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[532] Ibid., p. 30.

[533] Zdeněk Srp, *Příběh hradeckého nádraží* (Hradec Králové, 2000), p. 30.

[534] NA, 1081, Carton 1: List of attendees of the First General Assembly of the Council held on 30 May 1921 in Prague, p. 3. Since members were appointed for five years, it can be assumed that he was a member until at least 1926. For more information on the Council, see J. Šturz, *Československá ústřední rada železniční. Inventář 1921–1949* (Prague, 1969), available online at <http://badatelna.eu/fond/123/> [accessed 20 August 2015].

[535] František Nevole, 'Slovo úvodní', in *Pamětní list vydaný k otevření nové přijímací budovy ČSD 5. května 1935 v Hradci Králové* (Hradec Králové, 1935), n. pag.

[536] Quoted in Singerová, p. 74.

[537] 'Nová nádražní budova v Hradci Králové', *Železniční revue* (1935), 151–152 (p. 151).

[538] Hradec Králové, State District Archives, Fond Václav Rejchl.

extended over an area of 5,000 square metres.[539] The building could hold 3,000 people at any

one time and was built for up to 17,000 daily passengers.[540] The centrepiece was a tower of 46

metres in the middle of the façade, topped with an electrically operated clock that was

illuminated at night.[541] It was the first station in Czechoslovakia to include a hotel (with

twenty-eight rooms), in addition to other amenities such as a restaurant, a hair salon and even

a dental practice.[542] In the words of the local historian Zdeněk Srp, shared by many

contemporary commentators, the station building was 'at the time the most modern in Central

Europe'.[543]

The grand opening took place on 5 May 1935 (almost a year before the building works

were actually completed, a delay due to a shortage of funds). The reviews of the building were

overwhelmingly positive, although some objected to the size and great cost of nineteen million

Czechoslovak crowns, spent on the building in times of economic austerity. Indeed, the

beginning of the Great Depression caused considerable delays and adjustments during the

construction. In his introduction to an official publication honouring the station's opening, the

State Railways director František Nevole reminded readers not to let petty financial squabbles

spoil their enjoyment of this 'beautiful, monumental and grandiose building'.[544] The event

attracted wide press coverage from throughout the country, which strove to capture the

significance of the occasion. In a long portrait, *Osvěta lidu* marvelled that with this building of

'nationwide significance', Hradec Králové received a station

> adequate to the city's traffic and development and a piece of architecture of monumental
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> character with all the advantages of distinctive modern architecture, which integrates

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[539] Srp, p. 39.
[540] 'Hradec Králové dostává novou nádražní budovu', *Osvěta lidu*, 4 May 1935, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 28.
[541] Singerová, p. 74.
[542] Nová nádražní budova, *Železniční revue*.
[543] Srp, p. 39.
[544] Nevole.

harmoniously into the environment of the contemporary buildings that form the unique

modern character of Hradec Králové and highlight the city's creative energy.[545]

Prager Presse, the German-language mouthpiece of the government, stated that 'the city,

which has been flourishing since the [1918] revolution, has received a worthy new

representative building'.[546] In addition to listing technical details, almost all articles described

the station as a worthy representation of the country's railways and as an emblem of Hradec

Králové's modern character.

The station building – commonly called 'station palace' (*nádražní palác*) by the press[547]

– was presented as a manifestation of the self-confidence of a Czechoslovakia intent on

showing itself and the world its ability to create a nation-state on equal footing with the older

European states. At the same time, in line with Hradec Králové's national symbolism, the

station was celebrated as a specifically Czech achievement. In his introduction to the building,

František Nevole immediately linked Hradec Králové to Czech national history that set it apart

from nationally more ambiguous places in the country. 'Hradec Králové – the loyal bastion of

the Hussite King George [of Poděbrad] – has long had such size and importance that it was

ranked among the most important cities right after Prague.'[548] This grounding of national

history in space is reminiscent of the practice of discursively connecting the routes of new

railway lines in Slovakia to characters from Czechoslovak history, which I have discussed above.

However, the station was linked to the personality cult around President Masaryk to a greater

extent than new railway lines. The main hall of the station featured a bronze bust of the

president, the work of Rusyn sculptor Helena (Olena) Mandičová, who in 1928 had created a

larger-than-life statue of the president for the Ruthenian capital Užhorod.[549] Similarly, cult-like

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[545] Hradec Králové dostává novou nádražní budovu.
[546] 'Der neue Bahnhof in Hradec Králové', *Prager Presse*, 22 March 1935, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 28.
[547] See for example 'Nádražní palác v Hradci dobudován', *Večerní České slovo*, 25 April 1935, in ibid.
[548] Nevole.
[549] The monumental Užhorod statue measured more than seven metres from the bottom of the pedestal
 and adorned the main square of the city until Hungarian troops toppled it in March 1939. See
 Vladimír Jancura, 'Príbeh ženy, ktorej pózoval prezident Masaryk', *Pravda*, 31 January 2011 <
 http://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/169221-pribeh-zeny-ktorej-pozoval-prezident-masaryk/>

worship of Masaryk pervades Nevole's text on the station, which is dedicated to the honour of his eighty-fifth birthday. After opening his text with a quotation in which Masaryk acknowledges the significance of the railways,[550] he writes that 'finally in 1929 the project was approved and building work began – almost on the eve of the great birthday celebrations for the beloved President-Liberator's Eightieth. […] We are completing this great work in the year the founder and supreme leader [*nejvyšší vůdce*] of our state celebrates his eighty-fifth birthday.' After a description of the station's amenities, he returned again to the president:

> May the railway operations under this roof and in the entire republic be always and
> everywhere animated by the incomparable and ever-present example of humble, alert
> and diligent service our president has provided, in order that the station may indeed
> become a school of loyal public service, a school of order, discipline and progress, and so
> that his words, so significant, famous and binding for the railways, may prove true again
> and again: *'I daresay that the railways have raised nations in the same way as schools'*.[551]

Nevole took this quotation from the text of a lecture given by Masaryk in 1898 entitled *Jak pracovat?* (How to work).[552] The lecture discussed his notion of 'drobná práce' (work in small steps) and the way technological modernization had influenced attitudes towards work. Masaryk rejected any distinction between manual labour and scholarly work and then discussed the state of academia in Bohemia, which he compared negatively to the situation in Germany. He singled out accuracy (*přesnost*) as the defining characteristic of modern academic work, a quality that had also made an impact on society as a whole through industrialization. In essence, then, the railways for Masaryk were the main means of popularizing a modern sense of time and space (though not the only one: he also mentions 'modern factories,

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[accessed 20 August 2015].

[550] This unreferenced quotation, said to be from 1921, reads: 'I have seen the significance of the railways in this war, I have seen what a great thing it is to have order in the communication of things and people'. I have been unable to locate its source.

[551] Nevole.

[552] Masaryk, esp. p. 32.

modern industry'). Masaryk shared the common notion that the railways revolutionized time and space.

Although the president was often honoured at railway openings, Nevole's hagiographical worship of Masaryk was rare in its extreme extent and is reminiscent of totalitarian personality cults.[553] It highlights the identification of both the state and the railways with rational modernity, in which 'order, discipline and progress' may be learnt, following Masaryk's example. Hradec Králové thus played a significant role in the national railway discourse, which is also demonstrated by the programme of the opening ceremony. The event commenced with a performance of Bohumil Vendler's *Byli jsme a budem* (We were and we will be), a song that invoked the defiant spirit of the Czechs in their long fight against the Germans.[554] Then the Masaryk sculpture was unveiled, accompanied by the sound of Bedřich Smetana's *Sláva Tobě* (Glory to You). After several speeches by local dignitaries and railway officials, who praised the technical and architectural significance of the station, the ceremony was concluded with a performance of the national anthem by the Nymburk Railway Workers' Choir. Eight thousand people witnessed the event, and newspapers reported that the 'palace' was 'literally packed with visitors' all day. Sunny weather and the decorated houses in the neighbourhood, which sported flags and banners, contributed to the prevailing 'festive mood'.[555]

The new station of Hradec Králové thus proved an overwhelming success and was seen as further proof of the city's modern character. The fact that the new station building

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[553] Andrea Orzoff, 'The Husbandman: Tomáš Masaryk's Leader Cult in Interwar Czechoslovakia', *Austrian History Yearbook*, 39 (2008), 121–37.

[554] The lyrics of the song were written by Josef Václav Sládek and first published in 1892 in the volume *České písně*. The reference to Palacký's notion that Bohemian history is marked by centuries of conflict between Czechs and Germans is clear, as is the image of the Germans as colonizers in a land that rightfully belongs to the Czechs: 'Byli jsme a budem, | jak jsme byli dosud, | ranami a trudem | nezlomí nás osud. | Přes vln burné vzteky | na své české skále | bili jsme se věky, | bít se budem dále! | Prapory jsou zdrány, | krov je hříčkou hromu, | přec jen budem pány | my ve vlastním domu. | Ať se moře pění | v krve proudu rudém, | vzdorni, nezlomeni, | byli jsme a budem!'

[555] 'Nové hradecké nádraží je již v činnosti', *Večerní České slovo*, 6 May 1935, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 28.

symbolized a narrowly national approach to modernization is also corroborated by the German

response. An article published by the newspaper *Abwehr* (Resistance) was respectful of the

technical innovations of 'the most modern railway station in Bohemia'. However, this universal

admiration of modern technology was combined with resentment at the fact that it was

perceived to benefit only Czechs. 'The station building sports extensive lighting equipment and

a tower-like structure with a modern clock. But when will we be able to publish a similar report

about a station in the German part of the country?'[556] Visitors to the city now arrived in a

space whose architecture represented the 'salon of the republic' as a whole. It was very much

considered a national space, and the modernization of Hradec Králové a model to other cities

in the country. The building was repeatedly described as a 'model for our railway stations', just

as the city was a model for others.[557]

It is ironic that a station that was hailed as a Czech national achievement was built in a

style that was essentially international and widespread throughout Europe (and beyond). On

first sight, it would be logical to assume that the building was an example of the cosmopolitan

side of the railway paradox, since, with the exception of the Masaryk bust, there was nothing

particularly Czech about it. However, the building was seen to represent the country due to its

very internationalism, which was equated with modernity. Although the station was modern, it

was clearly not modernist or even functionalist in the sense used by the avant-garde.

Considering his rejection of monuments discussed above, Karel Teige would probably have had

harsh words about the monumental station palace (not to mention its hair salon and dental

practice). Rather than satisfying avant-garde expectations, its monumentality satisfied

mainstream expectations of representing the nation and state. As the Žižka Monument or the

Casa del Fascio mentioned above, the station expressed national distinctiveness through an

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[556] 'Der modernste Bahnhof in Böhmen', *Abwehr*, 5 May 1935. An almost identical article was published by a newspaper from Ústí nad Labem, which replaced the wording 'a station in the German part of the country' with 'Aussig station'. See 'Der modernste Bahnhof in Böhmen', *Aussiger Tagblatt*, 29 April 1935, both in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 28.

[557] 'Nádraží v Hradci Králové – vzor našich nádraží', *Národní střed*, 27 April 1935, in ibid.

essentially international style by connecting to a narrative of modernity. The building's

monumentality may have disagreed with the functionalist tenets of architecture, but like those

buildings, it was a monumental representation of the nation. This, of course, is not an

argument for an ideological proximity between inter-war Czechoslovakia and fascist Italy, but

the language of architectural expression was undoubtedly similar, especially in its emphasis on

monumental representation and clear – and thus hygienic – lines. According to this logic,

Hradec Králové station was modern because it was Czechoslovak, and it was Czechoslovak

because it was modern. In other words, Hradec Králové station became an emblem of

Czechoslovakia because it was an emblem of international modernity.

The Station as Folklore: Uherské Hradiště

The strategy of de-Austrianization used for the station at Uherské Hradiště was radically

different from Hradec Králové. Constructed between 1929 and 1930 by the architect Karel

Dvořák, who was also head of the municipal building department, the station building was

designed to look like a Moravian Slovak farmhouse and was thus an explicit attempt to create

a symbol of Czechness (see Figure 11).[558] The construction of a new station in the town had

already been authorized by the Habsburg Ministry of Railways on 5 October 1915, but had

been halted by the war.[559] The project was resurrected in May 1926, when the Ministry of

Railways decided that the local station was to be 'reconstructed and expanded […], since it

does not satisfy present-day requirements of transport and the economy'.[560] Though a smaller

town, the situation of Uherské Hradiště was comparable to that of Hradec Králové in the

nationalizing discourse of inter-war Czechoslovakia. It was not a modern 'salon of the republic',

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[558] Uherské Hradiště, State District Archives (SOA): František Cejnar et al., *Pamětní kniha královského města Uherského Hradiště* (Uherské Hradiště, 1910–1932), p. 66.

[559] SOA, Fond Archiv města Uherské Hradiště III, 'Výstavba stanice Uh. Hradiště město', Letter from the Austrian representative (*místodržitel*) in Moravia to the Municipal Council of Uherské Hradiště, 12 March 1916.

[560] NA, 813, Carton 465, no. 15002 ('Návrh na rozšíření stanice Uherské Hradiště [plány]').

but Uherské Hradiště held a special place in the national discourse as a symbol of Czech

peasant culture. It was the centre of Moravian Slovakia (*Slovácko*), a region that from the late

nineteenth century had become known for its folklore and intricate national costumes. This

was due mainly to the legacies of the architect Dušan Jurkovič (1868–1947) and the painter

Joža Uprka (1861–1940).

Jurkovič was a Slovak from a family with a long tradition of patriotic activism, who

lived most of his life in Moravia. The Czechoslav Ethnographic Exhibition in Prague of 1895,

which was hugely influential in the development of the Czech national narrative, exhibited

Wallachian and Slovak peasant homesteads Jurkovič had constructed. He had even persuaded

a family from the northern Slovak village of Čičmany to come and live in the houses for the

duration of the exhibition.[561] The exhibition thus presented a sanitized and romanticized

version of peasant life to the urbanites of Prague. It featured peasant handicrafts, costumes

and artefacts of all kinds classified by their regions of origin. One of its highlights was a

recreation of the Ride of Kings (*Jízda králů*), an Easter tradition of Moravian Slovakia.[562] The

folklore of Moravian Slovakia (along with that of Wallachia in north-eastern Moravia) was thus

given centre-stage as a showcase of Czech and Slovak peasant traditions. In Derek Sayer's

words, the 1895 exhibition was 'a high point in [the] representation of Czechness in terms of

the popular [*lidový*]'.[563] It diverted national ideology away from the academic pursuits of

linguistic codification and national historiography, and connected it to the soil and its

peasantry. Propelled to prominence by the success of the exhibition, Jurkovič made his name

through a number of buildings he constructed before the First World War in eastern Moravia.

Using motifs from vernacular architecture, he strove to create a Czechoslovak version of the

Heimatstil common in parts of Austria and Germany. He combined features he had observed in

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[561] Christopher Long, '"The Works of Our People:" Dušan Jurkovič and the Slovak Folk Art Revival', *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, 12.1 (Fall-Winter 2004–05), 2–29 (p. 6).

[562] Sayer, *Coasts*, pp. 124–27. See also Marta Filipová, 'Peasants on Display: The Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition of 1895', *Journal of Design History*, 24.1 (2011), 15–36.

[563] Sayer, *Coasts*, p. 124.

both Moravian and Slovak vernacular architecture and often used intricate decoration. In 1901

he designed a complex of spa buildings in Luhačovice (Bad Luhatschowitz), a town

neighbouring Uherské Hradiště at the end of the railway line, which, in the words of one of his

biographers, 'imparted a Slav character' on the town.[564] Jurkovič's interest in vernacular

architecture was largely an academic pursuit he developed during his studies at the

Staatsgewerbeschule in Vienna, and he defined as his goal 'not to reproduce the originals, but

to discern their underlying "natural" principles and to use these as a basis for a new

architecture'.[565] This new architecture was explicitly national. Looking back in 1929, he wrote

that 'I did not want my studies to lead to imitation, I did not want to think and create

according to the English model, but only in our own, Czechoslovak spirit. I consider it natural

today to write "Czechoslovak" – I was working in Moravia, Bohemia and Slovakia at the time,

and I was at home in all these places long before the revolution.'[566] Considering his life and

work, Jurkovič presented himself as a proto-Czechoslovak with some justification. In effect, he

strove to create a Czechoslovak national style before Czechoslovakia.

Uprka was not immediately involved in the 1895 exhibition, but as Marta Filipová has

pointed out, the influence of his folkloric style was palpable.[567] He shared an interest in

peasant culture with Jurkovič and the two often collaborated. In 1904, Jurkovič designed

Uprka's studio in the village of Hroznová Lhota, near Uprka's hometown of Kněždub in

Moravian Slovakia. He primarily used rural motifs taken from the region in his work. Two years

after the 1895 exhibition, Uprka depicted the Ride of Kings in one of his most famous

paintings. He was an active participant of various folklore festivals that took place regularly in

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[564] Dana Bořutová-Debnárová, *Dušan Samo Jurkovič: Osobnosť a dielo* (Bratislava, 1993), p. 221. See also Long, pp. 3, 13.

[565] Long, p. 9.

[566] See Jurkovič's own introduction to František Žákavec, *Dílo Dušana Jurkoviče: Kus dějin československé architektury* (Prague, 1929), p. xiv.

[567] Filipová singles out the design of the main advertising poster as influenced by Uprka's style. The three peasant figures depicted on it were intended to symbolize the spiritual union of Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia: a Bohemian woman sporting a folk costume from the Chodsko region, a Wallachian Moravian and a Slovak in a fur coat. See Filipová, p. 27.

the region, and in 1939 became chairman of the new organization *Národopisná Morava*

(Ethnographic Moravia).[568] His plans (derided as 'megalomaniac' in a recent book by the

ethnographer Josef Jančář) to build a research institute and museum devoted to the popular

traditions of Moravian Slovakia in Hroznová Lhota were quashed by the war.[569] None the less,

Uprka became instrumental in the popularization of the folklore tradition ascribed to the

region, particularly in the inter-war period.[570]

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Moravian Slovakia had thus become a

symbol of 'authentic' peasant culture in the national discourse. Like Hradec Králové, the town

was ethnically homogeneous – the census of 1921 counted 5,105 Czechoslovaks, but only 157

Germans, 331 Jews, and 89 foreigners and others.[571] But the station building could hardly have

been more different in style from the one at Hradec Králové. It closely followed Jurkovič's

vernacular style, sporting intricate decorations, alcoves, turrets and a large central balcony

crowned by an oversized dormer, which lent it the appearance of a Moravian farmhouse. The

building was decorated with motifs and idiomatic expressions in the local Czech dialect by

Rozka Falešníková (1900–1983), a well-known local painter.[572] Falešníková's art was inspired by

Uprka's. She had been taught by her brother-in-law Antoš Frolka (1877–1935), who had grown

up in the same town as Uprka, where the older artist had had a strong influence on his artistic

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[568] Josef Jančář, *Proměny Slovácka: Lidová kultura – od feudálního poddanství k postmodernímu společenství* (Strážnice, 2011), p. 70. For instance, he designed the poster for the 'Národopisné svátky Moravy' (Ethnographic Festival of Moravia) held in Brno from 28 to 29 June 1925.

[569] Ibid., p. 100.

[570] Even before, Uprka greatly contributed to the internationalization of Moravian folklore. Cathleen M. Giustino mentions that when Auguste Rodin visited Bohemia and Moravia in May 1902, he stopped by Uprka's house, who 'threw a party for Rodin that featured folk music, dress, and dancing'. See Cathleen M. Giustino, 'Rodin in Prague: Modern Art, Cultural Diplomacy, and National Display', *Slavic Review*, 69.3 (2010), 591–619 (p. 615).

[571] Uherské Hradiště, State District Archives (SOA): Cejnar, p. 20.

[572] In 1927, Falešníková had already designed the ornamentation of the new railway station at the Uherský Brod, a town 14 kilometres from Uherské Hradiště. The station was built in a folk style similar to that of its larger neighbour. See Hana Grošová, 'Rozka Falešníková', *Tasov – oficiální internetové stránky obce*, 9 June 2008 <http://www.tasov-ho.cz/rozka-falesnikova/d-7290/p1=3111> [accessed 20 August 2015].

approach. [573] Its decor placed the building not in a discourse of modernity as in Hradec Králové,
but rather attempted to connect it to this folkloristic tradition.

The station building was officially opened to the public on 12 October 1930 by the
then Minister of Railways, Rudolf Mlčoch (1880–1948).[574] By that time, the Jurkovičian folk
style had all but gone out of fashion. Jurkovič himself had shifted his allegiance to a simpler
and more modernist style after the First World War. The station at Uherské Hradiště hence
represented a state-sponsored attempt to reconnect to his national style, which, in the artistic
atmosphere of the time, was a reactionary gesture. In Stanislav Kostka Neumann's futurist
manifesto of 1913 quoted above, he called for an end to 'folklore [and] Moravian-Slovak
embroidery'.[575] Unsurprisingly, Neumann detested the station building, which he saw while on
a journey through Czechoslovakia for the newspaper *Lidové noviny* in 1933. While he regarded
the town of Uherské Hradiště as 'relatively progressive', 'the station in its "peasant style" is
ugly like an oversized pavilion at a shopkeepers' convention. The functional absurdity of glued-
on individuality screams from such buildings.'[576]

By then, this erstwhile avant-garde view had become the general public sentiment.
František Cejnar, the official town chronicler of Uherské Hradiště, wrote that 'supposedly the
character of the building was deliberately adapted to the character of the local region, but it
did not meet with approval from the citizenry'.[577] The folksy quaintness of the building was
panned by the press. *Naše Slovácko* (Our Moravian Slovakia), the local organ of the National

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[573] See 'Falešníková Rozka', *Městská knihovna Hodonín: Regionální osobnosti*
   <http://ctemeradi.webnode.cz/regionalni-osobnosti/falesnikova-rozka/> and Hana Grošová,
   'Antoš Frolka – lidový umělec', *Tasov – oficiální internetové stránky obce*, 9 June 2008
   <http://www.tasov-ho.cz/antos-frolka/d-7291> [both accessed 20 August 2015].
[574] SOA, Archiv města Uherské Hradiště III, 'Výstavba stanice Uh. Hradiště město', Invitation to the
   opening ceremony.
[575] Neumann, *Open Windows*, p. 416.
[576] Stanislav K. Neumann, *Československá cesta: Deník cesty kolem republiky od 28. dubna do 28. října
   1933. Část první: Opožděné jaro* (Prague, 1934), p. 13.
[577] Cejnar, p. 329.

Socialist Party, expressed exasperation at the fact that the building combined modern

technology with folklore, which the author deemed incompatible.

> Railway stations are places with a purpose: organizing the possibilities of modern traffic.
> Apart from factories they are the only tangible exclamations of the contemporary age, an
> age of functional construction. Station buildings must correspond to their character and
> be functional.

In the writer's view, the decoration of the building hid its function rather than giving it its due.

He rejected it not only because it did not, in his opinion, fulfil the requirements of a modern

railway station, but he did not even acknowledge its aim of representing local folklore

tradition. Indeed, he wrote that 'they gave us an architectural mongrel'.

> It appears that [the station] fully complies with the term international building, since it
> contains all European architectural cults. In principle this is a fine Tyrolean excursion pub,
> finished in a bulky Germanic style. Then they stuck a Moravian Slovak porch on it. The
> gables of the roof are somewhat reminiscent of village houses in Bohemia. The pinnacle of
> bad taste, of course, is the Moravian Slovak decoration on this monster.

It is ironic that despite its earnest attempt at invoking Moravian folk architecture, the building

was criticized as an international melange of styles. It was far from being accepted as a

national style, as Jurkovič's buildings still were. The journalist characterized the station as

anachronistic, a 'sin on the aesthetics of our day' and analogous to painting 'flowers onto the

mud-guard of your car'. The article thus suggested that decoration of a certain type was

incompatible with modern life exemplified by cars and trains.

> The unfortunate positioning of the left-luggage room and the waiting-rooms for first and
> second class create various nooks and crannies, which people spit into. Hurried travellers
> will break their noses against these breeding-grounds of germs. […] They wanted to give
> us a railway station that would speak for the region and make clear that Hradiště is the
> metropolis of Moravian Slovakia. And they gave us an architectural prostitute, who covers

her lack of grace with colourful, worn-out rags, *pêle-mêle* thrown together and adjusted in

re-sewn and chaotically indifferent tatters of foreign fabrics – together with Moravian

Slovak folk art, which this kind of thing degrades more than anything else.[578]

The cramped alleys of Old Prague were for Teige what the nooks and crannies of Uherské

Hradiště station are in this article: a disease that can only be cured by the hygiene of

modernity. The article combined a curious architectural xenophobia represented by the

building's 'foreign fabrics' with the medical narrative that associated hygiene with modernity

and disease with the past. The way in which the article depicts the station building as an

unclean, debased whore is indicative of how widespread this rhetoric of modernity and

hygiene was in the Czech discourse of the time.

In *Die Himmelfahrt der Galgentoni* (Gallows Toni's ascension to heaven), a play by the

Prague German writer Egon Erwin Kisch (1885–1948), a girl from the country is forced into

prostitution after coming to the city; it served as the source for one of the first Czechoslovak

feature films with sound, which was released as *Tonka Šibenice* in February 1930, just eight

months before the station opened.[579] If the Hradec Králové station was the dapper, popular

city boy, then the Uherské Hradiště station was represented here as Tonka – a naïve rural girl

who had to turn to prostitution to make ends meet.

Although it used less crass language, the national press also turned the station into an

object of ridicule. A satire published in the daily *České slovo* mocked the incompatibility, in the

author's eyes, of modern technology and folklore.

We have received further details about the story that Uh[erské] Hradiště will have a

freshly painted Moravian Slovak farmhouse instead of a railway station: The stationmaster

will not welcome trains in his uniform, but rather in the colourful costume of a swain. [The

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[578] Kolofot (pseud.), 'Naše nové nádraží', *Naše Slovácko*, 11 September 1930, p. 2.

[579] 'Tonka Šibenice – první český zvukový hraný film', *Česká televize*, 27 February 2010
<http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/kultura/82372-tonka-sibenice-prvni-cesky-zvukovy-hrany-film/> [accessed 20 August 2015].

design company] *Artěl* will supply distinctive locomotives. Before every departure, the

stationmaster and the train driver shall sing [the folk song] 'Akú som si frajurenku

zamiloval' and the station staff will dance [the folk dance] 'Vrcaj dievča' on the platform.

The Ministry of Transport [sic] itself has been the first to support this original idea, for it

knows that this is the best way to divert attention from the latest hike in ticket prices.[580]

The humour of the piece derives from the juxtaposition of two different worlds, that of festive

and colourful folklore festivals with the calculated, organized and rational world of railways.

The railways are invoked as symbols of modernity in all these texts, even though Moravian

Slovak tradition was a much more recent phenomenon in its folkloristic form, with the first

festivals held in the late nineteenth century.[581] It is a fine example of an 'invented tradition'

used for the purposes of nationalism.[582] None the less, even when it was not depicted as

diseased and backward, folklore was clearly seen as the realm of a fairy-tale world with little

bearing on modern reality. This point was also made by a similarly tongue-in-cheek

commentary in *Prager Presse*. Again, it demonstrated the prevailing view that railway stations

should, above all, correspond to their function.

> Since reading about this [the construction of the station], I have been assaulted by
>
> horrible dreams at night. I travel through Czechoslovakia in fast trains that speed back and
>
> forth through the country in order to inspect the new stations built in 1930, and, woe!,
>
> judge them. The Prague station shines in glorious baroque, while that of Karlstein is clad in
>
> Gothic darkness. In Pilsen one half is formed of beer kegs, the other of Škoda cars. What
>
> terrific buildings! […] Awakening from the dream, I marvel at the fact that people still
>
> haven't realized that a piece of embroidery or an adornment on a shirt is not suited as
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> decoration on a façade, or that a farmhouse cannot serve as a model for a railway station.

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[580] 'Uherské Hradiště', *Kvítko z čertovy zahrádky: Bezplatná příloha nedělního Českého slova*, no date [7 September 1930], p. 6.

[581] Jančář, pp. 98–114.

[582] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in *The Invention of Tradition*, Canto edn, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 1–14.

I hope that the aspiration will be for a modern, i.e. utilitarian, approach to station

design.[583]

The station building of Uherské Hradiště lagged behind the aesthetic taste of the

public, its vernacularism was seen as a backward gesture. It referred to a national narrative in

vogue at the turn of the century, not in 1930. Even more significantly, it did not fulfil public

conceptions of the modern. The press reactions to both stations indicate that railways were

identified as a marker of modernity. In order to live up to this reputation, then, railway

buildings had to fulfil modern building standards of simple functionality and avoid unnecessary

decoration. Even if avant-garde dogmas of strict functionalism had not reached the

mainstream, inter-war Czechoslovakia had certainly internalized Adolf Loos's rejection of

ornamentation in architecture. In his 1908 polemic *Ornament and Crime*, the Brno native Loos

gave as one example of the unmodern 'the Slovak peasant woman who embroiders her

lace'.[584] Even after he moved to Vienna, Loos kept many ties with his native country, and was

said to have spent more time in a railway carriage on the line from Vienna via Prague to Paris

than in his home.[585] Considering the functional reputation of the railway, it is not an altogether

unreasonable conjecture that his familiarity with the bare and undecorated railway

infrastructure might have influenced his critique of architectural ornamentation to a similar

extent as did his knowledge of Slovak embroidery.

The divergent stylistic approaches employed by the Ministry of Railways in the two

buildings I have discussed represent two ostensibly contradictory narratives of Czechoslovak

distinctiveness: one quaint and folkloristic, the other modern and monumental. They

represented two popular, but different narratives of what it meant to be Czech. The design of

railway stations in inter-war Czechoslovakia reflected popular notions of modernity. The Czech

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[583] J. Pečírka, '"Bahnhöfe im Volksstil": Sehenswürdige Geschmacklosigkeiten', *Prager Presse*, 19 September 1930, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 6.

[584] Adolf Loos, 'Ornament and Crime', in *Programmes and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, ed. by Ulrich Conrads, trans. by Michael Bullock (London, 1970), pp. 19–24 (p. 24).

[585] Nový, p. 174.

avant-garde around Karel Teige regarded trains as modern because of their social function of providing mass transport and therefore ensuring the health of towns and cities. At the same time, railway structures were seen as aesthetic paragons, since their simplicity reflected the principle of modernism that form should equal function. This was not just the attitude of the avant-garde, but became widespread in the public discourse. Since modernity was regarded to be the essence of the Czechoslovak state and nation, the international style used at Hradec Králové provided the most adequate representation of the nation.

Paradoxically, the folkloristic Uherské Hradiště station, which aspired to be national architecture, was criticized for being too international, while the Hradec Králové building aspired to be international and was praised for being national. The stations between the national and the cosmopolitan were ambivalent and had much to do with what was accepted as modern. Of course, such popular perceptions of what was modern and thus representative of the nation remained fluid. This is best demonstrated by the fact that Uherské Hradiště station was named the most beautiful railway station of the Czech Republic of 2011.[586] The two stations represented conflicting images of Czechoslovak nationhood, but in the end, they both contributed to shaping the discourse of modernity and to the de-Austrianization of the Bohemian and Moravian landscape.

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[586] 'Nejkrásnějším nádražím v Česku pro rok 2011 je Uherské Hradiště', *iDnes.cz Cestování*, 17 June 2011 <http://cestovani.idnes.cz/nejkrasnejsim-nadrazim-v-cesku-pro-rok-2011-je-uherske-hradiste-ptv-/po-cesku.aspx?c=A110617_101430_igcechy_tom> [accessed 20 August 2015]. There is also a plaque confirming the award attached to the station building.

Chapter 5
The Heart of Europe and its Periphery
Travel Writing and Railway Propaganda

Two Czechoslovak films were released in the early 1930s that conveyed similar narratives of modernity as the stations buildings in Hradec Králové and Uherské Hradiště. *Bezúčelná procházka* (Aimless walk, 1930), a short film by Alexandr Hackenschmied (1907–2004), is generally regarded as the foundation of Czech experimental cinema.[587] Hackenschmied was associated with the avant-garde group *Devětsil* and worked for the marketing department of the Baťa shoe company. He changed his name to Alexander Hammid after emigrating to the United States following the outbreak of the Second World War. Set in Prague, his film follows a *flâneur* in an industrial setting rather than showcasing the historic centre of the city. Like the station in Hradec Králové, it highlights the urban modernity of Czechoslovakia. It thus stands in sharp contrast to Karel Plicka's (1894–1987) *Zem spieva* (The earth sings, 1932). This documentary charts a year in the life of the eastern Slovak peasantry. Although ostensibly a cinematic ethnography, the abundance of frolicking children in folk costume and religious festivals portrayed in the film serves to romanticize the harsh reality of the peasants' lives. As in the Uherské Hradiště station, Czechoslovakia is represented here as a nation of peasants, an image than was more mythical than real. And like the station, the film was scorned at home. It did, however, garner considerable praise abroad: together with three other Czechoslovak films, it was awarded a joint directing prize at the Venice Film Festival of 1934.[588] The domestic reception of *Zem spieva* has become more positive in recent decades, and it is now considered Plicka's masterpiece.

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[587] Peter Hames, *Czech and Slovak Cinema: Theme and Tradition* (Edinburgh, 2009), p. 145; Natascha Drubek, '"Bezúčelná procházka"/"Aimless Walk" (1930): Alexander Hackenschmied's "Film Study" of a Tram Ride to the Outskirts of Prague-Libeň', *Bohemia*, 52.1 (2012), 76–107 (pp. 76–77).

[588] Hames, p. 112. See also 'Zem spieva', *Česko-slovenská filmová databáze* <http://www.csfd.cz/film/7263-zem-spieva/> [accessed 21 August 2015].

Chapter 5
Travel Writing and Railway Propaganda

Despite the differing imagery and motifs of the two films, a number of elements connects them – not least Alexandr Hackenschmied himself, who worked on *Zem spieva* as an editor. The fact that he was central to film projects that emphasized both the modern and the folkloristic character of Czechoslovakia serves as a telling illustration of the fluidity of the inter-war avant-garde. Furthermore, despite their incongruous content, the railway plays a significant role in both films. *Bezúčelná procházka*, is, in fact, less about a walk than about a tram ride. It follows a man as he travels on a tram through the centre of Prague to the industrial suburb of Libeň. The first part of the eight-minute short is dominated by rails and high-speed shots from the inside of the tram. The only recognizable structure of central Prague is Denis Station, the city's third large railway terminus (which has since been demolished). In the second half of the film, the protagonist roams around Libeň. Shots of the river Vltava alternate with images of factories and dockyards. In one scene, the smoke of the *flâneur*'s cigarette as he lies idly by the river appears to mock the smoke belching out of factory chimneys behind him. The film's ending depicts two versions of the same person: one catches the tram back to town and the other remains by the river. The film's quick cuts and shots from a moving tram emphasize the city's speed and the urbanity of the surroundings. Natascha Drubek has written that 'the tram seems to express most aptly the concept of a modern capital'.[589] Indeed, the film uses the tram both as a cinematic instrument and as an actor in its own right to celebrate Prague's modern urbanity.[590] It thus draws on the city symphony films in the tradition of Walther Ruttmann's 1927 documentary *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (Berlin: Symphony of a great city) and Dziga Vertov's 1929 *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* (Man with a movie camera), which also make use of cameras mounted on vehicles and give centre stage to trams, cars and other road vehicles.

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[589] Drubek, p. 96.

[590] The title of a version of the film broadcast by German television was rendered as 'Spaziergang ins Blaue', which is a mistranslation due to the expression's misplaced overtones of Sunday picnics in the countryside. It can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOnRAHj_gf8> [accessed 21 August 2015].

Despite its bucolic theme, *Zem spieva* also begins in a city centre, in this case that of

Bratislava. The heavy orchestral score make the buildings in the cramped inner city appear

oppressive; the rushed pedestrians appear stifled by its Gothic weight. After a cut to images of

the Danube the tone becomes lighter. All of a sudden, the camera is on a moving train that

crosses a Danube bridge, passes factories and towns and gradually leaves the signs of

civilization behind until it reaches the Tatra Mountains, the main setting of the film. It then

depicts the life of the Slovak peasantry, paying particular attention to religious festivals and

folk art. The train thus metaphorically transports the viewer from their cinema seat to the

countryside. While in *Bezúčelná procházka* the tram signifies the urbanity of Prague, in *Zem*

spieva the railway links city and countryside. Without them having to leave their seat, the train

from Bratislava to the Tatras takes the cinema audience on a tour of Czechoslovak national

culture. The relationship between the two films reflects the contradictory nature of the

railways as simultaneously modern and old, urban and rural, international and national.

Bezúčelná procházka portrays an urban modernity that is international in its essence. The

film's setting is Prague, but the country's capital plays to role of anonymous urbanity, and the

film depicts an experience common to all great cities. Due to its ethnographic approach, *Zem*

spieva, by contrast, presents an explicitly Slovak reality. It harks back to Loos's Slovak peasant

woman and her embroidery, while *Bezúčelná procházka* showcases the unadorned modernity

of trams and industry.

This tension between old and new was at the heart of travel narratives in inter-war

Czechoslovakia. In the following, I interpret the term 'travel narrative' broadly, including not

just traditional travel writing, but also films like the ones introduced above, propaganda

materials published by the government and various other agencies, and fictionalized accounts

of travel in Czechoslovakia. The railways figured prominently in these accounts not only

because they were still the primary means of transport in the inter-war period, but also

because they were used to convey meaning within the old-new divide. How was travel on the

railways represented in the public realm in inter-war Czechoslovakia? Were the railways and

the country they went through depicted as modern or old, urban or rural, national or

international? The responses given to these questions in travel accounts give an indication of

how the nation and its space was understood in inter-war Czechoslovakia.

'Get to Know your Homeland': National Travel in Czechoslovakia

Modern tourism grew out of the railways.[591] From the mid-nineteenth century, trains in the

Habsburg Empire connected spa towns in Bohemia, alpine pastures in Tyrol and fishing villages

in Dalmatia to the urban centres, and thus turned them into tourist destinations for the

growing middle classes. Tourism and the railways remained closely linked until after the

Second World War, when cars gradually began overtaking trains in many European countries

as the main means of transport. It is unsurprising, then, that the Austrian Ministry of Railways

was the most active of all imperial government bodies in disseminating brochures and posters

in order to win new customers for trips to spas and other places of interest.[592] None the less,

before 1918 travel for pleasure was to a large degree promoted by nationalist non-

governmental organizations, which were quick to acknowledge the benefit of tourism for the

national cause. The historian Milan Hlavačka has argued that 'travel for pleasure, and to find

out how far the homeland stretched, played a great role in national awareness in the second

half of the nineteenth century'.[593] Guidebooks and other tourist materials were highly

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[591] An elaboration of this point for the British case can be found in Jack Simmons, 'Railways, Hotels, and Tourism in Great Britain 1839–1914', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19.2 (1984), 201–22. On the history of travel and tourism in East-Central Europe, see Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (eds), *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism* (Ithaca, 2006); and Peter Stachel and Martina Thomsen (eds), *Zwischen Exotik und Vertrautem: Zum Tourismus in der Habsburgermonarchie und ihren Nachfolgestaaten* (Bielefeld, 2014). For the Bohemian Lands in particular, see Martin Pelc, *Umění putovat: Dějiny německých turistických spolků v českých zemích* (Brno, 2009); Jan Štemberk, *Fenomén cestovního ruchu: Možnost a limity cestovního ruchu v meziválečném Československu* (Pelhřimov, 2009); Hlavačka, *Cestování v éře dostavníků*; Jan Rychlík, *Cestování do ciziny v habsburské monarchii a v Československu: Pasová, vízová a vystěhovalecká politika 1848–1989* (Prague, 2007); and Kristýna Ulmanová, *Cestování před sto lety aneb všude dobře, doma nejlépe: Rozvoj českého turismu v kontextu světových výstav ve druhé polovině devatenáctého století* (Prague, 2011).
[592] Jan Štemberk, 'Organizační zabezpečení podpory cestovního ruchu v meziválečné ČSR', *Cestování včera a dnes*, 4.1 (May 2007), 63–71 (p. 63).
[593] Milan Hlavačka, 'Cestování v českých zemích v ranném novověku a v 18. a 19. století', *Cestování včera*

influential in promoting a national view of their destinations, despite – or due to – their apparent detached objectivity. By highlighting 'what ought to be seen' instead of merely listing what 'could be seen', the *Baedeker* series of guidebooks of Germany, for instance, presented a selection of the sights that showed the national community as a tangible entity that could be visited and experienced in its authenticity.[594]

The Kingdom of Hungary in the second half of the nineteenth century followed not only the aim of promoting the Hungarianness of the country for tourists, but regarded it as the role of tourism to actively contribute to the Magyarization of the multilingual borderlands. The tourist industry, which was spearheaded by the *Magyar Turista-Egyesület* (Hungarian tourist association), promoted destinations such as the High Tatras, the spa towns, and Lake Balaton.[595] Many of these destinations were located in the country's Slovak-speaking northern periphery, including the High Tatras and some of the most famous spas: Pöstyén (Piešťany), Trencsénteplic (Trenčianske Teplice), Bártfa (Bardejov) and Szliács (Sliač). As such, they were re-branded as Czechoslovak destinations after 1918.[596] A programmatic article by the schoolteacher Aladár Vágó on the aims of tourism in Hungary that appeared in 1906 illustrates its nationalist trajectory:

> In our country tourism is not just a sport, but a national duty and a mark of patriotism. Our
>
> ancestors settled the plains, ceding the mountains to various [other] nationalities. […] The
>
> conquest of these nationalities is [a task] awaiting the tourists. […] Every mountain slope,

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a dnes, 4.3 (September 2007), 33–41 (pp. 35–36).

[594] Rudy Koshar, '"What Ought to Be Seen": Tourists' Guidebooks and National Identities in Modern Germany and Europe', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33.3 (1998), 323–40 (pp. 330–33). See also Rudy Koshar, *German Travel Cultures* (Oxford, 2000), esp. pp. 19–27. For the Swiss case, see Judith Schueler, 'Traveling towards the "Mountain that has Borne a State": The Swiss Gotthard Railways', in *Networking Europe: Transnational Infrastructures and the Shaping of Europe, 1850–2000*, ed. by Erik van der Vleuten and Arne Kaijser (Sagamore Beach, 2006), pp. 71–96.

[595] Alexander Vari, 'From Friends of Nature to Tourist-Soldiers: Nation Building and Tourism in Hungary, 1873–1914', in *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, ed. by Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Ithaca, 2006), pp. 64–81 (esp. pp. 70–71).

[596] Márta Jusztin, '„Utazgassunk hazánk földjén!" A belföldi turizmus problémái a két világháború között Magyarországon', *Korall*, 26 (2006), 185–206 (pp. 185–91).

valley, and gorge constitutes a road for the tourist to penetrate [these areas], making it possible for the nationalities to become slowly acquainted with Magyar culture.[597]

This programme encountered little opposition among the Slovaks of Upper Hungary, but it also failed in its aim of 'marriage between the Alföld [the primarily Hungarian-speaking lowlands] and the Felföld [the primarily Slovak-speaking highlands]'.[598]

In the Bohemian Lands, by contrast, tourism became an important factor in the national conflict between Czechs and Germans. Especially in the border regions, Czech and German nationalist organizations such as the *Deutscher Böhmerwaldbund* or the *Národní jednota pošumavská* competed to turn what they considered their linguistic areas into destinations for their own tourists.[599] Pieter Judson has argued that the German guidebooks to the area 'sought to define for their audience what it meant to be German' in a multilingual environment. Thus, German Bohemia was imagined as a geographical entity separate from what, somewhat tautologically, might be called Czech Bohemia. The guidebook *Durch Deutschböhmen* (Roaming German Bohemia, 1906), which detailed routes that allowed nationally conscious travellers to avoid straying to the wrong side of the so-called *Sprachgrenze* (language border), not only offered a travel itinerary, but contributed to the very creation of a nationalist geography.[600] This geography included destinations that were off the beaten Bohemian tourist path of Prague and spa towns such as Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary) and Marienbad (Mariánské Lázně). For instance, German nationalists attempted to turn the passion play in in the southern Bohemian village of Höritz (Hořice) into a 'Bohemian Oberammergau', capable of attracting Germans from Bavaria and Austria and turning the village into a showcase of German Bohemia.[601] Tourist associations were therefore not

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[597] Aladár Vágó, 'A turistaság és a magyarság', *Turista Közlöny*, 13.1 (1906), pp. 3–4; quoted in Vari, p. 75 (translation adjusted).

[598] Jenő Rodniczky, 'A turistaságról', *Turisták Lapja*, 2.3 (1890), p. 71. Quoted in Vari, p. 70.

[599] Hlavačka, *Cestování v českých zemích*, p. 37. A detailed discussion of German (and many Czech) tourist associations in the Bohemian Lands before 1918 can be found in Pelc, *Umění putovat*, pp. 49–84.

[600] Judson, Every German visitor, pp. 151–52.

[601] Pieter M. Judson, 'The Bohemian Oberammergau: Nationalist Tourism in the Austrian Empire', in

apolitical promoters of the beauties of the countryside, but operated with clear ideological

motifs. It is not surprising that the public soon regarded them as 'guardians of the national

border'.[602]

The Czech efforts at nationalist tourism were consolidated into a single organization in

June 1888, when activists from the *Národní jednota severočeská* founded the *Klub českých

turistů* (Club of Czech hikers, KČT).[603] Over the next decades, the KČT built hostels and shelters,

created paths and signs for hikers, published maps and guides, and organized group tours in an

effort to promote tourism for the benefit of the Czech nation.[604] In his *Turistický katechismus*

(The tourist's catechism), Jiří Guth (1861–1943), the Club's chairman from 1915 to 1926,

wrote: 'Tourist associations and unions have great national significance, especially those

located at national boundaries and in mixed regions. They bring Czech visitors to these regions

and thus strengthen the Czech element.'[605] In 1938 Karel Nigrín (1904–1982), who became a

central figure in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Edvard Beneš's government-in-exile during

the Second World War, was even more explicit when he outlined the benefit of tourism to the

Czech nation.[606] The similarities to Vágó's article on Hungarian national tourism are striking.

The urban tourist has brought a love for nature and for the individuality of the people

[*lidovému svérázu*] from the rural homeland. National humiliation has made him turn his

gaze to the glorious past and made him want to discover the sights of history. The highest

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Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe, ed. by Pieter M. Judson and Marsha L. Rozenblit
(New York, 2005), pp. 89–106. This is not the same Hořice as the one mentioned above in
conjunction with the Jireš affair, which was in the north-east of Bohemia and known as Horschitz
in German.

[602] Pelc, *Umění putovat*, p. 207. See also Judson, *Guardians*, pp. 141–76.

[603] Josef Brož, 'Klub českých turistů v letech 1888–1918' in *Padesát let Klubu československých turistů
1888–1838* (Prague, 1938), pp. 32–43 (p. 32). It was renamed *Klub československých turistů* in
1920.

[604] Ibid. and Josef Brož, 'Klub československých turistů 1918–1938', in *Padesát let Klubu československých
turistů 1888–1838* (Prague, 1938), pp. 44–51. See also Ulmanová, p. 100.

[605] Jiří Jaroslav Guth-Jarkovský, *Turistika – Turistický katechismus* (Prague, 2003 [1917]), p. 116; quoted in
Pelc, *Umění putovat*, p. 216.

[606] On Nigrín, see the biographical sketch in Petr Blažek, Tomáš Bursík, Josef Halla and Jiří Hoppe (eds),
Aby se to už neopakovalo: Katalog k výstavě o dějinách sdružení bývalých politických vězňů K-231
(Prague, 2008), p. 40; available online at <http://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/k231/katalog-k231.pdf>
[accessed 21 August 2015].

mountains, those guardians of our borders, are located in a denationalized environment [*v prostředí odnárodněném*]. This has challenged Czech tourists to build their shelters in places where foreign chauvinism had rejected them. Our national self-esteem was injured by the neglect of the Czech language on home soil. The touristic and national (and these two expressions are inseparable for us) worker [Jan] Buchar expressed our effort for all of us: 'Our language has to conquer mountain huts and be used in them.'

    Wherever the Czech tourist was unwanted, he built his huts. Their tenants automatically become guardians and pioneers of our element in a minority environment. I have to add that our tourism was never guided by chauvinism, but by defence and necessity. Priceless work for the cause of the entire nation was achieved through tourism. Only tourism has turned our borderland, which is so naturally enveloped by a crown of mountains, into Czech property – at least in part, if it was impossible in its entirety. It is difficult to capture in words and numbers the way the never-ending stream of Czech tourists strengthened those side-branches of the Czech tribe that were withering ethnically and economically.[607]

Even taking into account that the rising tensions between Czechoslovakia and Nazi Germany in the late 1930s might have coloured Nigrín's statement, it still illustrates the overtly nationalist roots of tourism in the Bohemian Lands. Similar to what Vágó did for pre-war Hungary, Nigrín presents the mountainous border area as the main destination of a Czech tourism with the explicit aim of Czechizing an area that, in his view, had been conquered by the Germans. For Nigrín, Czech national expansion – expressed in military terminology such as 'defence' and 'conquer' – was an explicit aim of tourism. The KČT was more than a hiking club, it was one of the most active proponents of the Czechization of the ethnically mixed Bohemian borderlands.

    While most of the Club's energies went into promoting domestic tourism, it also organized trips abroad. In August 1889, less than a year after it was founded, it offered a tour to the Paris World Fair.[608] Even abroad, many Czech tourists regarded it as their task to support

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[607] Karel Nigrín, 'Turistika a naše národní věc', in *Padesát let Klubu československých turistů 1888–1838* (Prague, 1938), pp. 24–25 (p. 24).
[608] Ulmanová, pp. 100–03.

the national cause. As Kristýna Ulmanová has shown in her book on tourists at the World Fairs

of the nineteenth century, Czech travellers demonstratively avoided German and spoke Czech

in public. They thus asserted their nationality in a foreign environment, imagining themselves

pitted in a battle against the geographical and linguistic ignorance of Western Europeans and

Americans, who often held them to be Magyars or Gypsies.[609]

The occupation of Slovakia by Czechoslovak forces in the course of 1919 changed the

realities of national tourism by creating a new homeland to be explored by Czech tourists. Calls

for the promotion of Czech tourism in Slovakia emerged quickly. 'Only about half of Slovakia is

mountainous', wrote the left-wing journalist Vojtěch Lev in 1919. 'But those mountainous

areas are so beautiful and are blessed with so many natural sights that it would be enough for

them to become something like the Yellowstone Park in America.'[610] Lev repeatedly called on

his compatriots: 'Let's go to Slovakia, let's travel through the country and, above all, let's meet

its people.'[611] The first Czech guidebooks to Slovakia and Ruthenia after the creation of

Czechoslovakia serve as illustrations that the nationalist aim of tourism lived on after the

foundation of Czechoslovakia. For instance, Jozef Tancer has argued that the new guides to

Bratislava Czechoslovakized the city. The long history of the predominantly German-speaking

city within the Kingdom of Hungary was bracketed out in favour of its (historically dubious)

role in the medieval Greater Moravian Empire, as well as 'new Bratislava'.[612] As one guidebook

put it, 'the old Pressburg has evidently been disappearing and a new, representative Bratislava,

daughter of the venerable Brecisburk, is growing miraculously in its place'.[613] The new capital

of Slovakia was thus linked to the town's name as it appeared in the earliest records. Like in

Dvorský's geography, references to the Greater Moravia were a recurrent motif in Czech travel

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[609] Ibid., pp. 59–70.

[610] Lev, *Neznáma pevnina*, p. 12.

[611] Ibid., p. 32.

[612] Jozef Tancer, 'Die Geburt Bratislavas auf den Seiten der lokalen Stadtführer 1918–1945', in *Zwischen Exotik und Vertrautem: Zum Tourismus in der Habsburgermonarchie und ihren Nachfolgestaaten*, ed. by Peter Stachel and Martina Thomsen (Bielefeld, 2014), pp. 221–32.

[613] Vojtech Ondrouch, *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska* (Bratislava, 1936), n. pag.; quoted in Tancer, p. 226.

writing, and the medieval empire was almost universally invoked as the original Czechoslovak state, while the thousand-year period of Hungarian rule was glossed over.[614]

Another guidebook that connects tourist destinations to an imagined Czechoslovak past is Karel Václav Adámek's two-volume *Slovenskem* (Through Slovakia, 1921–22). Like Lev, Adámek considered it a national duty of Czechs and Slovaks to get to know each other by travelling.

> Before we can properly combine our energies to work for the nation, we have to get to
>
> know each other. Tourism has a great role to play here. We must travel through Slovakia,
>
> get to know its people and their life. We also hope that there will be many visits from
>
> Slovakia to our other territories, so that they may get to know our economic and cultural
>
> conditions.[615]

The book depicts Slovakia as the vessel of the Slovak nation and the location of Slovak history. The fact that the territory had belonged to Hungary is mentioned only within a narrative of liberation of the Slovaks from the Magyar yoke. Hence, like the speeches given at the opening ceremonies of new railway lines, Adámek repeatedly linked Slovak and Czech national heroes to the landscape he described. He reminded his readers that in the 1810s the Czech national historian František Palacký (1798–1876) received his schooling at the Protestant *lyceum* of 'Bratislava [sic]'. He described the village of Brezová as the birthplace of Milan Rastislav Štefánik, who had been killed in an aeroplane accident only two years before the book was published.

Furthermore, Adámek portrayed the whole of Slovakia as ethnically Slovak and neglected to mention the significant Magyar minority. Of Komárno (Komárom) in the south of the country, he said that 'its name confirms its Slav origin', and ignored the fact that the city's inhabitants were overwhelmingly Hungarian-speaking and opposed to the Czechoslovak

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[614] See e.g. J. Král, *Guide to the Czechoslovak Republic* (Prague, 1928), p. 31.
[615] Karel Václav Adámek, *Slovenskem: Díl I* (Prague, 1921), p. 11.

occupation of the city.[616] Even national heroes of Hungary were (Czecho)slovakized in this manner.

> The great-grandfather of Ludvík Košut [Lajos Kossuth] was a Slovak citizen in Turóc
>
> County. Ludvík's cousin [sic, should be uncle] Jiří Košut [György Kossuth/Juraj Košút] was a
>
> fervent Slovak nationalist who wrote against the Magyars. […] The Košut case is not
>
> unique. The Rákóczy family was of Czechoslovak origin. Their forefather was called Bogat,
>
> and his son Radovan. […] There is much Slav blood in the Magyar nobility.[617]

Adámek is certainly right to point out that much of the nobility in Upper Hungary was of Slav descent. But the conflict between György and Lajos Kossuth was one of political attitudes rather than fixed, sanguineous identity at a time when one's nationality was still a matter of personal preference. Adámek is even more anachronistic in ascribing a 'Czechoslovak' identity to the Rákóczis. The book thus certainly fulfilled its promise: it guides the patriotic reader through a thoroughly Slovak landscape from which all traces of Hungarianness, past and present, were erased. Martin Pelc's conclusion regarding the Bohemian Lands can therefore also be applied to Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia: 'On paper and in the minds of the hikers, the landscape was completely segregated and was subjected to a comprehensive ethnicization.'[618] Despite its undeniable nationalism, Adámek's book also illustrates how novel the idea of a unified Czechoslovakia still was even for its supporters. As most civil servants in the first years of the republic, Adámek still differentiated clearly between us (Czechs) and them (Slovaks). For example, he wrote that 'Nitra is for Slovakia what Vyšehrad is for us'.[619] Even Czech nationalists did not turn into Czechoslovaks automatically.

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[616] Ibid., p. 74. Regarding the town, see Éva Kovács, 'Die Kluft zwischen Longue Durée und Microhistoire: Das Beispiel Komárom/Komárno/Komorn in der Zwischenkriegszeit', *Bohemia*, 44.2 (2003), 448–58 (p. 454).

[617] Adámek, p. 136.

[618] Martin Pelc, 'Orte der Selbstpositionierung: Deutsche und tschechische Wandervereine in den böhmischen Ländern vor 1945', in *Zwischen Exotik und Vertrautem: Zum Tourismus in der Habsburgermonarchie und ihren Nachfolgestaaten*, ed. by Peter Stachel and Martina Thomsen (Bielefeld, 2014), pp. 233–42 (p. 241).

[619] Adámek, p. 64.

Chapter 5
Travel Writing and Railway Propaganda

The propagation of domestic tourism was not only a matter of nationalist associations, but was soon taken over by the state itself. The 'Czechoslovak Travel and Transport Agency' Čedok (*Československá cestovní a dopravní kancelář*) and Orbis, the publishing house of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, both published propaganda material.[620] Both organizations were closely aligned to the government; Andrea Orzoff considers Orbis 'a propaganda agency, producing and selling myth to defend the Czechoslovak state'.[621] The Ministry of Railways also played a key role in promoting Czechoslovakia and thus continued, like in many other fields, the work done by the pre-war Austrian ministry. The ministry's domestic campaign evolved around the slogan 'Don't travel abroad. Get to know your homeland!' (*Nejezděte/Nejezdejte do ciziny. Poznejte svou vlast!*), which was first used in a 1932 campaign to promote Carpathian Ruthenia as a tourist destination.[622] The slogan was disseminated throughout the 1930s through posters, timetables, guidebooks, and other materials. The patriotic tradition of domestic tourism was thus embraced by the Ministry of Railways. But the slogan also repeatedly became an object of criticism for patriotic Czechs. A cartoon published in the right-wing paper *Národní sjednocení* (National unification) in 1935 juxtaposed it with a view of a Czech family gazing at the shop windows in what appears to be central Prague (see Figure 12). Nearly all the advertising signs are in English or French ('Shoe Club', 'English Tailor', 'Grillroom', 'Joaillier', 'Chez Parisienne', as well as the puzzling signs 'American Dentist' and 'Indian Bisquit [sic]'). The caption has the family contemplating: 'That poster is right. Why travel abroad when we can get to know the same thing here?'[623] The cartoon makes use of a xenophobic type of anti-globalization that is still perceptible today. A slightly different point was made by an article that appeared in 1933. A journalist in Karlovy Vary spotted a poster with the slogan next to another poster advertising trains to Vienna, France and Poland. 'Such propaganda', the paper scoffed, 'exasperates the thinking man and will make us a laughing stock among

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[620] Štemberk, *Fenomén cestovního ruchu*, p. 63.

[621] Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, p. 4.

[622] Jan Štemberk, 'Vývojové trendy v cestovním ruchu v meziválečné ČSR', *Cestování včera a dnes*, 4.2 (June 2007), 62–64 (p. 62).

[623] *Národní Sjednocení*, 11 July 1935, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 31.

foreigners'.[624] The railway paradox of simultaneous nationalism and cosmopolitanism

continued to assert itself.

In addition to advertising, the ministry invested considerable resources in facilitating

travel for all sections of the Czechoslovak population. From 1927, the ČSD ran special

excursion trains that targeted the working class. Until 1937, 482 such trips were organized.[625]

The stated aim of the tours was to make Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia accessible to Czechs

and the majority of special trains departed for the country's eastern half.[626] Tickets were

heavily subsidized; for instance, a ticket for a group journey to Carpathian Ruthenia in

September 1938 only cost 159 Czechoslovak crowns.[627] Despite the impact of the Great

Depression and the growing competition from motorcars and buses, the railways remained the

main means of transport in inter-war Czechoslovakia. In May 1935 the newspapers reported

that every Czechoslovak used the railway sixteen times a year on average, and attributed this

to the rise in weekend excursions. This figure continued to rise, and peaked at nineteen

journeys on average in 1937 (it fell to eighteen in 1938).[628] The trips were mostly short: the

average Czechoslovak covered a total distance of 25 kilometres on each trip, which added up

to 400 kilometres a year.[629] The railways remained mainly a practical means of transport used

to travel to the workplace and to visit friends and family. At the same time, measures such as

the ČSD advertising campaign or the excursion trains enticed Czechoslovaks to venture further

afield and discover the country that had been created. The railways not only constituted the

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[624] 'Podivná propaganda', *Národní politika*, 1 August 1933, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 16.

[625] František Hampejs, 'Trochu statistiky', in *20 let výletních vlaků ČSD 1927–1947*, ed. by K. Votický (Prague, n. d. [1947]), n. pag.

[626] J. Slezák, 'Dvacet let ve službách veřejnosti: Historický náčrtek', in *20 let výletních vlaků ČSD 1927–1947*, ed. by K. Votický (Prague, n. d. [1947]), n. pag.

[627] Ibid.

[628] *Přepravní statistika za rok 1937* (Prague, 1938), p. 191, and *Přepravní statistika býv. Československých státních drah za rok 1938* (Prague, 1939), p. 234.

[629] See articles from May 1935 in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 28, e.g. 'ČSD zavedou motorové rychlíky', *Expres*, 3 May 1935, or 'Jeder Tschechoslowake fährt jährlich 16mal mit der Eisenbahn', *Grenzbote*, 4 May 1935.

physical infrastructure necessary for Czechoslovakia to grow together after 1918, but also facilitated travel of Czechs to Slovakia and Ruthenia and *vice versa*.

Nationalism thus undoubtedly played an important role in the development of the Ministry of Railway's policy, but it is important to keep in mind that even a nationalist tradition like tourism built on international networks. It is telling that the Hungarian State Railways used a poster in 1930 with a slogan almost identical to the Czechoslovak: 'Let's travel in our homeland!' (*Utazgassunk hazánk földjén!*).[630] The Czechoslovak railway ministry's advertising strategy, as well, was influenced by foreign models. Already in 1920, it had requested from the Czechoslovak Delegation in Washington 'examples in pictures and words of the railway advertising of American railway companies that would provide interesting impulses for railway advertising in Czechoslovakia'.[631] The slogan 'Get to know your homeland' certainly had echoes of the 'See America First' campaign in the United States. Developed in the early years of the twentieth century by the Great Northern Railway (which ran between St. Paul and Seattle along the United States' northern border), the extensive campaign's main aim was to boost visitor numbers to the Glacier National Park in northern Montana, which had been opened in 1910.[632] Transnational links facilitated nationalist tourism.

'The Heart of Europe': International Tourism in Czechoslovakia

At the same time, international links also served another purpose: to attract foreign visitors to the country. Much has been written about the relationship between tourism and nationalism, but the international aspect of travel has been largely neglected in the historiography on East-Central Europe.[633] This is perhaps due to the banality of the point that tourism was not only an

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[630] Jusztin, p. 185.

[631] NA, 813, Carton 5, no. 976 ('Dotazy, železniční informace pro americké vyslanectví'): Letter from Ministry of Railways to the Czechoslovak Delegation in the United States, 22 July 1920.

[632] Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880–1940* (Washington, DC, 2002), pp. 93–129.

[633] An exception to this are the chapters in *Touring Beyond the Nation: A Transnational Approach to*

instrument of nationalists, but also reflected the rise of European-wide networks of communication. These networks were often approached from a national standpoint, as in the case of the Czech tourists in Paris anxious to avoid being identified as Germans, Magyars or Roma. Even if it operated with categories invented by nationalism, these networks contributed to the rise of a cosmopolitanism that offered an alternative perspective to the national. Mass international tourism developed in the inter-war years on the premise that foreign countries featured places worth visiting (which were thus turned into destinations) that were easily accessible through an international transport network based on the railways. Just as the nationalist vision of tourism did, international tourism created a new geography of Europe based on railway lines, nodes and destinations. In other words, the nationalist and international uses of tourism were two sides of the same coin. They represent an extension of the paradox of the railways, which were simultaneously seen as a tool of national unification and international solidarity. Tourism was one of the ways in which inter-war Czechoslovakia attempted to bridge the apparent contradiction between internal nation-building and external cosmopolitanism.

The idea that Czechs were an inherently democratic people formed a pillar of the national myth. After 1918 it was applied to Czechoslovakia as a whole by the propaganda machine around Masaryk and Beneš. Andrea Orzoff has noted that 'the Czechs, now the leading nationality within the multi-ethnic Czechoslovak state, continued to be depicted as a tolerant, prosperous, cosmopolitan people at the heart of Europe, embodying Europe's proudest ideals, the quintessential liberal inhabitants of an ideal civil sphere'.[634] The promotion of this myth of cosmopolitanism abroad was the flip side of the creation of a unitary state within the country. A large number of publications promoted this image of Czechoslovakia. Čedok published an English-language illustrated monthly travel magazine from the late 1920s, simply entitled *Czechoslovakia*. Every issue featured a full-page overview of 'The Most

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European Tourism History, ed. by Eric G. E. Zuelow (Farnham, 2011).
[634] Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, p. 11.

Convenient Railway Connections between Prague and the Principal Cities in Europe'.[635] The

publication was distributed through travel agencies in Europe and North America, as well as

Čedok's own branch offices in London, Paris, Berlin and Budapest. Its focus was on reportage-

style, atmospheric articles regarding travel destinations in Czechoslovakia, often written by

scholars and other experts. For instance, Karel Dvořák, the architect of the Uherské Hradiště

station building, contributed a piece on Moravian Slovakia.[636] *Czechoslovakia* not just

promoted travel destinations, but also the myth of the state. For instance, the Comenius

expert Rudolf Jordán Vonka (1877–1964) published a hagiographical article on 'Komenský

(Comenius) and Masaryk' that featured page-filling photographs of both national heroes.[637]

In addition to periodicals, Čedok also published travel guides to the country. Jiří Král

(1893–1975), a lecturer in geography at the universities of Prague and Bratislava, published his

Guide to the Czechoslovak Republic in 1928, which claimed to be the 'first Guide [sic] to the

Czechoslovak Republic in the English language'.[638] Král's academic research centred on the

geography of Carpathian Ruthenia, on which he also contributed a number of articles to

Čedok's *Czechoslovakia*.[639] He advised foreign tourists to purchase a season ticket for the

railways, noting that 'railway traffic is very brisk, although the present net of railways, laid

down before the war, with consideration for the centres of that time, Wien and Budapest, is

now unsatisfactory to a large extent'.[640] Starting in the capital, the guide offered itineraries

through Czechoslovakia that always followed the railway lines. The description of every route

was preceded by railway information such as the distance and the time travellers could expect

to spend on the train. In the guide, the railways were the network that made the country

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[635] For instance in *Czechoslovakia: A Monthly*, 3 (1928), p. 139.
[636] Karel Dvořák, 'Moravian Slovakia (Moravské Slovácko)', in ibid., pp. 85–89.
[637] R. J. Vonka, 'Komenský (Comenius) and Masaryk', in ibid., pp. 109–15.
[638] Král, *Guide*, p. 5.
[639] On Král, see Jiří Martínek, 'Čeští vědci na Slovensku: Geografický ústav Univerzity Komenského', *Klaudyán*, 7.1–2 (2010), 22–28 (p. 24).
[640] Král, *Guide*, p. 13, 28–29.

accessible, offering a pre-ordered system of routes. Places not served by the railway were not presented as destinations and had to be sought out by intrepid travellers themselves.

This geography of railway accessibility was made even clearer in the international guides published by the Ministry of Railways. Especially in the late 1920s and the 1930s, the ministry released guides in several languages that aimed to draw visitors from the whole of Europe and further afield. Often richly illustrated, most were translations of texts by the writer and translator Emerich Čech (1870–1951) and the cartographer and geographer Josef Bělohlav (1882–1935).[641] The title of Bělohlav's guide to the country, *Československo: Obrazový průvodce po tratích československých státních drah* (published in English as *Illustrated Guide to the Czechoslovak State Railway Lines*), illustrates that the tourist's Czechoslovakia was equated with the parts of the country accessible by train. It saw wide distribution and was published in English, German, French, Hungarian, Serbian, Polish and even Esperanto translations.[642] The guides on the Czechoslovak spa towns and the High Tatras also were also published in several languages. In addition to the obligatory English, German and French, the Ministry's guidebook to the spas was aimed at the Polish, Serbian, Italian and Swedish market; the guidebook to the

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[641] In addition to the works mentioned below, these included Emerich Čech, *From Bohemian Switzerland Southwards by Train: Illustrated Guide with 40 Photographs and a Map* (Prague, 1924); Emerich Čech, *By Express from the Forests of Šumava to the Tatra Mountains: Illustrated Guide with 26 Photographs and a Map* (Prague, 1924), in the same year in French as *En Express des Forêts de Šumava aux Monts Tatra*; Emerich Čech, *Des Monts du Krkonoše jusqu'à la Vallée du Považí par le Train* (Prague, 1924), in 1932 in Dutch as *Per Trein van het Reuzengebergte naar het Waagdal*; Emerich Čech, *Railways of the Czechoslovak State: A Series of Photographic Views from the Train Window* (Prague, n.d.); *La Tchécoslovaquie: Beautés du Pays et Choses d'Intérêt* (Prague, 1930 and 1932); *Visitéz la Tchécoslovaquie* (Prague, 1931); B. Pračka, *The Moravian-Silesian Bezkydy Mountains* (Prague, 1935); Robert Burian and Josef Pietsch, *North Slovakia and Subcarpathian Russia* (Prague, 1932), in the same year in German as *Die nördliche Slovakei und Karpathenrussland* and in French as *La Slovaquie septentrionale et la Russie Subcarpathique*; Jiří Král, *Les Monts des Géants* (Prague, 1932); the bilingual editions by Jan Kamenický, *Krkonoše/The Giant Mountains* and *Krkonoše/Das Riesengebirge* (both Prague, 1935); and Jaroslav Brož, *Czechoslovakia* (Prague, 1935), in the same year in German as *Tschechoslowakei*, in French as *Tchécoslovaquie*, and in Dutch as *Tsjechoslowakije*.

[642] Josef Bělohlav, *Československo: Obrazový průvodce po tratích čsl. stát. drah* (Prague, 1933), in the same year in English as *Illustrated Guide to the Czechoslovak State Railway Lines*, in German as *Čechoslovakei: Illustrierter Führer auf den Strecken der čechoslovakischen Staatsbahnen*, in French as *Tchécoslovaquie: Guide Illustré des Lignes des Chemins de Fer Tchécoslovaques de l'État*, in Hungarian as *Csehszlovákia: Képes Kalauz a Csehszlovák Államvasutak Utasai számára*, in Polish as *Czechosłowacja: Illustrowany przewodnik po linjach czechosłowackich kolei państwowych*, in Serbian as *Čehoslovačka: Ilustrovani vodič po prugama čehoslovačkih državnih železnica*, and in Esperanto as *Ĉeĥoslovakio: Ilustrita Gvidlibro tra Linioj de Ĉeĥoslovakaj Ŝtataj Fervojoj*.

Tatras at the Polish, Hungarian and Romanian.[643] Despite this flurry of publications, the

average length of the sojourn of foreign visitors in Czechoslovakia was only around two days in

the 1930s; Czechoslovakia was, after all, in the centre of the Europe's transportation network

and many travellers only used it to pass through.[644] But the number of foreign visitors

increased steadily in the inter-war period.[645] This was also due to financial incentives. The

Czechoslovak State Railways offered a range of fare reductions to visitors from abroad who

bought a return ticket, which were generally not available to domestic tourists. The reductions

varied considerably year by year, but were generous. Return tickets to Bohemian spa towns

were sold at a discount of fifty per cent. From 1933, this discount was made available to all

foreign visitors regardless of destination if they stayed for a minimum of six days.[646] Despite

the efforts to promote the country as a whole, tourists continued to flock mainly to traditional

destinations that had already been popular before the First World War: the Bohemian spa

towns, Prague and the High Tatras.

The vision of Czechoslovakia promoted by the Ministry of Railways was often not

reciprocated by the destinations. Karlovy Vary and Mariánské Lázně remained overwhelmingly

German-speaking throughout the inter-war period and attempted to draw from their pre-war

status as meeting points of the German-speaking European *haute société*. From some of their

brochures, the only way prospective visitors could learn that these towns were now in

Czechoslovakia was from the address.[647] Germans and Austrians made up 60 per cent of

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[643] Josef Bělohlav, *Visit Czechoslovak Spas* (Prague, 1934), in the same year in German as *Besuchet die čechoslovakischen Kurorte*, in French as *Visitez les Villes d'Eaux Tchécoslovaques*, in Serbian as *Posetite čehoslovačke banje*, in Polish as *Przybywajcie do uzdrowisk czechosłowackich*, in Italian as *Visitate le Stazioni Indrominerali Cecoslovacche*, and in Swedish as *Besök de Tjeckoslovakia Badorterna*; Josef Bělohlav, *The High Tatras* (Prague, 1932), in the same year in German as *Die Hohe Tatra*, in Hungarian as *A Magas Tátra*, in Romanian as *Tatra Mare*, in Polish as *Tatry Wysokie*, and in French in 1934 as *Les Hautes Tatras*.

[644] 'Cizinci se v republice zdržují velmi krátce', *Národní střed*, 22 May 1935, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 28.

[645] Štemberk, *Fenomén*, p. 200.

[646] Jan Vopršal, 'Československé železnice a turistika', in *Padesát let Klubu československých turistů 1888–1838* (Prague, 1938), pp. 152–53 (p. 152). A variety of other discounts was also available, see Štermberk, *Fenomén*, pp. 120–24; and 'Die 66prozentige Fahrpreisermäßigung für Ausländer', *Prager Presse*, 14 May 1935, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 28.

[647] Štemberk, *Fenomén*, p. 63.

foreign tourists in inter-war Czechoslovakia and the travel guides published by the Ministry of Railways and Čedok had to contend with significant competition.[648] Most German-language travel guides to Prague presented the town as a site of German history and paid little attention to new urban developments.[649] In Slovakia, the situation was not much different: like before the war, the High Tatras and Slovak spas were marketed at and visited mainly by Magyars from the lowlands.[650]

In this context, a journalist of the Social Democrats' organ *Právo lidu* (The people's right) reflected the general mood when he asked: 'What good is the purposeful work of our railway ministry when it remains isolated?'[651] This did not only refer to counter-propaganda. It was repeatedly argued that the Czechoslovaks' attitude to foreigners undermined the country's own promotion. Railway workers were seen to have a special responsibility as the first and last representatives of Czechoslovakia foreigners would encounter on their journey. The railwayman (and, in some cases, railwaywoman) was 'the business card the foreigner will scrutinize and according to which he will judge what expect from the trip'.[652] In 1934 Bělohlav contributed to a booklet that explained to ČSD employees how to deal with foreign passengers. It included a railway-themed phrasebook in several languages, which, for instance, instructed employees always to provide foreigners with station names written on a piece of paper in the nominative case, in order to avoid any confusion that could arise from the case endings that are attached to all nouns in Czech.[653] Even though this might be regarded simply as an instance of customer service, it illustrates the extent to which the government tried to convey an attitude of cosmopolitanism on the railways.

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[648] Ibid., p. 200.

[649] Martina Thomsen, '„Historisches Prag" versus „modernes Prag": Kontroverse Pragbilder in deutschen und tschechischen Reiseführern 1918-1945', in *Praha–Prag 1900–1945: Literaturstadt zweier Sprachen*, ed. by Peter Becher and Anna Knechtel (Passau, 2010), pp. 229–47.

[650] Štemberk, *Fenomén*, p. 202.

[651] 'Také propaganda pro Československo', *Právo lidu*, 30 July 1936, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 55.

[652] A. Brtoun, 'Na prahu turistické sezony', *Zprávy ČSD*, 2 (1938), 7–9 (p. 8).

[653] Hanuš Entner and Josef Bělohlav, *Cizinec na ČSD* (Prague, 1934).

However, the Czechoslovak public discourse on tourism was often more nationalist than cosmopolitan. Czechoslovaks, a 1936 article in *Lidové noviny* demanded, needed to be prouder of their heritage: 'often we approach foreigners too ethereally and underappreciate the value of our traditions (such as our potato dumplings, which the Germans proudly sold as a Bavarian speciality at the Winter Olympics).'[654] Considering the similarity of Bohemian and Bavarian potato dumplings, this point was undoubtedly coloured by a good pinch of culinary chauvinism. It also illustrates that it was precisely around the Olympics of 1936 in Berlin and Garmisch-Partenkirchen that tourism became an intensively discussed topic in the Czechoslovak public discourse, due both to the increased number of foreign tourists who strayed from the Olympic host to neighbouring Czechoslovakia and the increasingly aggressive rhetoric of Nazi Germany. Hence, the tourist propaganda of the Czechoslovak state was by no means universally accepted either within the country or abroad. Nationalist rhetoric repeatedly got in the way of the cosmopolitanism the Ministry of Railways and other bodies attempted to convey. However, the geography of accessibility ensured by the railways and promoted by the ministry was uncontroversial; trains remained the primary mode of transport even for the wealthiest visitors. As I will discuss in the following section, the railway network came to signify more than mere accessibility in the ministry's propaganda.

All Railway Lines Lead to Prague: Tradition and Modernity in *Mezinárodní spoje ČSR*

More than by any other campaign, the rhetoric of Czechoslovak cosmopolitanism was put forward by the flagship publication of the Ministry of Railways, an expensively produced coffee-table volume of the international connections offered by the Czechoslovak State Railways. Five quadrilingual editions were published between 1930 and 1938 in Czech,

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[654] 'Podíl motorismu na cizineckém ruchu', *Lidové noviny*, 18 July 1936, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 55.

German, French and English.[655] The *Prager Presse* described the aim of the publication: 'to

draw the attention of foreigners to Czechoslovakia, the beauties of its cities and landscapes,

spas and industry and to attract new visitors to this state, which has hitherto remained

undiscovered by international tourism'.[656] The ministry originally planned to print a relatively

modest number of 4,000 copies, which were to be distributed mainly to travel agencies

outside the country. When it was decided to place copies of the book in all international

carriages running through Czechoslovakia, the print run was increased substantially to

22,000.[657] The publication thus saw an extensive dissemination within Czechoslovakia and

abroad. More than 15,000 copies of the 1930 edition were distributed among the railway

directorates throughout Czechoslovakia and placed in international carriages. The remaining

copies were sent to travel agencies, ocean liner companies, hotels in the Czechoslovak spa

towns and many foreign railway companies. While the majority of copies were circulated in

European states (especially in neighbouring countries, France and the UK), the ministry also

targeted potential tourists further afield. 700 copies were sent to the official ČSD agency on

New York City's Fifth Avenue, and from there distributed among travel agencies throughout

the United States. Other recipients included, for example, the Japan Tourist Bureau in Tokyo,

the Australian Travel Service in Melbourne, the Japanese colonial railways in Korea and all

Czechoslovak diplomatic missions throughout the world.[658] The print run of the 1931 and 1932

editions fell to around 15,000 and 10,500, respectively, due to funding problems caused by the

Great Depression.[659] None the less, considering its worldwide distribution, it is unlikely that

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[655] *Mezinárodní spoje ČSR – Internationale Verbindungen ČSR – Services Internationaux ČSR – International Services ČSR*, 5 vols (Prague, 1930–1932, 1937–1938).

[656] 'Die internationalen Eisenbahnverbindungen der Tschechoslowakei', *Prager Presse*, 13 July 1930, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 6.

[657] NA, 813, Carton 1539, no. 47103 ('Ph.Dr. Josef Bělohlav. Mezinárodní propagační jízdní řád Č.S.D.'): Draft agreement of the Ministry of Railways with Josef Bělohlav, 30 October 1929, and in the same carton, no. 56141 ('Mezinárodní jízdní řád'): Internal memo and draft letter to Josef Bělohlav, 25 February 1930.

[658] See the lists in NA, 813, Carton 1539, no. 27522 ('Mezinárodní jízdní řád 1930/31. Expedice.').

[659] See NA, 813, Carton 1539, no. 23026 ('Mezinárodní spoje Č.S.R. Zpráva pro věstník ministerstva železnic.') for the details for 1931 and in the same carton, no. 28428 ('Z úř. podnětu: Mezinárodní spoje Č.S.R. Expedice.') for 1932.

there was a more powerful tool of promoting Czechoslovakia abroad than *Mezinárodní spoje.*

And not just foreigners got to know Czechoslovakia's geography by way of these guides: old

copies were given to schools at home for use as teaching aides.[660]

The books were designed to be more than a collection of train timetables. Expensively

produced on high-quality paper, they were richly illustrated and featured texts introducing

Czechoslovakia, its railways and its sights to domestic and foreign travellers. In addition, they

sported extensive advertising sections where other state and private services were promoted,

from the Czechoslovak State Airlines to Baťa shoes. Indeed, as the ministry stressed, the books

were not only intended support tourism, but they were also designed to 'introduce foreigners

to the developed trade and state-of-the-art industry of Czechoslovakia'.[661] The advertisements

provided the ministry with enough revenue to pay for the publication and even make a

profit.[662]

The books' centrepiece was a range of maps designed by Josef Bělohlav, who had first

approached the ministry with the idea for the project. In addition to three main double-page

spreads that showed the railway networks of Europe as a whole, of Central Europe and of

Czechoslovakia, many small map inserts in the timetable section of the books located

individual routes within the European geography. The widest angle was provided by a

schematic plan of all direct through carriages to Czechoslovakia (see Figure 13). Prague, circled

with a thick black line, represented the centre of a network that spread to the edges of

continental Europe like a spider-web. In 1937, the map demonstrated, travellers could travel

on direct trains to Czechoslovakia from places as far afield as Paris, Calais and Amsterdam in

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[660] NA, 813, Carton 1539, no. 33638 ('Stažení publikace „Mezinárodní spoje Č.S.R."'): Correspondence between the Ministry of Railways and the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment, September 1933.

[661] NA, 813, Carton 1539, no. 47103 ('Mezinárodní jízdní řád'): Draft letter by the Ministry of Railways to potential advertisers, 4 December 1929.

[662] NA, 813, Carton 1539, no. 56141 ('Mezinárodní jízdní řád'): Internal memo and draft letter to Josef Bělohlav, 25 February 1930. The text triumphantly announces that 'it is clear this large-scale promotion will not cost the Ministry of Railways a penny, but instead it will make a net profit of *c.* Kč 100,000'.

the west, Berlin and Warsaw in the north, Lwów and Bucharest in the east and Sofia, Istanbul,

Athens, Split and Rome in the south-east and south.[663] The map showed the territories of

Czechoslovakia more accessible by train than ever before (or, it might be assumed, thereafter).

The two other fold-out maps included indirect connections, as well. Since countries and

borders were shown, they combined more geographic elements with a still highly schematic

view of Europe that represented Czechoslovakia as the centre of a European railway system,

and Prague as the centre of the Czechoslovak network (see Figures 14 and 15).[664] The

timetables in the books showed not only the departures and arrivals of all international trains

that passed through Czechoslovakia, but also high-quality photographs of sights and small

maps of the routes in question. The Czechoslovak sections of those routes were additionally

represented in diagrams, which showed the railway as a straight line and also represented

crossing railway lines and topographical features. Hence, from various perspectives, the wealth

of maps and diagrams in the books presented Czechoslovakia as the centre of Europe and the

crossroads of its railway system.

Indeed, the notion of Czechoslovakia as a crossroads of Europe pervaded the

accompanying texts in *Mezinárodní spoje*. One of the introductions to the 1937 edition

characterizes Czechoslovakia as 'Europe in a Nutshell', locating it at the centre of European

routes of transport: 'Through its position – it lies nearly in the heart of Europe – and its shape –

an elongated formation stretching from west to east – Czechoslovakia is predestined to

remain, as a geographic whole, the connecting link between west and east, north and

south.'[665] In the following volume, intended to be valid until May 1939, Czechoslovakia was

again described as 'a country of crossroads'.

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[663] Josef Bělohlav, 'Železniční mapa „Přímé vozy s Č. S. R.', in *Mezinárodní spoje ČSR – Internationale Verbindungen ČSR – Services Internationaux ČSR – International Services ČSR: 22.V.1937– 14.V.1938* (Prague, 1937), inset between pp. 80 and 81.

[664] Josef Bělohlav, 'Železniční mapa Evropy', in ibid., inset between pp. 26 and 27; and Josef Bělohlav, 'Železniční mapa Č. S. R.' in ibid., inset between pp. 64 and 65.

[665] Ibid., p. 11. Unless otherwise noted, I quote from the original English translations printed in the books.

It cannot be otherwise in a country lying at the very centre of a continent. From time

immemorial all ideological movements and all racial contests have crossed this country.

This small country was frequently a buffer of physical and moral forces from east and

west, north and south. And it was just this constant conflict that taught its valiant people

perseverance, while culture gave them indestructible moral strength.[666]

The text also notes that Czechoslovakia 'has for many years been called the Heart of Europe.

This name has not arisen haphazard; the world has already found that this is so and has arrived

at the conclusion that the condition of the whole organism depends on the correct functioning

of the heart.'[667] The idea that Czechoslovakia was at the centre of a European transport

network was thus linked to the old cliché of Bohemia as the heart of Europe. The heart

metaphor covered more than the idea of a central transport node; Czechoslovakia was

regarded as the organic heart of a Europe that was here imagined as a self-contained

organism. Robert B. Pynsent has demonstrated that the modern version of the cliché

understood the heart not only as a geographic centre, but also as a meeting-point that led

both to great diversity and to conflict.[668] In the introduction to the 1848 Czech translation of

his *History of Bohemia*, František Palacký alluded to the concept of the nation having emerged

out of the conflict in the centre of the continent.

> Just as the land of the Czechs was placed into the centre or heart of Europe, so for many
>
> centuries the Czech nation also became a centre, where, not without conflict, divers
>
> elements and principles of the new European national, State and Church life came into
>
> contact and united. In particular, both the long discord with and the mutual penetration of
>
> the Roman, German and Slav elements in Europe are clearly to be seen here.[669]

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[666] *Mezinárodní spoje ČSR – Internationale Verbindungen ČSR – Services Internationaux ČSR – International Connexions ČSR: 15. V. 1938–14. V 1939* [sic] (Prague, 1938), pp. 23–24.

[667] Ibid., p. 23.

[668] Pynsent, Heart of Europe.

[669] František Palacký, *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě dle původních pramenů*, Pt I, *Od prvověkosti až do roku 1253*, ed. by Bohuslav Rieger (Prague, 'jubilee edition' [1898?]), p. 7; quoted in Pynsent, Heart of Europe, p. 12.

Following Palacký, the notion that Bohemia (and by extension, Czechoslovakia) was at the heart of Europe and a precondition to the correct functioning of the entire organism became an integral part of the Czech national myth.[670]

It is true, however, that self-identification as central was by no means limited to Czechoslovakia. Benedict Anderson has noted that 'all the great classical communities conceived of themselves as cosmically central'.[671] The Hungarian scholar Johann von (János) Csaplovics in the early nineteenth century claimed that Hungary was 'a microcosm of Europe', for 'the diversity scattered in the other European countries is most favourably united in Hungary'.[672] The identification of Germany as the centre and the intermediary of Europe was widespread in German nationalism, as well.[673] The Czechoslovak case was set apart from other European claims to centrality not only by the sheer quantity of organicist references. The discourse promoted by *Mezinárodní spoje* depicted Czechoslovakia as a country in which the past and the present were united in a harmonious whole, as a crossroads of history and modernity. This is demonstrated in the description of Czechoslovakia written by the Minister of Railways Rudolf Bechyně (1881–1948) for the introduction to the 1937 edition:

> A garland of beautiful mountains, virgin forests, fertile plains, forests and woods, characteristic [*svérázné*] villages, ancient towns, castles and châteaux, charming holiday resorts and spas with curative waters, old and modern architecture, an eventful history, popular pageantry [*lidový folklor*], and an active modern life – all this is Czechoslovakia, happily combining past traditions with today's rich accomplishment. And everywhere trains pulsate over the dense network of railway lines. They thunder through darkness of tunnels through mountains, and fly through sun-drenched plains. They climb the

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[670] Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, p. 11.
[671] Anderson, p. 13.
[672] Csaplovics, pp. 13–14.
[673] Hans-Dietrich Schultz, 'Räume sind nicht, Räume werden gemacht: Zur Genese „Mitteleuropas" in der deutschen Geographie', *Europa Regional*, 5 (1997), 2–14 (pp. 2–3).

mountains over numerous serpentines, daring bridges and viaducts, cross rivers and deep

valleys, connect busy towns with lonely villages […].[674]

Bechyně's curious image of pulsating trains turns machines into living organisms and thus

clearly harks back to the metaphor of the nation-as-body. It also depicts Czechoslovakia as a

diachronic crossroads, a country that unites the best of tradition and modernity.

This discursive union of past and present was expressed in the books themselves. The

publication's design – including the timetables, photographs and fonts – followed a clear

modernist aesthetic. Bělohlav's map of direct connections with Czechoslovakia is reminiscent

both of a circuit diagram and of Harry Beck's topological map for the London Underground, an

icon of modern design. The title page of the 1937 edition made full use of the railway's

association with technological modernity, featuring a stylized railway signal and the

quadrilingual title enveloped by straight black lines. This modern aesthetic was repeatedly

contrasted with imagery of folklore. The inside cover of the same edition showed two

photographs of peasants in elaborate folk costume. Similarly, the book's cover featured two

aerodynamic motor coaches of the *Slovenská strela* high-speed train (see Chapter 6), standing

at a station as if poised to accelerate towards the viewer. The 1938 cover contrasted this

modern image with a photograph of the actress Jiřina Štěpničková in elaborate folk costume

on the set of the film adaption of *Maryša* (1935), originally a play by the brothers Alois and

Vilém Mrštík set in a Moravian Slovak village (see Figure 16). Inside the book, thousands of

participants engaged in the same movement at mass gymnastics meetings turn into single

blocks in the viewer's eye, echoing the straight lines of the railway tracks (and of the title

page). Only a few pages later, a large photograph showed a close-up of two peasants dressed

in, as the caption informed the reader, 'the national costumes which arose from the national

creative power of the Czechoslovak people'.[675]

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[674] *Mezinárodní spoje 1937–38*, p. 6.
[675] Ibid., pp. 17, 22.

Modernity as a mass phenomenon, technological and somewhat anonymous, was repeatedly contrasted with tradition as personal and intimate. *Mezinárodní spoje* suggested that in Czechoslovakia, the tourist could find both: modern life and ancient traditions. This is a wider concept than Palacký's image, or even Comenius's notion of Prague as the heart of hearts: 'Europe is the nucleus of the lands of the world; Germany is the heart of Europe, Bohemia [the heart] of Germany, Prague [the heart] of Bohemia'.[676] Rather, *Mezinárodní spoje* depicted Czechoslovakia as the centre of two axes, one spatial and one temporal: the country was the heart of European geography and the heart of European history.

Mezinárodní spoje represented the cosmopolitan side of the railway paradox: Czechoslovakia was at the heart of European space and time, modern and open to foreign visitors. However, even here the ambivalence between external cosmopolitanism and internal nation-building was present. For the publication did not only target foreigners. The Czech texts of the publications tended to be longer than the German, English and French translations and addressed their audience with a rather different message.

> The slogan 'Get to know your homeland first' [sic] is not an empty and shallow phrase, but an appeal of the utmost seriousness to all loyal people of this state. Citizens from Bohemia, how can you long to travel abroad without knowing the green beauty of the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands or the scenic rolling landscape of the Beskyd Mountains, and without having seen the clear waters of the Tatra lakes? Slovaks from Bratislava and Rusyns from Mukačevo, do not go looking for the beauties of the world beyond the border before having discovered it in the twisted alleys of old Prague, Tábor, Kutná Hora and other towns, towns that were once shaken by the steps of a history that was oftentimes your history, too! And you, Moravians, will have deep limitations in your knowledge until you've crossed the horseshoe-shaped mountain chain that encircles Bohemia and until

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[676] Johann Amos Comenius, *Clamores Eliae*, ed. by Julie Nováková (Kastellaun, Hunsrück, 1977), p. 133; quoted in Pynsent, Heart of Europe, p. 9.

you've stood atop one of the mountains that offer unforgettable views of Carpathian

Ruthenia's meadows and forests.

    Czechoslovakia – this will be a tourist treasure for all of us for years to come; discovering

this country and travelling through it from north to south and from west to east should be

as obvious for the modern Czechoslovak as knowing how to read and write. For knowing

the appearance and present of one's own country is just as instructive, important and

stimulating as knowing its past.[677]

It seems incongruous that the motif of travelling as a national duty was used in a publication

advertising the international connections offered by the ČSD. But it demonstrates how closely

connected the aims of cosmopolitanism and nationalism were. Perhaps Czechoslovakia was

indeed a crossroads, if in a different way than envisaged by the authors of *Mezinárodní spoje*.

In myth and in (railway) practice, it made for a successful meeting of ideologies of inclusion

and exclusion, of openness and introspection. Sometimes, all that was needed to unite the two

was a little loss in translation.

The Heart's Periphery: Travelling to Carpathian Ruthenia

Tradition and modernity were not distributed equally across the country in the crossroads

image of *Mezinárodní spoje*. Czechoslovakia was represented as a theme park of sorts, a

microcosm of Europe that – located in the very centre – combined the modernity of the west

with the folklore of the east. 'In the west of the country', the guide noted, 'you will see one of

the most civilized districts in Europe with busy industrial towns and obvious western culture. In

the east you can plunge into endless forests and live with the mountain people just as their

forefathers lived centuries ago.'[678] Modernity was represented by the modern architecture of

Prague, Brno, Bratislava and other urban centres of the country; folklore, on the other hand,

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[677] *Mezinárodní spoje 1937–38*, p. 10. My translation.
[678] *Mezinárodní spoje 1938–39,* p. 24.

was located in Czechoslovakia's eastern half, in Moravian Slovakia, Slovakia proper and

Carpathian Ruthenia. It was Ruthenia, in particular, that fascinated Czechoslovaks and

foreigners alike and drew an increasing stream of visitors. In 1937, nearly 70,000 tourists

travelled to the region.[679] While this was a far cry from the numbers seen by the spa towns,

the Tatras and urban destinations, it still represented a great increase from the Hungarian

period. If one is to believe the Club of Czechoslovak Hikers, travel for pleasure to Carpathian

Ruthenia was almost entirely unknown before 1918. A publication of the KČT called the region

a 'forsaken land' and continued that 'nobody went there to see the wild beauty of the

landscape, to meet its people and see their buildings, costumes and customs. Only Hungarian

counts came from time to time to hunt for bear, boar and smaller game.'[680] Under the auspices

of the club, Čedok and other organizations, the Czechoslovak authorities systematically built

up a tourist infrastructure in, as they saw it, utter wilderness. A network of marked hiking

paths was created, shelters and hostels were built in the mountains and hotels in the towns.

The Czechoslovaks turned Ruthenia into a tourist destination.

The most important instrument to make Ruthenia accessible for travellers had,

however, existed before the foundation of the country: the railway that ran from Košice to Čop

(Csap) along the river Tisa and then northwards to Jasiňa in the far east of Ruthenia at the

Polish border.[681] From 1923, the ČSD offered a daily express train to Jasiňa, travelling from

Prague in the winter and from Karlovy Vary in the summer, which was later extended west to

Cheb.[682] According to the 1933 timetable, the train left Cheb at 14.27 and ran via Prague,

Bohumín and Košice, reaching Jasiňa at 16.28 the following day, almost exactly twenty-six

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[679] J. Stocký, 'Cestovní ruch v Československu', in *Padesát let Klubu československých turistů 1888–1838* (Prague, 1938), pp. 14–17 (p. 16).

[680] Jaroslav Dostál, 'Turistika na Podkarpatské Rusi', in *Padesát let Klubu československých turistů 1888–1838* (Prague, 1938), pp. 56–59 (p. 56).

[681] Jasiňa is often described as the easternmost railway station of the inter-war ČSD network; see, for instance, 'Jasiňa', *Wikipedie: Otevřená encyklopedie* <http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jasi%C5%88a> [accessed 21 August 2015]. In fact, Jasiňa was the easternmost station served by direct express trains from Prague. Two stations, Lazeština and Zimir, lay farther east, but were only served by local trains. See e.g. *Vilímkův jízdní řád republiky Československé: Zima 1933–34* (Prague, 1933), p. 392.

[682] Karel Beneš, *Vasúti közlekedés Kárpátalján* (Budapest, 1996), p. 35.

hours later. At 1,046 kilometres, this was by far the longest direct train route in

Czechoslovakia.[683] As such, it became symbolic of Czechoslovakia's unity, perhaps best

expressed in the well-known nationalist slogan 'Od Jasini do Aše, republika je naše!' (From

Jasiňa to Aš, the republic is ours!).[684] This is somewhat ironic, as the Košice–Jasiňa railway was

perhaps a greater reminder of the Czechoslovak railway system's Austro-Hungarian heritage

than any other. For between the stations of Teresva (Taracköz) and Rachov (Rahó, Rakhiv), a

distance of roughly forty kilometres, the railway ran on the left side of the river Tisa (Tisza) on

what in 1918 had become Romanian territory; it called at five Romanian stations. Travellers

within Czechoslovakia could not leave the carriages while in Romania, but were not subject to

customs or passport controls. Travellers from Czechoslovakia to Romania or *vice versa* had to

travel in specially designated carriages and were controlled at the border stations.[685]

The Jasiňa train became emblematic of Ruthenia's remoteness from Prague. The length

of the journey was the object of frequent complaints. The Austrian geographer Hugo Hassinger

considered the fact that the train from Prague to Užhorod took twenty hours as an indication

that Czechoslovakia's elongated shape made it unviable as a state.[686] The long travel time also

led to practical problems for locals. It was a nation-building policy of the Czechoslovak Army to

send recruits from Slovakia and Ruthenia to the Bohemian Lands and *vice versa*. Soldiers from

Ruthenia thus often had to spend half of their eight-day holidays on the train between their

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[683] *Vilímkův jízdní řád*, pp. 426–29. See also Josef Jelínek, 'Nejdelší trasa první republiky: rychlíky z Prahy do Jasini', *Železničář*, 25 April 2013 <https://zeleznicar.cd.cz/zeleznicar/historie/nejdelsi-trasa-prvni-republiky--rychliky-z-prahy-do-jasini-/-2460/24,0,,/> [accessed 21 August 2015]. Jelínek quotes the length of the route as 1,053 kilometres, which is the distance specified in the timetable starting at Františkovy Lázně (Franzensbad), seven kilometres before Cheb. However, the direct train to Jasiňa departed only from Cheb.

[684] The slogan is commonly reproduced in contemporary Czech journalism on Ruthenia. See Jaroslav Formánek, 'Tenkrát v naší kolonii', *Respekt*, 19.44 (25 October 2008), 34–41 (p. 36), and Blanka Kovaříková, 'Češi mají na Zakarpatí stále dobré jméno', *Novinky.cz*, 22 November 2012 <http://www.novinky.cz/cestovani/285102-cesi-maji-na-zakarpati-stale-dobre-jmeno.html> [both accessed 21 August 2015]. Aš (Asch) lies approximately 27 kilometres north-west of Cheb and was Czechoslovakia's westernmost town; the two towns were connected by a railway operated by the German *Reichsbahn* throughout the inter-war period.

[685] *Vilímkův jízdní řád*, p. 385. See also Beneš, pp. 17, 35, and Jan Rychlík, 'Zapojení železnic Podkarpatské Rusi do sítě drah Československa', *Česko-slovenská historická ročenka*, 1997, 115–21 (p. 117).

[686] Hassinger, pp. 340–41. See also the Chapter 2 of this thesis.

home and their posting.[687] A governmental publication on Carpathian Ruthenia published in

1934 argued that it was unsurprising that the region continued to have strong connections

with Hungary, considering the train to Budapest took six hours, while travellers to Prague were

on the train for fifteen hours. The length of the journey was seen as incompatible with modern

capitalist life in Czechoslovakia: 'There are people – they are in the majority nowadays – who

can hardly afford to lose fifteen hours in a working day'.[688]

The great time and distance involved in the trip to Ruthenia corresponded to the

peripheral position the region inhabited in the minds of most tourists. The left-wing writer and

poet Stanislav Kostka Neumann first made the trip in 1932 and his description makes clear that

this was a railway journey to the very periphery of the state: 'From nine in the evening until

half past four in the afternoon, that's nearly twenty hours on the train. What left Prague as an

express train loses its long sleeper and restaurant cars on the way and arrives in Rachov and

Jasiňa as a wretched local train with three carriages – which are by no means crowded.'[689]

Foreign visitors had a similar perspective of Ruthenia's location. Already in 1923, in what was

to my knowledge the first post-war account of a trip to the region, the British travel writer

Henry Baerlein described Ruthenia as a distant, almost mythical land:

> And where is Ruthenia? It is in a curious position. […] Sometimes, even when she
>
> [Ruthenia] hears the wind that murmurs in her million oaks or feels those great-horned
>
> oxen ploughing up with the ruddy soil, she may remember with uneasiness that on the
>
> ordinary map of Europe there is no Ruthenia, albeit when you come to Eger [Cheb], on the
>
> north-west frontier of the new Czecho-Slovak Republic, you will find a train of which one
>
> carriage goes to Užhorod, Ruthenia's capital.[690]

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[687] Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, p. 153.
[688] Karel Hostaša, 'Na okraj dopravy a zájezdů na Podkarpatskou Rus', in *Podkarpatská Rus*, ed. by
    Jaroslav Zatloukal (Bratislava, 1936), pp. 174–76 (pp. 174–75).
[689] Neumann, *Enciány*, p. 15.
[690] Henry Baerlein, *Over the Hills of Ruthenia* (London, 1923), p. 7.

Chapter 5
Travel Writing and Railway Propaganda

The representation of Ruthenia as a far-away land at the end of the railway line was widespread in inter-war Czechoslovakia. This is unsurprising, considering the decision to include the territory into the nascent country was made on the basis of a political agreement between Tomáš G. Masaryk and émigré Rusyn leaders in the United States, and was entirely unexpected for Czech and Slovak national activists.[691] Especially after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, when Hungary launched its Magyarization programme, interest of the Czech national narrative in Hungary was sparse and limited to the Slovaks.[692] Lecturing to an audience in Užhorod in 1934, the historian and later foreign minister Kamil Krofta (1876–1945) freely admitted to this:

> When on 28 October [1918] the Czechs and Slovaks in triumph and excitement celebrated
> their separation from the former monarchy and the creation of an independent
> Czechoslovak state, hardly anyone was thinking of Carpathian Ruthenia. For hardly anyone
> could have anticipated that that land would become part of the new state. Beautiful as it
> is, it is nevertheless simply very far away from Prague and was little known there.[693]

The journalist and publicist Ferdinand Peroutka (1895–1978) echoed this sentiment: 'Of course, Carpathian Ruthenia was […] almost completely unknown to Czechs.'[694]

In general, the Czech gaze on Ruthenia was marked by a patronizing attitude that considered the Czechoslovak state on a civilizing mission in an undeveloped backwater. In Czech literature on the region, the Czechs often presented themselves as reluctant civilizers. Peroutka encapsulated this ambivalent attitude when he called the Ruthenia 'in many ways a Greek gift [*dar v mnohém ohledu danajský*]':

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[691] Peter Švorc, 'Začlenenie Podkarpatskej Rusi do ČSR (1918–1920)', *Česko-slovenská historická ročenka*, 1997, 39–60.

[692] This point is also made in Vojtech [sic] Lev, *Brána na východ: Karpatská Rus* (Prague, 1920), p. 5.

[693] Kamil Krofta, *Podkarpatská Rus a Československo* (Prague, 1934), p. 3.

[694] Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budování státu: Československá politika v letech popřevratových*, vol. 3 (Prague, 1936), p. 1608.

> The advantages [of the incorporation of Ruthenia] were not evident. The territory was
>
> backward in every respect in comparison to the other parts of the republic. […] A sizeable
>
> portion of additional oriental conditions fell to the state to administer and improve. The
>
> republic became more diverse; it became a meeting point of pure Occident and almost
>
> pure Orient. The state administration found itself in a territory where its role was primarily
>
> a civilizing one.[695]

The blame for the region's backwardness was put squarely on the Hungarian regime. Many

Czech writers wrote about modernization in Ruthenia using rabidly anti-Hungarian rhetoric,

accusing the former rulers of a thousand years of both economic and physical exploitation.[696]

Vojtěch Lev suggested that Hungarian noblemen and bureaucrats took sexual advantage of the

local girls, often leaving them with 'nasty venereal diseases'.[697] He was certainly echoing public

sentiment when in 1920 he blamed the Hungarians for turning Ruthenia into a non-European

colonial appendix of the civilized world. He wrote:

> It has been said that the Hungarian government created a piece of Asia in Hungary, in the
>
> centre of Europe. This is a weak comparison that conveys only a shade of the true state of
>
> things. I say it emphatically: *the Magyars created a piece of darkest Africa in Hungary*.[698]

It may be assumed that under the impression of the 1904 Casement Report – and before

Joseph Conrad's 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness* was translated into German (1926) or Czech

(1980) – Lev was referring to the Congo as the primary site of European colonial crimes. As a

result of their oppression, 'the majority of [Rusyns] live a life befitting an African bushman:

they work, eat and sleep'.[699] Even leaving aside his evident racism, which was certainly also

common at the time, both Lev's anti-Hungarian rhetoric and his colonialist allusions are typical

of the Czech discourse on Ruthenia. Based primarily on articles published by Czech civil

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[695] Ibid., pp. 1606–07.
[696] Viktor Budín, *Podkarpatská Rus očima Čechů* (Prague, 1996), p. 19.
[697] Lev, *Brána na východ*, p. 18.
[698] Ibid., p. 16. Emphasis in the original.
[699] Ibid., p. 20. Emphasis in the original.

servants who had been posted there, the historian Stanislav Holubec has argued convincingly

that 'almost all the binaries of Western orientalist discourse as they are defined in standard

textbooks on post-colonialism can be found in the Czech imagining of Sub-Carpathian Rus and

its inhabitants'.[700] In the following, I will broaden the argument made by Holubec by discussing

Czech travel writing on the region.

Like Africa itself, Ruthenia was a *terra incognita* for Czechs and most other western

travellers. After the region was integrated into Czechoslovakia in 1919, visitors were drawn by

the mystique of the unknown, combined with the fact that it was now accessible as part of the

homeland. In an article on the region published in a 1927 edition of Čedok's *Czechoslovakia*,

Jiří Král wrote:

> In Subcarpathian Russia nature in the remote districts is almost completely untouched by
>
> human hand and is an inexhaustible source of edification for those who find no joy in the
>
> usual paths that are taken by the everyday tourist and in those spots that are so
>
> frequently spoilt by a desecrating human hand. Here in the most easterly part of
>
> Czechoslovakia one can still find virgin soil, which will replace to the genuine lover of
>
> nature the complete lack of every form of comfort.[701]

The view of Ruthenia as a huge primeval forest untouched by civilization was highly

romanticizing. After all, tourism in the area was only made possible by the Jasiňa railway, as

great a symbol of civilization as any. But even when describing the view out of the train

window, Král invoked a pristine landscape:

> On the right [of the railway line] are the foothills of the Marmaroš Alps, whose dense
>
> woods are the haunt of bears, wolves and lynxes, just the country that rejoices the heart

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[700] Stanislav Holubec, '"We bring order, discipline, Western European democracy, and culture to this land of former oriental chaos and disorder." Czech Perceptions of Sub-Carpathian Rus and its Modernization in the 1920s', in *Mastery and Lost Illusions: Space and Time in the Modernization of Eastern and Central Europe*, ed. by Włodzimierz Borodziej, Stanislav Holubec and Joachim von Puttkamer (Munich, 2014), pp. 223–50 (p. 250).

[701] Jiří Král, 'Subcarpathian Russia', in *Czechoslovakia: A Monthly*, 2 (1927), 5–7 (p. 7). A similar description can also be found in Král's *Guide to the Czechoslovak Republic*, p. 244.

of such tourists who are prepared to put up with any amount of discomfort in order to make the acquaintance of a really untouched piece of nature.[702]

Travellers were drawn not only by the perceived bucolic, unspoilt countryside, but also by the pre-modern peasant lifestyle and the oriental mystery of the region's highly visible Jewish community. Indeed, Baerlein had been attracted less by natural beauty, but because he had been told that 'the Ruthenes are now on the brink of national emancipation'.[703] It was the Rusyns' desperate poverty and their political struggles that made Ruthenia a common topic in Prague intellectual circles, as well. A number of Czech left-wing intellectuals became interested in the region in the 1930s, of whom Ivan Olbracht (1882–1952) was the most prominent representative. He wrote three novels set in Ruthenia and produced the screenplay for the feature film *Marijka nevěrnice* (Marijka the unfaithful, 1934), which was directed by the avant-garde writer and *Devětsil* member Vladislav Vančura (1891–1942). Olbracht's interest was sparked by a series of long reportages from 1932 that were expanded and published in 1935 as *Hory a staletí* (Mountains and centuries). Olbracht was critical of the economic consequences of Czechoslovak rule for the local population and of the Czech bureaucrats' colonial pretensions. He noted drily that 'the Czech lords are colonizing Ruthenia. They are Czechizing an area hundreds of kilometres away and divided from the Crowns Lands by the whole expanse of Slovakia.'[704] While insightful, his writing is not free from the paternalism that characterized most Czech writing on the region. As the title of one of the reportages, 'Village from the Eleventh Century', suggests, Olbracht echoed the view of *Mezinárodní spoje* and portrayed the local inhabitants as if they had been lifted from the Middle Ages. Although he sneered at his homesick countrymen longing for Pilsner beer, he none the less presented western modernization as a self-evident necessity in order to alleviate Ruthenia's desperate poverty. Ruthenia, his texts implied, should be carried from its medieval squalor to the

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[702] Jiří Král, 'Among the Hucules', in *Czechoslovakia: A Monthly*, 3 (1928), 104–05 (p. 104).
[703] Baerlein, p. 10.
[704] Ivan Olbracht, *Hory a staletí* (Prague, 1950), p. 41.

contemporary age, to the life of Prague of his time. The notion that the Rusyns lived a life

untouched by modernity was a recurrent motif throughout the Czech media. In 1929, Karel

Plicka made the silent film *Jaro na Podkarpatské Rusi* (Spring in Carpathian Ruthenia), whose

bucolic and romanticizing aesthetic is similar to that of *Zem spieva*. The intertitles suggested

that the life of the peasantry was ahistorical: 'The primitive buildings give the Carpathian

villages the charm of times long past. The locals dress in ancient Slav costumes, which have

remained unchanged for centuries.'[705]

Unlike Olbracht or Plicka, Stanislav Kostka Neumann is not remembered for his writings

on Ruthenia. To an extent, this is due to the eclectic nature of his works, which transformed as

often and as radically as his politics. The left-wing poet and writer was a political and literary

chameleon who always found (or founded) an avant-garde, and went from being a decadent,

anarchist, Satanist, and Poetist to dogmatic communist. His travel writing also cannot count

among his best work: overlong, repetitive and narcissistic, with often rambling digressions, it

indicates a public intellectual profoundly comfortable with his views and confident of his

success. At the same time, it is the most significant Czech work of the travel genre on

Ruthenia. Neumann first made the journey in 1932, a year after Olbracht did. The trip formed

the basis for a travelogue entitled *Enciány s Popa Ivana: Letní dojmy z Rachovska* (Gentians

from Pop Ivan: Summer impressions from Rachov and surroundings, 1933). In the following

year, *Lidové noviny* hired Neumann to travel through Czechoslovakia and write about his

experiences for the daily newspaper. His reportages appeared from May to November and

were published as the epic three-volume *Československá cesta* (Czechoslovak journey) in 1934

and 1935. The books were illustrated with photographs taken by Neumann himself, and most

of the second volume is devoted to Ruthenia. He viewed the region as the real destination of

his trip: while he appreciated Bratislava for its 'metropolitan life and cosmopolitan character'

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[705] *Jaro na Podkarpatské Rusi*, dir. by Karel Plicka (1929) [available on the DVD of *Marijka nevěrnice*, dir.
by Vladislav Vančura (1934)].

and was impressed by the modern new buildings constructed since 1918, he noted that 'I see ever more clearly that [Bratislava] is somewhat secondary and not the real thing'.

> We are not yet experiencing our journey, we are only still travelling to where we will be in our element, and our hearts are impatient rather than enchanted. We will feel enchanted only past Užhorod, past the Hust gate, past the Romanian territory, only when the train delves into the deep valley between Trebušany and Rachov.[706]

It seems Neumann agreed to the whole trip through Czechoslovakia mainly to return to eastern Ruthenia. Further trips to the region resulted in a collection of poetry entitled *Karpatské melodie* (Carpathian melodies), which remained unfinished, as they were written just before the Hungarian occupation of the territory following the First Vienna Award of November 1938.[707]

More than Olbracht's books, Neumann's travel writing is representative of the Czech gaze on Ruthenia as a whole. Like most tourists, he went there to find a corner of the country yet untouched by modern civilization, to find nature in its authentic, primeval form. He left home, he writes in *Enciány*, 'for a bit of poetry and delicate happiness'.[708] For nature 'tells you more about the glory of life than the most famous of poems'.[709] Especially during his first trip, he showed little interest in the region's inhabitants.

> I don't know much about the people around Rachov from personal experience. We went here to take a break from civilization in its capitalist guise and to explore a piece of nature not yet overly affected by exploitation. We preferred to walk among the gentians on mountain meadows than run after people with a notebook in hand.[710]

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[706] Neumann, *Československá cesta I*, pp. 44–45 and 48–49.
[707] See Stanislav K. Neumann, *Bezedný rok: Básně 1938* (Prague, 1951), pp. 11–43.
[708] Neumann, *Enciány*, p. 11.
[709] Stanislav K. Neumann, *Československá cesta: Deník cesty kolem republiky od 28. dubna do 28. října 1933. Část druhá a třetí: Karpatské léto, Český podzim* (Prague, 1935), p. 9.
[710] Neumann, *Enciány*, p. 91.

When he did encounter Rusyns, he described them in similar terms as the nature around him.

He felt 'delight at the sweet naturalness' of the dress worn by the locals and elsewhere

described the local girls as 'delightfully natural'.[711] As most other Czechs in Ruthenia, he was

enchanted by the landscape. His description of a hike up the mountain Pop Ivan is reminiscent

of a religious experience and characteristic of his abundant description of nature:

> The deeper we were enveloped by the mountain wilderness, the more we were seized by
>
> joy; joy of nature, of solitude, of freedom. Only our backpacks weighed us down and
>
> remained on our backs as the last shackles of civilization.[712]

When he visited the region again the following year, he felt like an émigré returning to his

'true home' after a long absence.[713]

At the same time, Neumann feared that Ruthenia was in the process of losing its natural,

ahistorical authenticity. In one of his poems he wrote: 'History is sneaking into the chilly huts

of yesterday | and the unknown land is becoming famous'.[714] Neumann blamed the Czechs for

this, both their repressive, capitalistic state and the other Czech tourists he encountered.

Indeed, he appeared as a typical tourist who despised other tourists for blocking his view of

the authentic.[715] This is illustrated by his descriptions of Rachov, which he loved in 1933 and

loathed in 1934. 'The town has changed', he lamented in *Československá cesta*, a new hotel

had been built for the Czechs and 'the restaurant looks something like a Prague pub. […] The

Turistický dům brings western urban civilization to Rachov and you feel that it won't be long

until it gains the upper hand against the originality of the indigenous population.'[716] For

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[711] Neumann, *Cesta II*, pp. 14, 35.
[712] Neumann, *Enciány*, pp. 61–62.
[713] Neumann, *Cesta II*, p. 12.
[714] Neumann, *Bezedný rok*, p. 12.
[715] This is identified as characteristic of the tourist gaze in Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Eine Theorie des Tourismus', in *Einzelheiten I: Bewusstseins-Industrie* (Frankfurt am Main, 1964), pp. 179–205 (pp. 183–85).
[716] Neumann, *Cesta II*, pp. 26–27

Neumann, the other tourists were petty bourgeois, unable to experience the beauty and poetry of their surroundings.

> It is pointless for this type of sedate bourgeois to travel to Carpathian Ruthenia. For they have no special interests in ethnology or sociology, they have no deep relationship to the wild countryside, and they miss their civilization and comfort.[717]

Neumann seemed unaware of the fact that he took part in the bourgeois system of Czechoslovakia as wholeheartedly as the other tourists did. He complained when he found any comfort he was accustomed to lacking, he was irritated when hiking signposts were missing and when the buses were crowded and uncomfortable. Faced with several disfigured beggars in Užhorod, he was disgusted and felt his 'body and mind threatened. This moment spoilt Užhorod for us.'[718] Neumann's criticism of the petty bourgeois mindset of Czech tourists was hypocritical, since he acted like a petty bourgeois himself. He was unprepared to consider the region on its terms rather than according to his preconceived notions of authenticity. This lack of reflection is indicated by Neumann's own photography, which illustrated *Československá cesta*. One inset shows his girlfriend, who remains unnamed throughout the book, taking close-up pictures of flowers, followed by the flowers themselves (see Figure 17). This self-referential image reflects Neumann's general approach to Ruthenia.

His hypocrisy is also evident in his attitude towards capitalism. He decried the fact that modern consumerism has reached Ruthenia, that Rusyns wore Baťa shoes instead of homemade footwear and that 'the whole world has become a shop window'.[719] However, he clearly enjoyed the consumer culture he would have liked to see withheld from the Ruthenians, spending several bizarre paragraphs unsubtly advertising hiking shoes in *Enciány*. 'I recommend the trainers that cost 19 crowns at Baťa this year', he wrote.[720] His outward – if

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[717] Ibid., p. 75.
[718] Ibid., 154.
[719] Neumann, *Enciány*, p. 56.
[720] Ibid., p. 85.

inconsistent – anti-capitalist stance included a strongly antisemitic attitude towards the region's large Jewish community. He made abundant and aggressive use of the antisemitic stereotype of Jews as capitalist exploiters. Describing money as the Jews' 'God on earth', he wrote that 'their religion is a shady business; and shady business is their religion; they come from shady business and with shady business they Hebraized [*požidovstili*] the Christians'. Exploitation was presented as the essence of Judaism and Judaism thus as morally corrupt. He suggested that individual Jews could liberate themselves from the exploitative nature of their religion by joining the socialist movement. 'There is only one teaching that is truly "anti-Jewish", and that, at the same time, signifies great moral progress: socialism and communism.'[721] In addition to his anti-capitalist antisemitism, there is also an ethnic element. Like most Czech writers, he regarded the Rusyns as the only rightful inhabitants of the region, and rejected all other groups as colonists. In addition to his condemnation of Czechs and Jews, this is illustrated by his disregard for the Magyars, whom he described very little in general, despite their prevalence in the towns. When he did so, they appeared as petty bourgeois traders who, for instance, contributed to the 'bastard' nature of Jasiňa.[722]

It is easy to dismiss Neumann's travel writing as too crass, contradictory and hypocritical to merit scholarly interest. However, while extreme, Neumann's representation of Ruthenia shows tendencies that were widespread in the Czech attitude towards the region, and even towards Slovakia, if to a somewhat lesser extent. The Czechs' romanticization of its wild landscape and pre-modern population went hand in hand with a strongly patronizing drive to supply their Slav brothers with superior civilization. As such, the Czech travel discourse on Ruthenia has clear parallels to the rhetoric used at the opening ceremonies for new railway lines in Slovakia discussed above. However, even though the Hungarian government was blamed for turning Carpathian Ruthenia into a 'piece of darkest Africa', Ruthenia was not Czechoslovakia's Congo. Its inhabitants were Slav brothers; they were romanticized and

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[721] Ibid., pp. 102–03.
[722] Neumann, *Cesta II,* p. 60.

infantilized, but never depicted as savages. Like most Czech travellers, Neumann does not

portray Ruthenia as a colony, but rather an inherent part of his country. This is illustrated by

the title of his book, *Československá cesta*, which firmly binds Ruthenia into the framework of

the nation-state. Neumann accepts that he is foreign, but also feels like he has reached his true

home. This ambivalence lies at the heart of the Czech construction of Carpathian Ruthenia.

The travel narratives discussed in this chapter created a peculiar geography of inter-war

Czechoslovakia. Depicted as the geographical centre and the spiritual heart of Europe, it

unified the great variety of European ways of life: from the cosmopolitan urbanity of Prague in

the west to the traditional peasant life in Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. This notion of

Czechoslovakia as a microcosm of Europe was conveyed not just in traditional travel guides,

but also in publications such as the *Mezinárodní spoje*, or the films I discussed at the outset of

this chapter. However, the presentation did not correspond to the ethnolinguistic diversity

that in fact existed in the country. Czechoslovakia was overwhelmingly depicted as the land of

Czechs and Slovaks, while all other groups were degraded to the status of minorities or

neglected entirely. This was especially the case in travel writing on Slovakia marketed at a

domestic audience, where there was a conscious effort to Czechoslovakize this previously

Hungarian landscape by linking it to Czech and Slovak history and disregarding the presence of

a Magyar minority. The Czechoslovak State Railways and travel guides such as Karel Václav

Adámek's encouraged Czechs to travel to Slovakia and thereby get to know their homeland (to

paraphrase the ČSD's advertising slogan). In conjunction, the books on travelling in the

homeland and the presence of the railways as the means to get there had a real impact on the

development of a Czechoslovak spatial consciousness. This becomes evident in Neumann's

writings on Ruthenia. For all his hypocrisy and colonialist rhetoric, he nevertheless regarded

Ruthenia as an intrinsic part of Czechoslovakia. He was drawn to the region precisely because

it was *in* Czechoslovakia, but ostensibly not *of* it. Of course, Neumann's travel experience was

singular and it is difficult to gauge those of other Czechoslovaks. Did they really get to know

their homeland, as Neumann thought he did, or did they experience travel to other parts of

the country as an alienating trip to foreign lands? Given the lack of personal testimonies that reflect train travel, this question may never be answered. But the railways certainly provided a national framework to train travel that, as Neumann's writing suggests, had the power to change spatial identifications.

The discourse stressed the fact that Czechoslovakia was a unified country and aimed to discursively include the new territories of Slovakia and Ruthenia into the national narrative. Inadvertently, however, the rhetoric of Czechoslovak unity created a geographical hierarchy that ran from west to east. Czechoslovakia may have been the heart of Europe, but Prague was the undisputed heart of Czechoslovakia. This hierarchization operated with the categories of modern and traditional. The modern character of the country was located in its main cities and was expressed, for instance, by the Prague tram in *Bezúčelná procházka* or, in Neumann's words, the 'metropolitan life' of Bratislava. As *Zem spieva* and many other sources suggested, unspoilt countryside and traditional peasant ways of life could be found in Slovakia and Ruthenia. Czechoslovaks did get to know their homeland by train, but the homeland they discovered was not as unified as some had hoped. It was a complex, layered and hierarchized geography whose Czech domination was, as it turned out, unsustainable in the highly nationalized context of the day.

Chapter 6
'Bratislava to Prague in 4h 51min'
Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the *Slovenská strela*

A new train commenced scheduled services between Prague and Bratislava on 13 July 1936.[723]

The so-called *Slovenská strela* (Slovak bullet) featured two sleek and aerodynamic motor units that had been custom-designed by the Moravian firm Tatra, one of the most prestigious automobile manufacturers in the country (see Figure 18).[724] In 1936, the scheduled journey between Prague and Bratislava took four hours and fifty-one minutes, which corresponded to an average speed of 82 kilometres per hour.[725] This reduced the travel time between the national capital and the Slovak one by more than an hour compared to the steam train, which took nearly six hours. It turned out that the train was capable of even higher speeds than the ČSD had anticipated, and by 1939, the travel time had been reduced further to four hours and sixteen minutes.[726] The train owed its speed to its ground-breaking design and technology: it combined carriage and engine in a single motor coach (known officially as ČSD Class M 290.0) that offered room for 72 passengers. Powered by a petrol engine, it featured an electromechanical transmission designed and patented especially for the project. Only two motor coaches were built. They were used on their designated route for less than three years, until the destruction of the Second Czechoslovak Republic in March 1939. None the less, the *Slovenská strela* was a great economic success and became a lasting symbol of inter-war Czechoslovakia. Today, the surviving motor coach is exhibited in front of the Technical

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[723] The first scheduled run was widely publicized. See the articles from July 1936 in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 55, e.g. 'Slovenská strela', *Národní listy*, 9 July 1936.

[724] Czech periodicals sometimes used the Czech translation 'Slovenská střela', although the Slovak was the official form used by the Ministry of Railways and the ČSD throughout the country.

[725] Tomáš Sousedík (ed.), *Slovenská strela: Josef Sousedík* (Vsetín, 2011), p. 15; Paul [Pavel] Koller, 'La «Flèche Slovaque»: Nouveau service d'autorail rapide entre Prague et Bratislava', *Bulletin de l'Association international du Congrès des Chemins de fer* (January 1937), 239–48 (p. 247).

[726] Martin Navrátil, 'Rychlá střela z Kopřivnice', *ČD pro vás*, 1.8 (August 2010), 20–23 (p. 22); 'Co nám řekl o Slovenské strele její řidič', *Tatra: Podnikový zpravodaj*, 6 (1947), 5–7 (p. 5).

Museum in Kopřivnice (Nesselsdorf), the seat of the Tatra headquarters. And 'Slovenská strela'

remains the name of an international express train from Prague to Bratislava (although this

generic 'EuroCity' definitely lacks the modern appeal of the original and is only marginally

faster).[727] This chapter is a case study of this high-speed train in the context of simultaneous

processes of nation-building and attempts to create a Czechoslovak modernity. In the

Slovenská strela, the often contradictory strands of Czechoslovak railway policy were united.

The bullet train contributed to the unification of the nation by connecting the Slovak capital

with the national one. At the same time, it showed the world that technologically,

Czechoslovakia was at the forefront of Europe. The Slovak Bullet was, therefore, an emblem of

inter-war Czechoslovakia's two-pronged, simultaneously national and cosmopolitan approach

to nation-building and the railways.

Cars, Trains, Aeroplanes: Speed and Modernity

The *Slovenská strela* was a part of the spirit of the age to such a great extent because the inter-

war period was a time obsessed with speed. Of course, steam railways had already accelerated

the world from the 1830s, not only by mastering distances in a matter of hours that had taken

days to cover on foot or by coach. It also led to a new experience of time. Before the railways,

time had been measured by church clocks, which often varied considerably even between

neighbouring towns.[728] The running of railways necessitated the introduction of timetables and

thus unified the measurement of time. All time on the *Kaiser Ferdinands-Nordbahn* from

Vienna via Brno to Krakow was measured according to the station clock in Vienna. Several

'train clocks' were set according to a master clock kept in a safe in the station. The driver of the

first morning train took one of these along and all stationmasters *en route* checked their own

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[727] According to the 2015 timetable, this train covers the 396 kilometres between Prague and Bratislava
  in four hours and eight minutes, an improvement of eight minutes.
[728] Schivelbusch, pp. 35–45.

clocks to make sure they were still 'on time'.[729] This so-called railway time soon penetrated

society and by the end of the century unified clocks had been put up throughout urban

centres, and watches worn in a pocket or on the wrist were ubiquitous among the middle

classes.[730] Railway time became the condition for the development of modern capitalism. It

instilled a sense of punctuality, calculability and efficiency in business that was taken to its

extreme by industrialists like the American Frederick W. Taylor (1856–1915). By dividing time

into clearly defined periods of work and rest, Taylor sought to achieve ever greater efficiency

of production.[731] Henry Ford's (1863–1947) system of mass production on assembly lines was

guided by the same principles. By the turn of the century, the modern attitude towards

capitalist efficiency had taken hold throughout Europe, including the Bohemian Lands. Tomáš

Baťa (1876–1932) founded a shoe company in Moravian Zlín in 1894. In Zachary Doleshal's

words, he was 'captivated by a vision of a rationalized industrial society where man and

machine, family and factory, worked together seamlessly'.[732] Baťa's firm became the largest

private company in inter-war Czechoslovakia and set the tone for a type of rationalized

production that was made possible by railway time.

It was in the first half of the twentieth century, and especially in the years between the

two world wars, that the 'transport revolution' started by steam locomotives came to a

head.[733] Robert Musil's (1880–1942) great novel of the end of Austria-Hungary, *Der Mann ohne*

Eigenschaften (The man without qualities), was written in the 1920s and 30s, but set in Vienna

of 1913. It makes clear the extent to which railway time had taken over the public imaginary.

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[729] Hlavačka, Superstroj, p. 123; id., Fenomén času, p. 10.
[730] Kern, pp. 110–11.
[731] Ibid., p 115; Hlavačka, Fenomén času, p. 15.
[732] Zachary Doleshal, 'The Bata Company's Beginnings and its Golden Era', *Slovo*, 15.1 (Summer 2014), 4–7 (p. 4).
[733] Peter Borscheid, 'Beschleunigungsimperative, Tempo-Viren und Zeit-Zeichen: Kulturelle Auswirkungen der Verkehrsrevolution des 20. Jahrhunderts', in *Neue Wege in ein neues Europa: Geschichte und Verkehr im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Ralf Roth and Karl Schlögel (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), pp. 377–90. Andreas Helmedach has argued that 'the epoch of acceleration, of the transport revolution' in the Habsburg Empire had already started in the eighteenth century with the first tentative steps towards a modern transport system (see Andreas Helmedach, *Das Verkehrssystem als Modernisierungsfaktor: Straßen, Post, Fuhrwesen und Reisen nach Triest und Fiume vom Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zum Eisenbahnzeitalter* [Munich, 2002], p. 14).

As so often, it refers to an imagined America, which had become the epitome of modern, capitalist society.[734]

> For some time now […] an obsessive daydream has been a kind of super-American city
> where everyone rushes about, or stands still, with a stopwatch in hand. […] Air trains,
> ground trains, underground trains, people mailed through tubes special-delivery, and
> chains of cars race along horizontally, while express elevators pump masses of people
> vertically from one traffic level to another; at the junctions, people leap from one vehicle
> to the next, instantly sucked in and snatched away by the rhythm of it, which makes a
> syncope, a pause, a little gap of twenty seconds during which a word might be hastily
> exchanged with someone else. Questions and answers synchronize like meshing gears;
> everyone has only certain fixed tasks to do; professions are located in special areas and
> organized by group; meals are taken on the run.[735]

This was a vision of the future, but it shows the power of the notions of time and efficiency in the early twentieth century. Musil's description could be read as a dystopia, but speed became a popular obsession in the inter-war era. This is illustrated by the transformation of public entertainment. The first Tour de France was held in 1903 and the ill-fated (and very fast) crossing of the Atlantic by the Titanic gripped public attention in 1912. As Peter Lyth has argued, in the 1920s car racing drivers became 'demigods in goggles and leather, idolised by a public anxious for peace-time heroes after the horrors of the trenches'.[736] In 1934, two British aviators won the London to Melbourne Air Race in the especially designed De Havilland 88 Comet aircraft, covering the approximately 18,200 kilometres in 71 hours.[737]

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[734] Egbert Klautke, *Unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten: „Amerikanisierung" in Deutschland und Frankreich* (Stuttgart, 2003), p. 8.

[735] Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, trans. by Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike (London, 1997), pp. 26–27.

[736] Peter Lyth, 'Fast Forward: Speed, Streamlining and National Pride, 1912–1952', in *Neue Wege in ein neues Europa: Geschichte und Verkehr im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Ralf Roth and Karl Schlögel (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), pp. 321–37 (p. 324).

[737] Ibid., p. 328.

Chapter 6
Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the *Slovenská strela*

Czechoslovakia was no exception from this scramble for speed. From 1930 car races

were held annually on the Masaryk Circuit in Brno, the first purpose-built road racing circuit in

East-Central Europe, which was praised for its 'exceptional speed'.[738] The press described the

first race on 28 September 1930 as an 'astounding success', estimated the number of

spectators at 100,000 and described the course of the race as 'dramatic', 'as if it had been

made for an American film' (it was won by the German driver Heinrich-Joachim von Morgen in

a Bugatti).[739] As the changing travel habits of Europeans indicate, between the two world wars

progress was increasingly identified with acceleration.[740] The first commercial aeroplanes took

to the sky during the First World War. The Czechoslovak government founded the

Czechoslovak State Airlines ČSA (*Československé státní aerolinie*) on 6 October 1923 as one of

the first state-owned airlines in the world. The first flight was from Prague to Bratislava, and

from 1929 ČSA aeroplanes flew from Prague to Užhorod with stops in Brno, Bratislava and

Košice. The first international flight in July 1930 took Czechoslovaks from Prague and Bratislava

to Zagreb, a link that was later extended with generous financial support from the Little

Entente as the Adriatic Express (*Jadranský expres*) to Dubrovnik via Sušak and Split.[741]

Flying remained an extravagant means of transportation for the rich and famous in the

inter-war years. But automobiles started seriously competing with the railways for passenger

numbers. The number of registered cars in Czechoslovakia skyrocketed from fewer than ten

thousand in 1922 to more than 200,000 in 1938.[742] Most of these were produced domestically

by one of the remarkable number of Bohemian and Moravian carmakers, which included

Praga, Aero, Walter and Jawa in or near Prague, Tatra in Kopřivnice, Laurin & Klement (which

merged with the armaments producer Škoda in 1925) in Mladá Boleslav (Jungbunzlau), and

Wikov in Prostějov (Proßnitz). Zbrojovka Brno (Ammunitions works Brno) also produced

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[738] František Fürst, *Masarykův okruh: Jeho vznik* (Brno, 1933), p. 14.

[739] 'Obrovský úspěch Masarykova okruhu', *Lidové noviny*, 29 September 1930, p. 1.

[740] Lyth, p. 325.

[741] Barbora Bartáková, 'Rivalové na leteckých tratích: Československá letecká doprava v meziválečném období', *Historický obzor*, 10.11–12 (November–December 1999), 265–70.

[742] Jan Štemberk, *Automobilista v zajetí reality: Vývoj pravidel silničního provozu v českých zemích v první polovině 20. století* (Prague, 2008), p. 19.

automobiles under the brand name Z. An impediment to the development of motorism was the bad condition of most roads in Czechoslovakia, which were generally unpaved. They were improved only gradually after a 1927 law earmarked funds for the upgrade of roads.[743] From the mid-1930s, the Italian and German examples sparked an intensive debate about the construction of so-called *autostrády* in Czechoslovakia, i.e. motorways without crossings for the exclusive use of motorcars. The centrepiece of the motorway network was to be a 'national highway' from Plzeň to Košice, proposed at the First National Economic Conference of 1935 in Prague and named the most important investment to be carried out by the state.[744] In the press, such as the illustrated weekly *Pestrý týden* (The week in colour), the proposal was presented in patriotic language as a means to reduce the high unemployment numbers caused by the Great Depression. Its main initiator, the engineer Karel Valina, warned that the construction of motorways was necessary in order 'to keep up with our neighbours'.

> We have to be prepared – now and in the future – for economic, political, cultural and military competition with the other progressive states in Europe. We must bind together all provinces of the republic with a firm bond for all times. And this bond, which simultaneously will bring all countries closer, is the proposed 'national highway' Plzeň–Košice, a real backbone of our republic [*páteř naší republiky*] and a unique connection between the European West and the Far East.[745]

Much like the railway discourse, then, the discussion that developed around the development of a road network made us of corporeal language that imagined the nation as a body and its communication lines as a skeleton. In a 1938 article published in *Národní listy*, the

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[743] Jan Štemberk, 'Schneller und weiter: Mit dem Automobil durch die Erste Tschechoslowakische Republik', in *Zwischen Exotik und Vertrautem: Zum Tourismus in der Habsburgermonarchie und ihren Nachfolgestaaten*, ed. by Peter Stachel and Martina Thomsen (Bielefeld, 2014), pp. 263–74 (pp. 266–67).

[744] Jan Oliva, 'Die Schaffung eines tschechoslowakischen Straßennetzes in gesamtverkehrspolitischer Betrachtung', in *Die moderne Straße: Planung, Bau und Verkehr vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hans-Liudger Dienel and Hans-Ulrich Schiedt (Frankfurt am Main, 2010), pp. 203–22 (p. 218).

[745] K. Valina, 'Účelnými investicemi k zmírnění nezaměstnanosti: Silniční investice', *Pestrý týden*, 10.22 (1 June 1935), p. 2.

popular novelist and diplomat Jan Havlasa (1883–1964) also called for the development of a
network of 'national motorways' in Czechoslovakia.

> In order for the motorways to genuinely become the backbone of the state, they must
> traverse its whole territory just as the backbone traverses the body. Even the densest
> network of veins and arteries would perish were it not held together by a strong
> backbone, and as the body grows so must the backbone.

Anticipating post-war developments, he imagined the motorways would provide relief to
overcrowded cities and lead to the development of suburbs.

> [Motorways must be] strong enough to withstand an intensified rhythm of life, in which
> overcrowded urban expanses would disappear. Life in cities would flow over into the
> countryside, maintaining an organic connection with the city, but at the same time
> creating harmony with the land.[746]

In Havlasa's proposal, then, roads harmonize the traditionally fraught relationship between
city and country by bringing urban modernity to the countryside. As Karel Teige did when he
called for the construction of a metro in Prague, Havlasa associated modern infrastructure
with healthy circulation. Not only speed, but also hygiene became a banner of the age.

Motorcars seemed to combine these characteristics and turned into symbols of
modernity. They represented speed and cosmopolitanism, a hint of the wide world. It is
unsurprising that the reports of the first race on the Masaryk Circuit emphasized the great
number of foreigners, both in the competition and in the audience, who had travelled to
Brno.[747] Adverts for cars were ubiquitous in glossy magazines and newspapers, including the
railway ministry's *Mezinárodní spoje*, to the extent that one railway official sighed that due to
the 'automobile fever', the car had become a 'spoilt pet, for whom visible advertisement is
done' everywhere.[748] The new media also contributed to developing this image. Czechoslovak

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[746] Jan Havlasa, 'Chvála silnice', *Národní listy*, 27 November 1938, pp. 1–2.
[747] 'Obrovský úspěch Masarykova okruhu', *Lidové noviny*, 29 September 1930, p. 1.
[748] Josef Koněrza, *Stavba jednokolejné hlavní dráhy z Handlové do Horní Štubně*, p. 14.

films of the 1930s often showed successful men driving fast cars.[749] Gustav Machatý's 1933

drama *Extase* (Ecstasy) played with this image, showing the heroine Eva's wealthy but sexually

unfulfilling husband Emil speeding through the countryside in a large automobile. Here,

modernity is shown as a hyper-hygienic dystopia: like his functionalist flat, everything in Emil's

life is efficient, clean and streamlined, leaving no room for the passion Eva craves. Hence, Eva

divorces Emil and takes a lover she met while swimming in a lake in the countryside. It is no

coincidence that the latter works as a builder on the railway and that the film ends with Eva

and him waiting at the railway station for a train to take them to Berlin. The train signifies an

old-fashioned, poor and slow romanticism that the modern, fast and rich motorcar could not

offer. *Extase* was, as many other cultural commentaries of the time, critical of this modernity.

But it was still a confirmation that cars were a modern symbol of speed and savvy

cosmopolitanism.

The competition between motorcars and trains soon became a topic in the public

discourse. A long article in the *Sudetendeutsche Tageszeitung* (Sudeten German daily) in May

1935 represented the railway as a revolutionary technology, 'more important for humanity

than Alexander's campaign in India'. But it considered its days numbered, suggesting it might

completely disappear within fifty years. The 'means of transport of the twentieth century' was

the automobile, it argued, superior to trains not only for economic reasons, but also aesthetic

ones:

> Take a look at a locomotive, that colossus of a machine, pulling several half-empty
>
> waggons, which are often in a less than satisfactory state of hygiene. And then compare it
>
> to the streets of a traffic-rich city, in which buses, cars and lorries zip back and forth with
>
> enviable agility, while accidents happen only relatively rarely. Certainly one will have the
>
> impression that the heavy monster roaring asthmatically with its load is no longer the
>
> ideal means of transport, but rather outmoded and destined to die out.[750]

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[749] Štemberk, *Automobilista*, p. 18.
[750] Eberhard Schöppe, 'Die Zukunft unsereres Verkehrswesens', *Sudetendeutsche Tageszeitung*, 8 May

The modern attributes of hygiene, speed and flexibility clearly spoke in favour of cars, the author suggested, and expressed regret that the railways would still have to exist for some time until cars could completely replace them. This view was shared by many in inter-war Czechoslovakia. Already in 1931, a railway publication praised the advantages of buses over trains. 'Travelling by bus is something new that is attractive mainly because it is cheaper, more fun and generally more relaxed for travellers than the strict order on the railway.'[751]

From the late 1920s cars became the first serious competitor to the railway's near-monopoly in the transport sector since its invention. This was less a matter of passenger statistics, in which the railways easily kept the upper hand. Until 1936, more people worked for the ČSD than owned a car, and many more Czechoslovaks took the train on a regular basis than travelled by car. Trains were especially dominant in the country's eastern half, where cars remained a rarity: 89 per cent of Czechoslovak cars in 1938 were registered in the Bohemian Lands.[752] But the railways were losing out when it came to the representation of modernity. Trains in Czechoslovakia were generally regarded as slow, old and dirty, quite the opposite of the public perception of motorcars. An article by the economist Jiří Hejda (1895–1985) in *Přítomnost*, the most important political weekly in the inter-war years, makes this clear. Hejda ridiculed the modernist car adverts in *Mezinárodní spoje*:

> The ČSD is exceedingly considerate of tourists. In the promotional publication released by the Ministry of Railways and distributed in all international express trains [...], it advises them to travel through Czechoslovakia by car – but not everybody has one of those.

The poor, Hejda continues, will still have to use 'that old-fashioned means of transport we call the railway'.

1935, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 28.

[751] 'Dráha – autobus', *Československé železniční listy*, 10 October 1931, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 9.

[752] Štemberk's table in *Automobilista* (p. 19) shows that of 221,513 automobiles in 1938, 143,239 were registered in Bohemia, 54,506 in Moravia and Silesia and 23,768 in Slovakia. No data is given for Carpathian Ruthenia, but considering that there were only 895 cars there in 1931, it is unlikely to have been a high number.

When they wish to travel a great distance, or to get somewhere quickly, Czechoslovak

citizens and foreigners in some entirely unjustified superstition use trains called expresses

[*rychlíky*]. [...] These are not fast, stop every fifteen minutes, and their carriages are just as

dirty and scruffy [...] as those of ordinary trains. The only thing that Czechoslovak express

trains share with foreign express trains are the high ticket prices.[753]

Hejda went on to argue that express trains were faster both in neighbouring countries and, for

many connections, in the former Habsburg Empire.[754]

The point that the international connections of the ČSD were slower than they had

been before the First World War was a recurring motif in the press. The glossy *Mezinárodní*

spoje, which was designed to promote the trains as a contemporary means of transport, was

repeatedly used as an object of ridicule for feigning a modernity that, in the eyes of the critics,

did not exist. A 1929 article in a Prague German newspaper on the 'decline of our railways'

argued: 'If [the Minister of Railways] wants to influence the competition between car and

railway in favour of his department, his actions will have to be reflected in the timetables and

not just in propaganda albums on American ships'.[755] The Ministry of Railways was aware of

the negative image ČSD trains had in the public. The problem of train speed, two ministerial

officials wrote in response to Hejda's article, 'has become even more acute through the

development of the motorcar'. They justified the low speed of Czechoslovak trains compared

to other European countries with the country's hilly landscape and the legacy of a weak

railway superstructure and bridges inherited from the Habsburgs.[756]

By the early 1930s, there were calls in favour of abandoning the railway as a means of

transport altogether.[757] The ČSD was seen not only as old-fashioned aesthetically, but also

unviable economically, a blown-up state-owned bureaucracy ill-adapted to survive in modern,

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[753] Jiří Hejda, 'Proč nejezdíme rychlíkem', *Přítomnost*, 8.35 (2 September 1931), 547–48 (p. 547).

[754] Ibid. and the eponymous continuation in *Přítomnost*, 8.38 (23 September 1931), 607–08.

[755] O. S., 'Der Verfall unserer Eisenbahnen', *Montagsblatt*, 13 May 1929, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 5.

[756] [Pavel] Koller and [Jindřich] Rybák, 'Rychlost vlaků v Československu', *Hospodářská politika*, 7
November 1931, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 9.

[757] Schöppe; Pavel Koller, *Dopravní krize a postavení železnic* (Prague, 1933), p. 7.

efficient capitalism. Indeed, the ČSD struggled to be profitable throughout the 1920s, and the

Great Depression plunged the railways into a deep financial crisis. From 1929 until 1932,

passenger transport fell by 20 per cent and freight transport by 40 per cent.[758] The economic

crisis had a long-term impact, and the company was still running an operating loss of several

hundred million crowns between 1932 and 1934.[759] Unsurprisingly, the radical solution of

scrapping the railways was opposed not only by railway workers who saw their jobs in

danger.[760] Many reasons, as the ministerial economist Pavel Koller noted at a talk to the Czech

Economic Society in October 1933, spoke for a coexistence of cars and railway, not least the

fact that the competition from cars improved the quality of trains. 'Automobilism forces the

railway to perfect its quality, both in terms of train speed and in terms of travel opportunities

offered to the public, i.e. the number of trains.'[761]

Modernization was thus an economic necessity for the Ministry of Railways, due both

to the Great Depression and the rising competition from cars. The ministry attempted to speed

trains up by reducing the number of stops, and by advising engine drivers to take on cooling

water less often.[762] More significantly, the Czechoslovak government invested into the

modernization of the railway infrastructure. There were various plans to introduce

aerodynamic steam locomotives following the British example, where in 1938 the Mallard

locomotive set an unbroken speed record for steam locomotives at over 200 kilometres per

hour.[763] The development of aerodynamically designed locomotives was followed closely by

the illustrated press, which never failed to note the speed reached by a new bullet train.[764] It

also noted the beauty of aerodynamic form. 'Aerodynamics', claimed one article, 'is the

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[758] Koller, *Dopravní krise*, p. 13.
[759] *Statistika československých drah za rok 1937* (Prague, 1938), p. XLIV–XLV.
[760] See for instance 'Konkurence automobilů železnicím', *Železniční zřízenec*, 10 June 1930, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 6.
[761] Koller, *Dopravní krise*, p. 12.
[762] 'Rychlost vlaků bude až o 100 procent zvýšena', *A.Z. České slovo*, 27 October 1931, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 9.
[763] 'Aerodynamické lokomotívy na československých štátnych železniciach', *Ľudová politika*, 22 April 1937, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 78. On the Mallard, see Lyth, p. 330.
[764] See e.g. 'Ve znamení okřídleného kola', *Pestrý týden*, 10.19 (11 May 1935), p. 22.

science of elegance'.[765] While Czechoslovakia's light railway superstructure meant that speeds

like in Britain were all but impossible, the ČSD still modernized rapidly in the 1930s. The

government routinely spent more than 100 million crowns annually on the upkeep and

modernization of the rolling stock.[766] Emphasis was placed on the motorization of trains, which

allowed both substantially higher speeds than steam locomotives and a greater number of

trains without the need to rebuild the tracks. Locomotives propelled by combustion engines

were introduced on the first lines in 1927 and their number increased more than sixfold

between 1928 and 1937, from 85 to 539 (the number of steam locomotives remained steady

at around four thousand).[767] Most of the new trains were first used on local routes, such as the

well-known *Modré šípy* (Blue arrows), built by Škoda between 1934 and 1936. By 1938,

motorized locomotives accounted for a quarter of all passenger kilometres. Czechoslovakia

thus developed into a European leader in railway motorization. By the mid-1930s, the country

was second behind Germany in the total number of motorized locomotives, and first when

expressed as a percentage of all locomotives (18 per cent).[768] The Ministry of Railways was

certainly satisfied with the outcome of its modernization drive. In a piece for *Pestrý týden*,

Pavel Koller wrote in 1935 that 'motorization has advanced farther on the ČSD than on any

other European railway [...]. Foreign railways have only started motorizing intensively in recent

years and often rely on the Czechoslovak model.'[769]

The *Slovenská strela* as a Signifier of Czechoslovak Modernity

Despite these improvements, the railways were missing a symbol of modernity that could

compete with the automobile. The trend in Europe as a whole was towards light, single-unit

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[765] J. Hajšman, 'První aerodynamická lokomotiva ČSD', *Pestrý týden*, 13.11 (12 March 1938), 10–11 (p. 11).

[766] Pavel Koller, 'Účelnými investicemi ke zmírnění nezaměstnanosti: Investice a obnova vozidel ČSD', *Pestrý týden*, 10.25 (22 June 1935), p. 2.

[767] Ibid., and *Statistika československých drah za rok 1937*, pp. XL–XLI.

[768] Štěpán, p. 204.

[769] Koller, Účelnými investicemi.

motorized trains. In mid-December 1933, an Italian *Littorina* train whose design had clear

similarities with the *Slovenská strela* performed a test run in Prague.[770] This spurred on the

development of a Czechoslovak high-speed train. After an offer by Tatra in February 1934, the

Ministry of Railways ordered two aerodynamic motor units capable of reaching 130 kilometres

per hour from the company in May 1934 for delivery in 1935. Like the *Littorina*, their design

was unmistakeably derived from that of automobiles.[771] Tatra's leading engineer and head of

the project was the Austrian Hans Ledwinka (1878–1967), a pioneer of Czechoslovak

automobile construction.[772] The engineer and inventor Josef Sousedík (1894–1944) created a

ground-breaking electromechanical transmission especially for the *Slovenská strela*, which was

inspired by automobile technology. He was said to have come up with the idea while driving a

car in the Moravian countryside.[773]

The aesthetic design of the train was self-consciously modern. The external and

internal design of the carriage was carried out by the modernist architect Vladimír Grégr

(1902–1943). Grégr had received his training from Josef Gočár and then worked for the

prominent property developer Václav Maria Havel (father of the playwright and later

Czechoslovak and Czech president), building a number of villas in Prague's new garden suburb

Barrandov. The carriage's internal design was praised by the ČSD on-board magazine as 'simple

and elegant', following 'the principles of modern architecture'.[774] The interior of the train was

unusual for having no compartments, but two rows of two seats each separated by an aisle

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[770] Kopřivnice, Archives of the Regional Museum, Fond Slovenská strela, 'Historie Slovenské střely', unpag. [p. 1].

[771] This view was shared by contemporary commentators. In one article, for instance, the train is described as a 'long motorized carriage, which brings to mind a modern automobile'. See 'Slovenská strela, pýcha našich železnic', *Polední deník*, 19 September 1936, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 59.

[772] Adolf Hitler and Ferdinand Porsche were influenced by inexpensive Ledwinka-designed Tatra cars in their search for an Aryan 'people's car'. As a result, Ledwinka spent six years in prison in Nový Jičín (Neutitschein) after the Second World War for alleged collaboration with the Nazis. See Hans Christoph Graf von Seherr-Thoß, 'Ledwinka, Hans', *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 14 (1985), 48–50, available online at <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/ppn11892849X.html> [accessed 21 August 2015].

[773] Historie Slovenské střely, unpag. [p. 2].

[774] *Šťastnou cestu*, 4.1 (1935), p. 1; quoted in Sousedík, p. 14.

(see Figure 19). The daily newspaper *Národní politika* (National politics) wrote that 'the interior of the train, which is second-class only, is luxurious. […] The comfortable club seats are soft […] and wide windows offer a clear view of the countryside.'[775] The train was one of the first locomotives in Czechoslovakia to be tested in a wind tunnel to improve its aerodynamic properties, a technology borrowed from aeroplane design.[776]

The train was marketed primarily at Bratislava businessmen as a connection that would allow them to travel to Prague and back in one day while leaving enough time to take care of business.[777] According to the 1936 timetable, it left Bratislava at 5.50 in the morning and after a single stop in Brno reached Prague's Wilson Station at 10.42. The return journey left Prague at 18.35 and reached Bratislava at 23.26.[778] The target group, it seems, was more than satisfied with the service. Despite a price surcharge and the need to purchase a seat reservation for an additional five crowns, the train boasted an occupancy rate 9 per cent higher than the ČSD average (36 per cent to 27 per cent) and made a profit from its very introduction.[779] It proved highly reliable and newspapers reported that despite its speed the *Strela* was never delayed; station staff called it 'clockwork' for its punctuality.[780] Many passengers used the train to travel only between Prague and Brno (far fewer passengers used the train only between Brno and Bratislava).[781] The railway ministry had planned to extent the

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[775] 'Zkušební jízda „Slovenské strely", nejrychlejšího čsl. motorového vlaku', *Národní politika*, 1 July 1936, p. 3.

[776] Koller, Flèche Slovaque, p. 243.

[777] Ibid., p. 239.

[778] See the timetable printed on the *Slovenská strela* advertising poster (discussed below), which is reproduced in Zuzana Kopcová, 'Studio Rotter (1928–1939)' (unpublished bachelor's thesis, University of Olomouc, 2007), p. 65; available online at <http://theses.cz/id/dtw9nm/> [accessed 12 June 2015]. Contrary to the poster's claim, the journey from Bratislava to Prague did not take '4h 51min', but one minute longer; the time was correct for the return journey.

[779] NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 55: Note by the Press Department of the Ministry of Railways, 7 July 1936; Historie Slovenské střely, unpag. [p. 3].

[780] 'Slovenská strela jezdí přesně včas', *Pražské noviny*, 26 July 1936, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 55; 'Co nám řekl o Slovenské strele její řidič', *Tatra: Podnikový zpravodaj*, 6 (1947), 5–7 (p. 6).

[781] It is asserted in the newsreel discussed below that 'passengers from Brno […] make the greatest use of this train' (see NFA, 'Bezstarostné cestování po železnici', 1937). This is only partially supported by the statistics for the period between July 1936 and June 1937 given in Historie Slovenské střely, unpag. (p. 3). These assert that in the direction Bratislava–Prague, 17 per cent of passengers travelled only from Bratislava to Brno, almost 50 per cent from Brno to Prague and roughly a third went the whole distance from Bratislava to Prague. In the opposite direction, roughly 40 per cent travelled only to Brno, 10 per cent only from Brno to Bratislava, and more than 50 per cent the

service over several other key routes, including the 'backbone of the nation' Prague–Bohumín–

Košice, the new connection Bratislava–Zvolen–Margecany–Košice (which was only completed

in July 1936), and routes within the Bohemian Lands such as Prague–Karlovy Vary and Brno–

Ostrava.[782] The destruction of Czechoslovakia in 1938 thwarted these plans.

Built with a streamlined body by an automobile manufacturer, the *Slovenská strela*

transferred elements of the modern aesthetic borrowed from cars and aeroplanes to the

railway. It thus allowed the railways to compete with motorcars aesthetically, and was widely

perceived as a symbol of modernity. This is illustrated by the responses to the public test runs,

which took place on 30 June 1936. One train departed from Prague and the other from

Bratislava and both met halfway in Přerov (Prerau), in honour of the Central Moravian

Exhibition that was being held there. The event was attended by a number of dignitaries,

including the mayor of Bratislava, the president of the ČSD, Ledwinka, Sousedík and a throng of

Czech, Slovak and foreign journalists.[783] Telegrams were sent to president Beneš and railway

minister Bechyně.[784] The train covered the test track between Prague and Přerov in little more

than three hours, reducing the travel time of the fastest scheduled steam train by nearly an

hour and reaching a speed up to 140 kilometres per hour. Railway workers congregated at the

railway line to watch the new train whizz by and christened it 'red devil' due to its speed and

its red coat of paint.[785] Journalists also came up with their own nicknames, such as 'aeroplane

on rails' and 'modern dragon'.[786] The on-board publication of the ČSD made the new train

sound like a machine of the future, warning travellers that 'the great speed necessitates

various precautions that the public will be unaccustomed to', such as a special air-conditioning

system and a ban on opening the windows. It continued that 'despite its great speed, the

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whole way from Prague to Bratislava.

[782] '„Slovenská strela" i na novej trati Košice–Margecany', *Slovenský deník*, 21 July 1936, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 55; 'Slovenská strela', *Vpřed*, 15 July 1936, in ibid.

[783] Sousedík, p. 12.

[784] 'Zkušební jízda „Slovenské strely", nejrychlejšího čsl. motorového vlaku', *Národní politika*, 1 July 1936, p. 3.

[785] 'Rudý ďábel „jede po stropě"', *Národní střed*, 2 July 1936, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 54.

[786] 'Motorový rychlík „Slovenská strela"', *Věstník sdružení traťmistrů*, 7–8 (1936), in ibid.

carriage runs very smoothly. However, due to the great speed it is only possible to walk

through the carriage very carefully, since the inertial forces are greater than usual.'[787]

The train quickly became a sensation both in the press and on the radio. Pictures of

the 'elegant silhouette' of the 'glory of our railways' were ubiquitous.[788] Tatra used images of

the *Strela* in much of its advertising in the late 1930s.[789] It is illustrative of its fame that most

Czechoslovak dailies thought it newsworthy that the two prototypes were taken out of service

for a few days in September 1939 for routine checks.[790] Also *Národní politika* promoted the

technology of the train enthusiastically:

> First and foremost, the 'Slovenská střela' has ideal uninterrupted movement and breaking,
>
> despite the enormous acceleration […]. The 'Slovenská střela' easily reaches 120
>
> kilometres per hour in 86 seconds and is able to come to a halt from this high speed in 480
>
> metres on even terrain and in 700 metres on a downward incline of 5 per mil. Travellers
>
> who do not pay attention to it will not even notice changes of speed.

The paper continued to praise the calm ride despite the high speed, and concluded: 'The

"Slovenská střela" is a wonderful product in all regards. […] The Czechoslovak State Railways,

the Tatra works, manufacturer Sousedík and everyone who in thought or deed helped to

create the "Slovenská střela" deserves the public's appreciation.'[791] This enthusiasm was

shared by the Slovak press. Andrej Hlinka's party paper *Slovák* reported that 'the Slovenská

strela has flown' and wrote that the train 'travels at a speed of 120 kilometres per hour and is

therefore a serious competitor to aeroplanes'.[792] In economic terms the ČSA link between

Prague and Bratislava was a long stretch from competing even with slow steam trains. But in

terms of the notion of modernity it aimed to represent, the *Slovenská strela* certainly

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[787] *Šťastnou cestu*, 4.1 (1935), p. 1; quoted in Sousedík, p. 14.
[788] These quotations are taken from the following article, which also announced a radio broadcast:
'Slovenská strela, pýcha našich železnic', *Polední deník*, 19 September 1936, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton
59.
[789] See the advertisements in *Mezinárodní spoje 1937–38* and *1938–39*, and in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 59.
[790] See the articles in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 59.
[791] '„Slovenskou střelou" k dopravní zkrácení republiky', *Národní politika*, 2 July 1936, p. 3.
[792] 'Slovenská strela letela', *Slovák*, 2 July 1936, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 54.

competed with aeroplanes. And news of the train did not only make waves in Czechoslovakia.

Using a similar aerospace metaphor, the Vienna daily *Reichspost* reported that the 'flying train'

was faster than the famous German '"Fliegender Hamburger", which only made it to 124

kilometres [per hour]'.[793] Both *Slovenská strela* trains were featured on the cover of the 1937–

38 edition of *Mezinárodní spoje*, familiarizing an international audience with their distinctive

aesthetic (see Figure 16). In the late 1930s, the *Slovenská strela* epitomized the correlation of

speed and modernity, both in Czechoslovakia and internationally.

This is illustrated by a modernist advertising poster for the train widely distributed

from 1936 (see Figure 20). The poster was designed by the advertising studio of Vilém Rotter in

Prague, which created several modernist posters for transportation companies.[794] The poster

shows the *Strela* speeding through the night, lighting up the dark surrounding countryside.

Telegraph poles in the background further add to the image of speed and punctuality. The

timetable was printed directly onto the poster below the words 'From Prague to Bratislava in

4h 51min'. It had an immediate impact; one commentator thought that 'the colour poster of

our own "Slovenská strela" feels like the call of a new age'.[795] More recently, the artist Petr

Štembera has written that 'the train, just like the advertisement, are among the very best of

pre-war Czechoslovakia'.[796]

The train was also featured in the 45-minute documentary-style newsreel *Bezstarostné*

cestování po železnici (Trouble-free travel on the railways) that was shown in Czechoslovak

cinemas in 1937.[797] It gives viewers a taste of the train's speed with several long scenes of the

train hurtling along the tracks from the rear and from behind the driver. Another shot proved

the point, showing the speedometer needle at 130 kilometres per hour. However, the narrator

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[793] 'Das „slowakische Geschoß"', *Reichspost*, 3 July 1936, p. 8. The *Fliegender Hamburger* was a high-speed train on the line between Hamburg and Berlin which had entered service in 1933.
[794] Kopcová, pp. 23–24.
[795] Vladimír Ringes, 'O rychlosti na koleji kdysi a dnes', *Ročenka státních a soukromých drah Československé republiky* (Prague, 1938), 1107–31 (p. 1124).
[796] Petr Štembera, 'Reklamní plakát v Praze ve 30. letech: Vilém Rotter a jeho Atelier', *Bulletin moravské galerie v Brně*, 64 (2008), 95–100 (p. 98); quoted in Kopcová, p. 24.
[797] NFA.

explained, 'the passengers do not concern themselves with the train's speed as it flies along'.

Instead, the atmosphere inside the train was shown to be that of a comfortable café:

passengers played cards and read the newspaper while enjoying coffee and other

refreshments from the 'well-stocked buffet'. Both the poster and the film promoted the same

message: the *Slovenská strela* was the fastest and most efficient way to travel for the modern

businessman.

The *Slovenská strela* as a Tool of Czechoslovak Nation-Building

All in all, the *Slovenská strela* was a successful and highly visible signifier of belonging to the

modern world for the Czechoslovak railways and Czechoslovakia as a whole. At the same time,

though, the train was also conceived and perceived as a tool of Czechoslovak spatial nation-

building. After all, it ran on the railway line from Prague to Bratislava, which linked the

Bohemian capital to the new Slovak one and thus symbolized the unity of Czechs and Slovaks.

There had been no direct connection between the two cities before the First World War.

Especially the section from Břeclav in south-eastern Moravia via Kúty (Jókút, Kutti) to

Bratislava was problematic, since it was only a local railway, built in 1900 as a collaborative

project by the *Kaiser-Ferdinands-Nordbahn* and the Hungarian State Railways. The railway

historian Miloslav Štěpán has noted that 'unwittingly one of the important connections of the

future Czechoslovakia was being prepared'.[798] Indeed, as one of their first projects, the

Czechoslovak Ministry of Railways feverishly upgraded the track.[799] Only when works were

completed in 1921, express trains were able to serve this, as the historian Jiří Vysloužil has

called it, 'most important connection' for the country.[800]

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[798] Štěpán, p. 163.
[799] Ibid., pp. 168, 193.
[800] Vysloužil, p. 80.

Chapter 6
Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the *Slovenská strela*

The connection between Prague and Bratislava remained highly symbolic for the Czechoslovak nation-state as a whole, since Bratislava kept significant German and Hungarian-speaking communities throughout the inter-war period. The city played a key part in the Hungarian national narrative as the ancient capital during the Ottoman occupation of Buda from 1541 to 1686. Its geographically peripheral position adjacent to the Austrian and Hungarian borders and pro-Hungarian attitude of most of its Hungarian and German-speaking citizens meant that the Czechoslovak authorities always viewed the city with distrust. The ambivalent relationship of the government to the city was indicated by the conflict about the re-opening of an electric railway from Bratislava to Vienna between the Ministry of Railways and the Bratislava-based Ministry Plenipotentiary for the Administration of Slovakia. The much-loved *Pressburgerbahn*, a local railway that ran as a tram within the two cities, had been opened in 1914 after decades of conflict between the Pressburg bourgeoisie, which supported it for economic reasons, and the Budapest government, which feared it would lead to the Germanization of Hungary's western 'Magyar bastion'.[801] The train was economically successful, but ceased operation when the city became a theatre of war during the Czechoslovak-Hungarian conflict of 1919. Until 1923, attempts by the municipality and the Slovak ministry to re-instate the service were blocked by the Ministry of Railways, which feared that the Hungarian employees of the privately-run train might exploit their position for subversive activities. It also demanded the construction of modern border control facilities that would prevent the dissemination of pro-Magyar propaganda. These conditions were only fulfilled in December 1923, when non-stop services were re-introduced.[802] However, the passenger numbers of the *Pressburgerbahn* were a far cry from before the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. In October 1935 the train was discontinued and its Slovak section incorporated into the Bratislava municipal tram system.[803] The creation of the Habsburg

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[801] Regarding the history of this railway, see Babejová, pp. 170–79; and Felix Jeschke, 'Dracula on Rails: The *Pressburgerbahn* Between Imperial Space and National Body, 1867–1935', *Central Europe*, 10.1 (2012), 1–17.

[802] Jeschke, pp. 14–16.

[803] Ibid., p. 16.

successor states crushed geopolitical realities in Bratislava and caused a nationalization among the city's population. Even the traditionally pro-Hungarian German-speaking bourgeoisie increasingly looked towards Berlin, not Budapest or Vienna. One citizen noted that 'in the city trams one could all of a sudden hear German spoken like […] on Unter den Linden'.[804]

In a sense, then, the demise of *Pressburgerbahn* can be seen as the flip side of the rise of the *Slovenská strela*. Rather than by a patriotic Hungarian, German-speaking bourgeoisie, the city became dominated by a class of nationally conscious Czech and Slovak capitalists prepared to pay a premium in order to travel in style between the two capital cities of the country. The Czechoslovakist mission of the *Slovenská strela* was emphasized by the Ministry of Railways. To ensure that the train looked like a representative of the state idea from the outside, a large moulded coat of arms of Czechoslovakia, designed by the sculptor Jan Nušl (1900–1986), a pupil of *fin-de-siècle* sculptors Josef Mařatka and Bohumil Kafka, adorned its front.[805] In a press release, the ministry praised the train's exceptional speed, 'which has drawn such attention and even desire'.

> Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia want and need the most active and frequent of communication with the capital of the state and its western half […]. Journeys from Carpathian Ruthenia and Slovakia to Prague have long ceased to be infrequent and exceptional events. Although Prague will never lose its powerful and alluring emotive charm for Slovaks, they became a matter of everyday necessity. But the horror of the kilometres and the never-ending hours in the train!

The new train, the article promised, would make the long hours spent on the train travelling within Czechoslovakia a thing of the past. It also made redundant the discussion of the viability of trains in view of the competition from cars and aeroplanes.

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[804] Zuzka Zguriška, *Strminou liet* (Bratislava, 1972); quoted in Peter Salner (ed.), *Taká bola Bratislava* (Bratislava, 1991), pp. 20–21.

[805] Marcel Fišer, 'Jan Nušl', *www.socharstvi.info: Informační portál, věnovaný modernímu a současnému sochařství v České republice* <http://socharstvi.info/autori/jan-nusl/> [accessed 21 August 2015]. Nušl had previously collaborated with the architect Grégr on his Barrandov villas.

> The railways as a public and, most of all, mass means of transport will remain
>
> indispensable for a very long time to come, especially on long-distance routes. The
>
> railways merely need to be modernized and improved. The fact that the *Slovenská strela*
>
> will be faster and offer greater comfort, thus serving the needs of the Czechoslovak
>
> railways and its passengers, is the reason why the entire Slovak public has received it with
>
> such delight. It is why all Slovaks hope it will soon fly along all Slovak lines, connecting with
>
> its admirable speed Prague, the heart of the republic and the capital city of our state, to
>
> Slovakia and Ruthenia. Yes, the *Slovenská strela* has a mission of Czechoslovak
>
> rapprochement and connection.[806]

Many commentators agreed with this view and the train's test runs were widely perceived as a

measure of spatial nation-building. The conservative newspaper *Národní střed* (National

centre) wrote that 'two "Slovenská strela" trains met at Přerov station. One came from

Bratislava, the other from Prague. Czech and Slovak journalists met in Přerov. The trains

became a symbol of the state idea: Přerov became the bridge where Slovakia and the historical

lands met'.[807]

However, like most gestures of Czechoslovakism, the *Slovenská strela* soon came

under scrutiny from Slovak autonomists. It was especially the train's name that became a bone

of contention. It is likely that the railway ministry chose to call the new high-speed train

'Slovak' as a nod to placate the strengthening Slovak autonomist movement. This is supported

by the fact that all signage on the train was held in Slovak only, as was Vilém Rotter's

advertisement discussed above.[808] However, *Slovák* disagreed with the choice of name,

arguing that Slovak peasants would have little reason or money to use the expensive high-

speed train to Prague. The train, the paper suggested, should be named 'Czech-Jewish'. 'No

Slovak is employed on the *Slovenská strela*. It wasn't built in Slovak factories, it was built by

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[806] NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 54: 'Fejton: Slovenská strela', press release (4 July 1936).
[807] 'Rudý ďábel „jede po stropě"', *Národní střed*, 2 July 1936, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 54.
[808] Kopřivnice, Archives of the Regional Museum, Fond Slovenská strela: 'Nápisy na Slovenskou strelu'.

non-Slovak workers and perhaps even from non-Aryan capital.'[809] A similar but reversed

argument was put forward by a Magyar MP in a speech to supporters in the southern Slovak

town of Dunajská Streda (Dunaszerdahely, Niedermarkt), which was primarily Hungarian-

speaking. He argued that the government was oppressing Magyars in their cultural and

linguistic rights, citing monolingual Slovak station signs as an example. He continued that 'a

good Magyar cannot use [the *Slovenská strela*], which is otherwise a practical train, because

the name will remind him of injustice'. He suggested the train be called 'Bratislava Bullet'

instead.[810]

Even some of the Czech press had difficulties with the name. The Czech nationalist

journal *Národní myšlenka* (National idea) suggested that the government had been overly

accommodating towards Slovak demands.

> [The *Slovenská strela*] is certainly a positive sign of our honest and absolutely selfless
>
> relationship to Slovakia, to which were are giving a gift wrought by Czech diligence and
>
> Czech work in front of the eyes of the domestic and foreign public. For the naming may
>
> lead some to the assumption that the train is a Slovak product.

The article then doubted that the train would be called 'Czech Bullet' if the situation was

reversed and it had been produced in a Slovak factory. 'We would be glad if only we could be

absolutely sure that […] there is no doubt on the Slovak side regarding the fact that whatever

is Slovak is also Czech and *vice versa*, for the nation and the state are Czechoslovak.'[811] The

paper seems oblivious to the fact that it was engaging in the game of 'us and them' as much as

any Slovak autonomist. The public debate around the *Slovenská strela* thus illustrates the

Czechocentrism inherent in the Czechoslovakist project (as well as the antisemitic chauvinism

that characterized much of the autonomist reaction). Czechoslovakist railway projects revealed

the fissures within the so-called Czechoslovak nation.

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[809] 'Ostala Slovenská strela slovenskou?', *Slovák*, 17 July 1936, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 55.
[810] 'A ešte Slovenská strela', *A-Zet*, Bratislava edition, 17 July 1936, in ibid.
[811] '„Slovenská strela"', *Národní myšlenka*, 9–10 (1936), in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 54.

The *Slovenská strela* and the End of Czechoslovakia

In autumn 1938 and spring 1939, the Czechoslovak state was gradually dismembered by Nazi Germany and its allies. The Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938 allowed *Wehrmacht* troops to march into the borderlands of Bohemia and Moravia. On 2 November the First Vienna Award granted parts of southern Slovakia to a revisionist Hungary. The liberal German newspaper *Prager Tagblatt* (Prague daily) reported on the humanitarian cost of the agreements:

> At midnight the first express train with sealed carriages to cross the occupied territory was
>
> dispatched from Bratislava. It was fully occupied, to a large part with refugee families from
>
> Slovakia. In front of Kuty [sic] station groups of people with furniture were visible on the
>
> road waiting to cross the occupied territory.

Without stopping, the train went through Břeclav, the next stop on the line which had been awarded to Germany. It was delayed near Česká Třebová (Böhmisch-Trübau), where the Germans were building a new railway link to avoid going through the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and reached Prague with a delay of several hours. The article ended on a related note: 'The "Slovak Bullet" passed through Brno yesterday morning, too. Only a third of its seats were occupied.'[812] The *Prager Tagblatt* thus identified the destruction of the country with the decline of the train's popularity. Indeed, the *Strela* did not survive the occupation of the Bohemian Lands by Nazi German troops in March 1939, after which its route was cut up by the new borders between the Third Reich, the Nazi-administered Protectorate and the semi-independent Nazi satellite Slovak Republic.

The following decades were a mere epilogue to the train's heyday in the late 1930s. Despite Hitler's predilection for Tatra cars, the two motor coaches spent almost the entire war stored in a Bratislava depot and were only occasionally commissioned to transport German

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[812] 'Sperrzug "Slowakischer Pfeil"', *Prager Tagblatt*, 6 November 1938, p. 4.

officers.[813] After 1945, they were returned to service, running briefly on the routes Prague–

Ostrava and Prague–Karlovy Vary, before providing regular services between Prague and

Nuremberg from autumn 1946 during the military tribunals. The trains were used by American

troops stationed in Germany to go on excursions to the Bohemian spas and to Prague.[814] After

the end of the trials, they were used by the Czechoslovak government for official trips. In 1953

one motor unit was destroyed in a fire while undergoing repairs. The other one was retired in

1960 and has since been part of the holdings of the Technical Museum in Kopřivnice; it has

been on prominent display outside the museum's main entrance since 1997.[815]

The *Slovenská strela* was the most prestigious railway project of inter-war

Czechoslovakia. It was also a political project. It contributed to the unification of the nation by

connecting the Slovak capital with the national one and was represented as a Czechoslovakist

project by most commentators. At the same time, its streamlined speed showed the world

that technologically, Czechoslovakia was at the forefront of Europe. Its aerodynamic silhouette

proved that trains could compete with cars in the inter-war period not only in terms of

passenger numbers, but also as symbols of modernity. Throughout the inter-war years the

country grappled with the paradox that its railways, like most railway systems around the

world, were designed and perceived simultaneously as national and as cosmopolitan. Unlike

other railway projects, the *Slovenská strela* signified both cosmopolitan modernity and

national unity. The *Slovenská strela* was therefore the culmination of the railway project of

Czechoslovakia. But it also coincided with the arrival of a much more sinister modernity. After

the beginning of the Second World War in 1939, modern technology (such as the Škoda works

in Plzeň) was redeployed to produce arms, and Europe's railway network was soon

transporting millions of Jews, Roma and others to extermination camps, where efficiency was

judged not in terms of profit maximization but in terms of the number of people killed. Within

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[813] 'Co nám řekl o Slovenské strele její řidič', *Tatra: Podnikový zpravodaj*, 6 (1947), 5–7 (p. 6).
[814] Ibid.
[815] Navrátil, p. 23.

a few years, the *Slovenská strela* and its aims of modernity and speed on the Czechoslovak

railways seemed like from another era. It is emblematic that although the train saw some

service after the Second World War, it never returned to a route between the Bohemian Lands

and Slovakia. It became a symbol of the First Republic as soon as the latter had been

destroyed.

Conclusion
National Bodies, Modernity and Railways

This thesis set out to corroborate first Czechoslovak president Tomáš G. Masaryk's terse statement that 'the railways have raised nations in the same way as schools'. Specifically, I used the railways as a lens to examine the processes of nation-building in inter-war Czechoslovakia with the methods of cultural history. Cultural studies of the railways of the kind pioneered by Wolfgang Schivelbusch hinted at the nationalizing impact of trains, but there was a lack of case studies demonstrating it. It is clear that the railways were ubiquitous in the lives of Czechoslovaks: more than one per cent of the country's population worked for the Czechoslovak State Railways. Furthermore, the number of journeys taken annually per capita on the ČSD hovered around eighteen in the late 1930s and on average, every Czechoslovak travelled four hundred kilometres by train every year. The railways thus facilitated national communication in its most basic form. This study is based on the hypothesis that, given their presence in the everyday lives of Czechoslovaks throughout the country, the railways were significant in the way Czechoslovak identity was constructed.

The physical results of the railway project are easy enough to quantify. The state built a total of 372 kilometres of new track until 1938, which featured 66 stations, 32 large viaducts and 44 tunnels with a combined length of 25 kilometres.[816] This might not seem like a large total, considering Czechoslovakia inherited more than 13,000 kilometres of track from the Habsburg Empire. However, considering the mountainous terrain of Slovakia where most new lines were built, it was a major feat of engineering. It was also capital-intensive and did not promise great financial returns. However, as the largest public enterprise in Czechoslovakia, the ČSD routinely attracted the highest single portion of the budget.[817] More importantly for

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[816] Václav Průcha et al., *Hospodářské a sociální dějiny Československa 1918–1992. I. díl: Období 1918–1945* (Brno, 2004), p. 303.

[817] Antonie Doležalová, 'Ve státním zájmu? Státní podniky v meziválečném Československu', *Historický časopis*, 3 (2011), 443–69 (p. 447).

my purposes, a comprehensive system of new east-west links was created. These allowed the

country to turn the fragments of the Habsburg lines that had centred on Vienna and Budapest

into a unified Czechoslovak network, stretching from Cheb to Jasiňa with Prague at its centre.

But, except when a new line was inaugurated or a new train like the *Slovenská strela*

made its debut, Czechoslovaks rarely invoked the railway system as an instrument of national

unification. It had become an infrastructure grown into the land. Since it was rarely in the

political limelight, the main challenge of this thesis has been to specify the impact of the

railway system on the construction of Czechoslovakia's spatial and national identities. I have

addressed the problem of sources by using a broad thematic approach that focused on

discourse. The development of the railway network was continuous 'work on national space',

an evolving framework that structured Czechoslovak national space both internally and

externally: the reach of the national railway system marked the extent of the national

geography and delineated Czechoslovakia from its neighbours. To be sure, this remained a

work in progress throughout the inter-war years, as the remnants of the pre-1918 network

that survived the destruction of the Habsburg Empire – such as the *Reichsbahn*-operated

sections near the German border or the ČSD-operated section in Romania – showed. But there

was a continuous effort to nationalize the railway network, in both senses of the word: to take

it into state ownership and to give it a particularly Czechoslovak character. Czech railway

workers were transferred to Slovakia, Ruthenia and the multilingual borderlands of Bohemia

and Moravia. Other signifiers such as station signage further underlined the privileged status

of the Czechs. The nationalization of the railways proved controversial with ethnic minorities.

Many Germans regarded Czech-speaking conductors in the 'German linguistic area', for

example on the express train between Liberec and Cheb, as the vanguard of an encroaching

foreign domination. Not without reason, they were seen as attempts to turn territory that was

considered German into Czechoslovak national space. A common reaction was the glorification

of the Habsburg national policy, when, as one German newspaper from Plzeň claimed in 1925,

'national sensitivities were meticulously guarded' and 'there was always a member of one's

own nation to turn to'.[818] Magyars and autonomist Slovaks in Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia

shared the German fears, but so did many Czechs in the Bohemian borderlands. The use of

German or Hungarian on trains in Czechoslovakia was considered a constant reminder by

nationally-minded Czechs and Slovaks that the country was not yet a homogeneous nation-

state. Particularly in Bohemia's multilingual borderlands, a trilateral relationship developed, in

which both the Czechs and the Germans felt disadvantaged by the government, which

teetered between upholding the rule of law and its duties towards the Czechoslovak

Staatsnation. The emotions unleashed by the Jireš case illustrate that trains were among the

main public places in which this relationship was played out. For Jireš and other nationally

conscious Czechs, taking the train was not merely a matter of travelling from A to B, but also

an assertion of national identity.

This indicates that in a fundamental way, the national railway network in

Czechoslovakia transformed the experience of travel. This becomes even more evident in its

promotional material. Using the slogan 'Don't travel abroad. Get to know your homeland!', the

Czechoslovak State Railways and tourist organizations like the Club of Czechoslovak Hikers

encouraged citizens to travel. One tourism activist commented in 1938:

> [This campaign] has been bringing more and more visitors to Slovakia every year, who –
>
> especially in the poorest areas that abound in natural beauty – bring the local population
>
> great financial benefits. […] Getting to know each other fosters the convergence of Slovaks
>
> and Czechs, the resolution of many problems, the explanation of misunderstandings. It
>
> deepens mutual respect and secures the bond of brotherly love.[819]

Of course, such Czechoslovakist rhetoric was an idealization of the realities of travelling by

train. Travel accounts by Czech writers like Karel Václav Adámek, Vojtěch Lev and Stanislav

Kostka Neumann demonstrate that 'getting to know each other' fostered perspectives that

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[818] 'Eisenbahnpolitische Rückblicke', *Pilsner Tagblatt*, 31 March 1925, in NA, MŽ-TR, Carton 2.
[819] Ivan Štefánik, 'Klub československých turistov na Slovensku', in *Padesát let Klubu československých turistů 1888–1938* (Prague, 1938), pp. 52–55 (p. 55).

were often less than respectful and facilitated a hierarchical view of the nation. At the same time, all described Slovakia and Ruthenia as their homeland and with a sense of belonging. To speak with Wolfgang Schivelbusch, the panoramic view from the train window changed along with the borders and the form of government.[820] Train travel facilitated a nationalized view of the landscape.

However, the impact of railway discourses did not just favour national identifications and, to use Rogers Brubaker's terminology, Czechoslovakia was not only a 'nationalizing state'.[821] It was also an internationalizing state that aspired to convey a sense of cosmopolitanism. Indeed, the Czechoslovak state ideology depicted the country as a beacon of democracy in a sea of authoritarianism and illiberalism. Shaped by Tomáš G. Masaryk, this ideology aimed to attract travellers by portraying Czechoslovakia as an open and modern country. Since the large majority of foreign visitors arrived by train, the railway network was crucial in creating this representative modernity. The maps printed in *Mezinárodní spoje*, the most widely distributed Czechoslovak propaganda publication, illustrate this double aim, showing the country at the centre of European railway lines, and simultaneously unified by a dense national network. In the built environment, the elegant, aerodynamic exterior of the *Slovenská strela* and the clean monumentality of Hradec Králové station represented the narrative of cosmopolitanism. Promotional materials illustrated the wealth of railway connections to Czechoslovakia and were distributed by travel agents and railway companies throughout Europe and further afield, inviting tourists to board a train and visit the country.

The railway discourse thus reflected two themes common in inter-war Czechoslovakia: Czechoslovakia as a unified nation, and Czechoslovakia as a cosmopolitan democracy. Nothing shows this dual role better than the *Slovenská strela*. Czechoslovakia's only high-speed train represented both the unification of Czechoslovakia, and its simultaneous modernization. Like

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[820] Schivelbusch, p. 51.
[821] Brubaker, p. 6.

the de-Austrianizing architecture of the Hradec Králové and Uherské Hradiště stations, this

high-speed train seemed to wrench Czechoslovakia from the – as it was seen – dusty grip of

the Habsburgs towards a post-imperial, national modernity. At the same time, it promised a

Czechoslovakia that was cosmopolitan and well-adapted to the needs of the modern traveller.

The train thus exemplified the two trajectories of the Czechoslovak railway discourse. The

simultaneous pursuit of these two goals, one inward-looking and one outward-looking, was

not necessarily seen as a contradiction by contemporaries. As in the celebration of the

Slovenská strela, they often existed side by side. Czechoslovakia, the narrative suggested, was

turned into a unified national space by the railways, and at the same time, the railways'

inherent internationalism was characteristic of Czechoslovakia, a country distinguished by its

cosmopolitanism.

The parallel aims of national unity and cosmopolitanism were linked through a

common organic imagery that identified the national territory with a human body. The latter

lent itself to analogy with the railway system. The historian Ralph Harrington has written that it

'not only […] convey[s] the physical complexity of the vast networks of intertwined lines, it also

embodies the idea of the railway as a system that nourished and sustained the national

body'.[822] The Czechoslovak image had two geographic layers that corresponded to the

narratives of nationalism and cosmopolitanism: in the smaller, national layer, it was the

national territory of Czechoslovakia within which the transport network ensured healthy

circulation around the heart Prague. In the larger, international layer, Czechoslovakia as a

whole formed the heart of Europe, pumping trains to the far corners of the continent, from

Istanbul to Calais. Organic metaphors of this kind can be found throughout the themes dealt

with in this thesis. Drawing on Friedrich Ratzel's organicism, the geographer Viktor Dvorský

explicitly approached geography as a biological science, in which states provided a natural

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[822] Ralph Harrington, 'Biological Metaphor and Railway Systems: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century
Perceptions of the Railway', *Artificial Horizon* (1999)
<http://www.artificialhorizon.org/essays/pdf/metaphor.pdf> [accessed 22 August 2015], p. 2.

territory to nations. 'The territory is the body of the state', he wrote.[823] The Czechoslovakist

discourse employed in the openings of new railway lines in Slovakia emphasized that railway

construction was turning the country into a well-structured unit. In travel writing aimed at

foreigners, Czechoslovakia was presented as the heart of Europe and the crossroads of past

and future, connected to the world by trains that, like 'pulsating' veins, ran back and forth

from the heart to the rest of Europe in a dense grid. The railway discourse gave a new twist to

the old nationalist cliché of Bohemia as the heart of Europe.[824]

The metaphor of the nation-as-body has often been linked to conservative, anti-

modern and fascist ideology.[825] In the mid-1930s, German road engineers presented the

construction of the *Autobahn* network in these terms, arguing that they were 'pulsating roads,

veins of the German *Volk* life in every respect'.[826] Even before the Nazis came to power,

revisionist German officials used an organic vocabulary that bears a striking resemblance to

the Czechoslovak case. In 1929, the head of the *Reichsbahn* in East Prussia, then separated

from the rest of Germany by the so-called Polish Corridor, complained about the loss of

transport connections that had previously linked the territory to Germany proper 'like veins

and nerve fibres'.[827] While spatial notions of the national body thus played an important role in

this *Weltanschauung*, many historians have focused on the Nazi construction of the

Volkskörper, the social body of the German people. In the Nazi discourse, Weimar

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[823] Dvorský, *Základy*, p. 12.

[824] See Pynsent, Heart of Europe.

[825] In addition to the works cited below, see Wilfried van der Will, 'The Body and the Body Politic as Symptom and Metaphor in the Transition of German Culture to National Socialism', in *The Nazification of Art: Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in the Third Reich*, ed. by Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will (Winchester, 1990), pp. 14–52.

[826] *Die Straßen Adolf Hitlers: Sechzig farbige Bilder auf Veranlassung des Generalinspectors für das Deutsche Straßenwesen geschaffen von Ernst Vollbehr* (Leipzig, 1935), p. 7; quoted in Boaz Neumann, 'The Phenomenology of the German People's Body *(Volkskörper)* and the Extermination of the Jewish Body', *New German Critique*, 36.1 (2009), 149–81 (p. 166). Translation adjusted.

[827] Quoted in Moritz Föllmer, 'Der „kranke Volkskörper": Industrielle, hohe Beamte und der Diskurs der nationalen Regeneration in der Weimarer Republik', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 27.1 (2001), 41–67 (p. 50). See also Inge Baxmann, 'Der Körper der Nation', in *Nation und Emotion: Deutschland und Frankreich im Vergleich. 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Etienne François, Hannes Siegrist and Jakob Vogel (Göttingen, 1995), pp. 353–65 (p. 361).

republicanism and the First World War had brought disease to the national body. National

Socialism offered the prospect of recovery through the expulsion of parasitic *Fremdkörper*

from within the national body. These foreign elements were, first and foremost, the Jews. As

Inge Baxmann has argued, the corporeal metaphor became 'the basis of a politics of exclusion'

in Nazi Germany.[828] The body of the nation was invoked as an idealized community purified of

foreign elements. The metaphor was therefore part of a pseudo-conservative stance that

referred to a constructed past. Examining why Czechoslovakia, which was so intent on its own

image of modernity, made such abundant use of similar terminology will go some way in

further assessing the impact of the Czechoslovak railway discourse.

The analogy of national territory as human body held together by the railway system

developed from the early nineteenth century and was widespread in many national narratives.

In his railway novel *La Bête Humaine* of 1890, Émile Zola (1840–1902) described the French

railway system as 'a huge body, a gigantic creature lying across the land, with its head in Paris

and joints all along the line, limbs spreading out into branch lines, feet and hands in Le Havre

and other terminal towns'.[829] In Hungary, both the national poet Sándor Petőfi and the

'greatest Magyar' István Széchenyi used a similar metaphor when they called for a railway

network as a circulatory organ around the heart Budapest. The Ottoman Empire was referred

to as the sick man of Europe, and its successor states kept the medical terminology: inter-war

Greece promoted the railways as 'the spinal cord of the land transportation system'.[830] The

historian A. Kim Clark notes that the Guayaquil–Quito railway in Ecuador 'was meant to be the

spinal column of an extensive system'.[831] Corporeal analogies in social discourse were even

older than the spatial railway imagery. The human body had served as a natural point of

comparison to social realities since ancient times and was used to simultaneously stress the

unity of social groups and their internal diversity. Hence, Plato constructed an organic

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[828] Baxmann, p. 361.
[829] Emile Zola, *La Bête Humaine*, trans. by Leonard Tancock (Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 58.
[830] Anastasiadou, *Constructing Iron Europe*, pp. 227–28.
[831] Clark, p. 203.

conception of the *polis*, in which a three-partite model of the human body corresponded to a three-partite model of social relations: the brain was the acropolis of the body and seat of the rational, the heart was its executive and protective warrior, while the area below the navel found its parallel in the irrational *demos*.[832] Also the concept of the diseased body, which is particularly often associated with Nazi Germany, was widespread elsewhere. The debate around the viability of inter-war Austria operated with spatial and medical metaphors, asserting that the Alpine republic was too small to survive and referring to Vienna as an inflated head stuck on a diminutive body.[833] The oblong, 'spaghetti-like' and implicitly crippled shape of Czechoslovakia was a recurrent motif especially among geographers critical of the country, but also among travellers like Stanislav Kostka Neumann exasperated by the long travel times. Similarly, the avant-gardist Karel Teige wrote about the metro in Prague in terms of disease and cleansing, using the old metaphor of circulation.

All this suggests that metaphors of body and hygiene were by no means limited to nationalist rhetoric, and indeed cut across ideological divisions. The nation as body and the railway system as a circulatory organ that ensured hygiene and health was an image that was used as a discursive tool of nation-building in many modern societies, irrespective of their political regime.[834] In inter-war Czechoslovakia, the corporeal metaphor was often used not to reject technological modernity, but rather the exact opposite: as a call for radical technological modernization. For Teige, Czechoslovak railway ministers and many others, hygienic circulation was regarded not only as a positive feature of modernity, but indeed a necessary requirement to turn Czechoslovakia into a modern country. Some one hundred years after the invention of the locomotive, notions of modernity still structured the discussion around the railways in inter-war Czechoslovakia. Organic images of the nation, the railways and modernity coalesced:

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[832] Rainer Guldin, *Körpermetaphern: Zum Verhältnis von Politik und Medizin* (Würzburg, 2000), pp. 46–47.

[833] Ota Konrád, *Nevyvážené vztahy: Československo a Rakousko, 1918–1933* (Prague, 2012), p. 32.

[834] As Jonathan Harris has demonstrated, this was not just a Central European discourse, either. See Jonathan Harris, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1998).

as the railway network was modernized, it turned into a tool of Czechoslovak nation-building; as new lines in Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia were constructed, they became part of the circulatory organ that centred on Prague, the heart of the nation and the state. Czechoslovakia, this suggested, was modern because it was a unified body politic held together by a railway network. The railway discourse thus added a spatial dimension to the Czechoslovak national myth, a precarious balancing act which combined a sense of closed nationhood with a sense of open cosmopolitanism.

Czechoslovak nation-building was distinguished from the Nazi version by the lack of a clearly defined foreign element that could be blamed for the parasitical undermining of the body. However, there were attempts at creating such an analogy: Viktor Dvorský saw the Germans as a foreign element in the Bohemian Lands, a people uprooted from their natural homeland; the national conflict on the railways showed that similarly, many Bohemian Germans regarded railway stations and trains as outposts of a foreign occupying power, i.e. the Czechs. But these views remained marginal. They peaked at the beginning and at the end of the First Republic and were never turned into state ideology. The nation-building process aimed to bind together previously disconnected territories rather than ejecting foreign bodies. Such a constructive attitude towards the body politic was not unique. In a book published shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, Henri Lefebvre, whose constructivist approach to geography has informed this study, identified two types of nation.

> An accomplished nation is necessarily a unity and a community, and hence a unit. But
> there are two forms: closed units and open units. A living organism is a whole, but one
> that receives impulses from all sides of the world, and one that develops and reproduces
> the received energy with its own rhythm. It is an open unit.

Lefebvre identifies 'fascism' as a closed unit, one that is therefore bound for extinction. By contrast, 'the new nation is alive and assimilating'.[835] While Lefebvre's Marxism had little in

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[835] Henri Lefebvre, *Le nationalisme contre les nations* (Paris, 1937), p. 238.

common with the dominant Czechoslovak narrative, Czechoslovakia can be seen as a prime

example of using the corporeal metaphor to argue for a cosmopolitan interpretation of the

nation. Czechoslovak railway planners would certainly have agreed with Lefebvre that their

country was a 'living organism' that received 'impulses from all sides of the world'.

However, Czechoslovakia's brand of organicism created problems of its own. It cast

Slovakia and especially Carpathian Ruthenia into the role of extremities, integral parts of the

body politic, but nevertheless peripheral. While this narrative was underpinned by a belief in

Czechoslovak unity, it nevertheless led to the creation of a geographic hierarchy that favoured

the 'motherland', as Czech statesmen often called the Bohemian Lands in the early years of

the republic. This pseudo-colonialist rhetoric fuelled the arguments of Slovak autonomists and

separatists, as well as nationalists of various *couleurs* in Ruthenia, that 'Czech rule' was little

more than Magyar suzerainty in a different guise. In the 1930s, the large number of Czech

workers on the railways in Slovakia and Ruthenia became as controversial as it had been in the

German-speaking borderlands of Bohemia and Moravia in the 1920s. The inherent

Pragocentrism of Czechoslovakism came to haunt its founders as a home-grown Slovak middle

class developed. Slovak autonomists welcomed the new railway connections built by the

government, but loathed the hierarchizing rhetoric of Pragocentric unity that went with it. As

such, the railway discourse reflected and nurtured a Slovak feeling of inferiority towards

Prague. Through its rhetoric of territorial integrity and unity, the railway discourse represented

one of the strongest arguments of Czechoslovakism. In its geographic hierarchization, it also

reflected one of Czechoslovakism's greatest weaknesses.

Until it was resurrected in a different guise in 1945, the Czechoslovak nation-building

project ended in 1938, when the Munich Agreement granted the Sudetenland to Nazi

Germany. On 15 March 1939, the *Wehrmacht* invaded the remainder of the Bohemian Lands.

After receiving encouragement from Hitler, Jozef Tiso had proclaimed an independent Slovak

state the day before. The geographic hierarchy of Czechoslovakia, to whose creation the

railway discourse had contributed, did not lead to the country's destruction. However, it

meant that Slovak independence was accepted with little internal opposition.[836] On 29 June

1945, Carpathian Ruthenia was awarded to the Soviet Union by a bilateral treaty. Amongst

other things, it was the rhetoric of peripherality of the railway discourse that facilitated these

border changes.

Although the idea of a single Czechoslovak nation was abandoned after the Second

World War, the notion that a Czechoslovak national territory existed survived the war years,

and formed the basis of the restoration of the state. The Košice Programme, which was

proclaimed on 5 April 1945 by a provisional cross-party government (pointedly called the

'National Front of Czechs and Slovaks', thus distinguishing between the two groups), became

the foundational document for post-war Czechoslovakia and made clear reference to the

country's territory:

> On its glorious journey to the west the Red Army has liberated the first parts of the
>
> Czechoslovak Republic. Thanks to our great ally, the Soviet Union, the President of the
>
> Republic was thus able to return to the liberated territory, and here – back on home soil –
>
> a new Czechoslovak government was created.[837]

The programme thus took the existence of a Czechoslovak 'home soil' for granted and

implied that the border changes of the war had been aberrations. The self-evidence with

which the document posits Czechoslovak national space is noteworthy, considering it had been

created only three decades earlier. It was enforced in a variety of contexts, including mapping

in schools and the media, and national marking in the landscape itself, for instance by

constructing hiking trails. As I have argued in this thesis, the railways were another context

that played a decisive part in the spatial codification that resulted in the naturalization of

Czechoslovak space by 1945. This was achieved both physically and metaphysically, i.e. both

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[836] Magocsi, p. 253; Heimann, p. 157.
[837] *Košický vládny program*, ed. by Viera Götzová (Bratislava, 1978), p. 87.

through the construction of railway lines which revolutionized the travel experience of

Czechoslovaks, and through the accompanying narrative, which, using motifs of national unity

and cosmopolitanism, fed into an often ambivalent notion of post-imperial, national

modernity. As it forged an iron landscape, the railway experiment of inter-war Czechoslovakia

also created a national landscape.
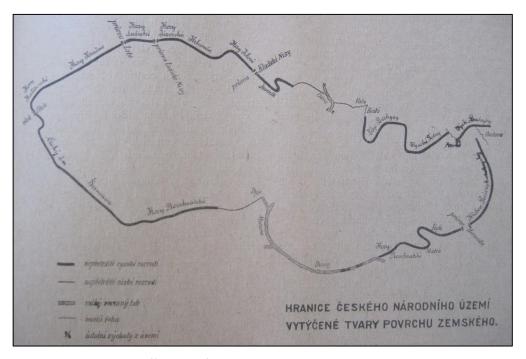
Appendix

Figures

Figure 1: Viktor Dvorský's map of the Czechoslovak national territory
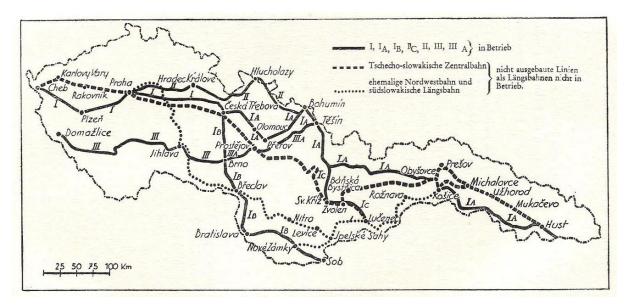
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Figure 2: Map of Viktor Dvorský's 'Czechoslovak Central Railway'

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Figure 3: The cover of Jan Antonín Baťa's 'Let's build a state for 40,000,000 people'

Figure 4: President Edvard Beneš officially inaugurates the construction of the Banská Bystrica–Diviaky railway, 29 September 1936

Prague, National Archives

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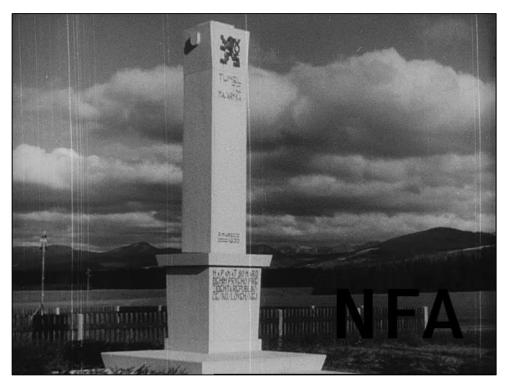
Mezinárodní spoje 1938–39, p. 8

Figure 6: Masaryk memorial by Sklené station on the Handlová–Horná Štubňa line

Prague, National Film Archives

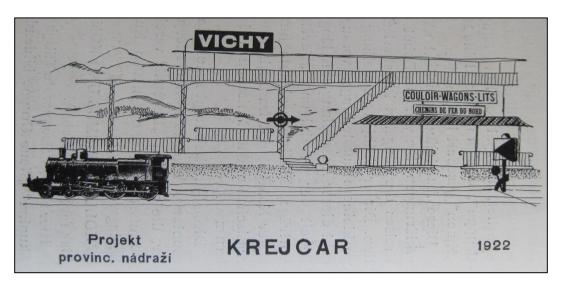*Figure 7*: Josef Jireš, 1896–1942

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My photograph

Figure 12: The ČSD slogan criticized in a newspaper carton

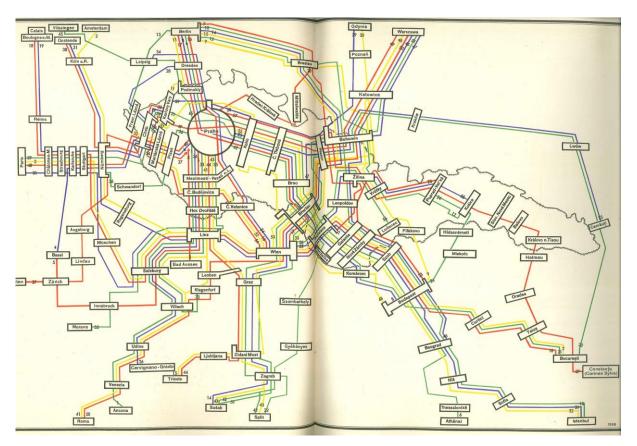*Národní sjednocení*, 11 July 1935

Figure 13: Schematic map of direct railway connections with Czechoslovakia in *Mezinárodní spoje*

Figure 14: Map of Czechoslovakia within the European railway system in *Mezinárodní spoje*

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Neumann, *Cesta II*, inset following p. 32

Figure 18: The *Slovenská strela* at Prague's Wilson Station

'Biografie představuje vynálezce a politika Sousedíka, valašského Edisona', *iDnes.cz Zprávy*, 30 June 2013 <http://zpravy.idnes.cz/kniha-o-vsetinskem-rodakovi-josefu-sousedikovi-ft1-/domaci.aspx?c=A130627_1945175_zlin-zpravy_ras> [accessed 22 August 2015]

Figure 19: The *Slovenská strela*'s interior

Kopřivnice, Archives of the Regional Museum

Figure 20: Vilém Rotter's modernist advertising poster for the *Slovenská strela*

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Tables: Nationality Statistics of Czechoslovak Railway Workers in 1923

Prague, NA, 813, Carton 314, no. 5727; for a detailed description of the geographic boundaries of each directorate, see Lexa, pp. 78–91

Table 1: Czechoslovak State Railways

	Czechs	Slovaks	Germans	Magyars	Poles	Rusyns	Others
Wage bracket I	1,163	25	242	19	2	1	28
Other office workers	28,074	2,401	11,711	890	427	60	70
Clerks	39,403	4,507	9,394	1,253	780	394	39
Manual labourers	36,673	12,714	10,691	1,489	963	1,033	91
Total	105,313 64%	19,647 12%	32,038 20%	3,651 2%	2,172 1%	1,488 1%	228 Marginal

Grand total: 164,537

Table 2: Directorate of State Railways Košice (Carpathian Ruthenia and north-eastern Slovakia)

	Czechs	Slovaks	Germans	Magyars	Rusyns	Others
Wage bracket I	112	15	5	16	1	2
Other office workers	1,150	915	179	460	40	21
Clerks	544	1,903	99	791	389	29
Manual labourers	1,146	5,818	120	815	997	69
Total	2,952 19%	8,651 55%	403 3%	2,082 13%	1,427 9%	121 1%

Grand total: 15,636

Table 3: Directorate of State Railways Bratislava (south-western Slovakia)

	Czechs	Slovaks	Germans	Magyars	Others
Wage bracket I	137	10	4	1	3
Other office workers	2,386	1,604	69	425	16
Clerks	1,253	2,529	47	461	2
Manual labourers	1,093	6,689	62	671	10
Total	4,873 28%	10,895 62%	182 1%	1,558 9%	31 Marginal

Grand total: 17,539

Table 4: Directorate of State Railways Brno (southern Moravia)

	Czechs	Slovaks	Germans	Others
Wage bracket I	135	-	11	3
Other office workers	2,563	8	820	13
Clerks	6,391	-	1,347	15
Manual labourers	4,886	11	643	22
Total	13,975 83%	19 Marginal	2,821 17%	53 Marginal

Grand total: 16,869

Table 5: Directorate of State Railways Olomouc (northern Moravia and Silesia)

	Czechs	Slovaks	Germans	Poles	Others
Wage bracket I	134	-	79	-	1
Other office workers	6,031	8	3,253	420	7
Clerks	5,486	11	1,375	753	2
Manual labourers	5,857	57	2,124	916	21
Total	17,508 66%	76 Marginal	6,831 26%	2,089 8%	31 Marginal

Grand total: 26,535

Table 6: Directorate of State Railways Hradec Králové (north-eastern Bohemia)

	Czechs	Slovaks	Germans	Others
Wage bracket I	165	-	48	1
Other office workers	5,565	3	3,027	12
Clerks	5,878	1	2,411	4
Manual labourers	5,925	2	2,970	10
Total	17,533 67%	6 Marginal	8,456 33%	27 Marginal

Grand total: 26,022

Table 7: Directorate of State Railways Plzeň (western Bohemia)

	Czechs	Slovaks	Germans	Others
Wage bracket I	156	-	31	2
Other office workers	3,866	-	803	5
Clerks	6,254	-	1,418	2
Manual labourers	6,706	-	1,331	8
Total	16,982 83%	0	3,583 17%	17 Marginal

Grand total: 20,582

Table 8: Directorate of State Railways Prague (northern, central and southern Bohemia)

Note: Detailed data for the Prague Directorate is missing from the archival file. These numbers were calculated based on the overall data for the ČSD. This directorate was split into two new ones (Prague-North and Prague-South) in 1924.

	Czechs	Slovaks	Germans	Others
Total	31,490 76%	6 Marginal	9,762 24%	93 Marginal

Grand total: 41,354

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