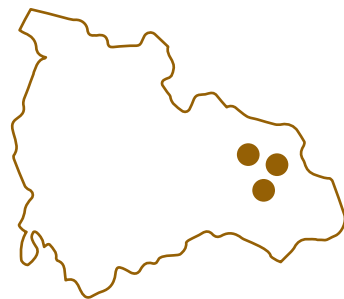


Brutalism, the Architecture of Sports Buildings and the Conservation Limits and Options

Brutalismus, architektura sportovních staveb a limity i možnosti památkové ochrany



Martin Strakoš

Abstract: Brutalism emerged as an architectural style in the context of Modernism in Great Britain in the 1950s, not penetrating Soviet-era Central and Eastern Europe until the following decade. In the Czech context, it was applied in the 1960s to 1980s mainly in public buildings, especially culture centres, hotels, sports and administrative buildings, infrastructure elements, memorials and funeral halls. In the introductory part, this study discusses the genesis of Brutalism and its theoretical anchoring. In the second part, it focuses on sports buildings in Ostrava, where the principles of Brutalism can be encountered in the multipurpose hall in Havířov, the former Palace of Culture and Sport in Ostrava-Zábřeh (the ČEZ then Ostravar Arena), the swimming pool in Ostrava-Poruba and the multipurpose hall in Frýdek-Místek, which was demolished in 2013. The architectural design of the above-mentioned buildings lies in a stylistically characteristic structural and material composition and in a distinctive sculptural form, set within the urban environment in a broader urbanistic context, which was often unresolved at the time, necessitating further interventions usually differing from the original plans. This study explores the origins of these buildings, traces their structural development, assesses their current condition, and considers the possibilities and limitations for their future conservation.

Key words: Brutalism; architecture; sport; heritage conservation; Ostrava Region

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Abstrakt: Brutalismus se jako architektonický styl zformoval v kontextu modernismu v 50. letech 20. století ve Velké Británii, zatímco do sovětizované střední a východní Evropy pronikal až v průběhu následujícího desetiletí. V českém prostředí se uplatnil v 60. až 80. letech 20. století především u veřejných staveb, konkrétně u kulturních domů, hotelů, sportovních a administrativních budov, objektů infrastruktury nebo u memoriálních realizací a smutečních síní. Studie pojednává v úvodní části o genezi brutalismu a jeho teoretickém ukotvení. V druhé části se zaměřuje na sportovní stavby Ostravska, kde se s principy brutalismu setkáváme u multifunkční haly v Havířově, u bývalého Paláce kultury a sportu v Ostravě-Zábřehu (ČEZ a posléze Ostravar Aréna), plaveckého bazénu v Ostravě-Porubě a multifunkční haly ve Frýdku-Místku, která byla zbořena v roce 2013. Řešení zmíněných objektů spočívá ve stylově příznačné konstrukční i materiálové skladbě a ve výrazné skulpturální formě, zasazené do městského prostředí v širším urbanistickém rámci, často však ve své době nedořešeném. Nejen to vyvolalo další intervence, obvykle odlišné od původních plánů. Studie se zabývá vznikem těchto staveb, jejich stavebním vývojem, současností i možnostmi a limity eventuelní památkové ochrany.

Klíčová slova: Brutalismus; architektura; sport; památková péče; Ostravsko

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The term Brutalism, used to denote one of the more prominent stylistic modes of Late Modernism, represents an important developmental line in the architecture of the second half of the last century, one that has been discussed with both indifference and passion in recent years. Such discussions usually concern efforts either to preserve or, conversely, demolish specific examples of this architecture of the second half of the 20th century. For example, the heritage conservation of the Hotel Thermal in Karlovy



Fig. 1. Multipurpose hall (now Gascontrol Arena), main façade with sales stalls, Havířov-Podlesí, 1965–1968, Josef Hrejsemnou, Stavoprojekt Ostrava, in collaboration with sculptor Václav Uruba, photo: Roman Polášek, 2019

Vary, the Transgas building in Prague and, currently, the departure hall of Prague's main railway station.¹ Brutalism stemmed from Modernism and penetrated other contemporary architectural trends from the 1950s until the rise of Postmodernism.² In the Czech context, this mode remained relevant from the 1960s to the 1980s.³ In its introductory section, this study focuses on the development of Brutalism in both European and

1 Questions concerning society's relationship to its architectural heritage from the second half of the 20th century and the possibilities for its heritage conservation were addressed in a thematic issue of the journal *Heritage Conservation Reports (Zprávy památkové péče)*, 2017, vol. 77, No 4. See also VORLÍK, Petr – POLÁČKOVÁ, Tereza (eds.), *Architecture on the Red List (Architektura na červeném seznamu)*, Prague 2020.

2 For information on the genesis and examples of Brutalism in international architecture, see *Atlas of Brutalist Architecture*, London – New York 2018 (2022). See also the exhibition catalogue by ELSER, Oliver – KURZ, Philip – SCHMAL, Peter Cachola (eds.), *SOS Brutalism. A Global Survey*, Zürich 2017. For more recent publications translated into Czech, see UFFELEN, Chris, *Brutalism Yesterday and Today (Brutalismus včera a dnes)*, Prague 2019. For the development of Brutalism in the context of modern architecture, see FRAMPTON, Kenneth, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History (Moderní architektura. Kritické dějiny)*, Prague 2022. More recent developments and the relationship to Modernism, including Brutalism, are addressed in HATHERLEY, Owen, *Militant Modernism (Militantní Modernismus)*, Prague 2021. Modern architecture, including Brutalism, is viewed critically and even dismissively, despite claims of valuing positive examples and guiding principles, by the conservative and traditionally oriented CURL, James Stevens, in *Making Dystopia, The Strange Triumph of Architectural Barbarism (Budování dystopie. Podivný triumf architektonického barbarství)*, Brno 2022. The authors of the first, third and last books mentioned here consider Brutalism a permanent part of architectural theory and practice from the 1950s to the present.

3 For a reflection on the development of Brutalism in the Czech context, see e.g. ŠVÁCHA, Rostislav, *Architecture 1958–1970 (Architektura 1958–1970)*, in: ŠVÁCHA, Rostislav – PLATOVSÁ, Marie (eds.), *History of Czech Fine Art IV/1 (1958–2000) (Dějiny českého výtvarného umění IV./1 (1958–2000))*, Prague 2007, pp. 66–69. Brutalism is discussed in more detail in older domestic summary publications, for example in: HAAS, Felix, *Modern World Architecture (Moderná světová architektura)*, Bratislava 1968, pp. 235–247; and in a modified form in: HAAS, Felix, *20th Century Architecture (Architektura 20. století)*, Prague 1978, pp. 386–399.



Fig. 2. Multipurpose hall (now Gascontrol Arena), eastern side façade with gargoyles and areas for collecting rainwater from the hall roof, Havířov-Podlesí, 1965–1968, Josef Hrejsemnou, Stavoprojekt Ostrava, photo: Roman Polášek, 2019

Czech contexts, mentioning exemplary architectural works that show Brutalism in both international and domestic settings.

The central part of the text looks at four sports buildings in the Ostrava Region that showcase Brutalist and sculptural tendencies in architectural design from the 1960s to the 1980s. It also demonstrates the application of this stylistic mode to a typologically specific group of sports buildings consisting of multipurpose halls and one more typologically distinct structure, a swimming pool.⁴ More specifically, this study focuses on a sports hall in Havířov, built between 1966 and 1968 based on a design by the Havířov architect Josef Hrejsemnou; a multipurpose hall in Frýdek-Místek, designed from 1971 by architect Oskar Chmiel at Stavoprojekt Ostrava and only completed in 1986; the Palace of Culture and Sport in Ostrava, constructed between 1976 and 1986 according to a design by Vladimír Dedeček at Stavoprojekt Bratislava; and finally a swimming pool in Ostrava-Poruba, constructed based on a design by architect Antonín Buchta at Sportprojekt Praha and completed in 1986.

The development and fates of the buildings in this group are illustrative, as I will attempt to demonstrate, not only in terms of the promotion of Brutalist ideas within a specific typological area of Czech architecture of the time, but also in the context of their existence after 1989. This is because the group exemplifies the application of this architectural style in the eastern part of Central Europe, specifically in the socialist bloc countries, with the buildings demonstrating various developmental trends, including variations between the concrete and steel lines of Brutalism. At the same time, all four buildings demonstrate varying degrees of structural persistence within the post-socialist context, including lack of understanding and aversion, even hatred and demolition, while on the other hand they also show the development of a positive attitude, and even

4 Sports architecture is addressed, for example, in: ŠVÁCHA, Rostislav (ed.), *Onward! Czech Sports Architecture 1567–2012 (Naprej! Česká sportovní architektura 1567–2012)*, Prague 2012. See, for example, the entry on the Palace of Culture and Sport, pp. 228–231.



Fig. 3. Multipurpose hall (now Gascontrol Arena), view of the sports surface, tribunes and roof structure, Havířov-Podlesí, 1965–1968, photo: Roman Polášek, 2019

a cult-like admiration of particular buildings connected with the sports events intrinsically linked to these structures. In my conclusion, I address the possibilities and limitations of the heritage conservation of these solitary structures within the environment of state heritage conservation under the post-socialist regime and society, as well as other potential approaches emphasising the preservation of the architectural and urban values represented by these unique buildings.

The Genesis of Brutalism in the International Context

The term *New Brutalism* emerged among young architects, critics and architectural theorists in Great Britain, more specifically in England, in the first half of the 1950s. It denoted an ethically oriented approach to creation that emphasised, among other things, the processual and material dimensions of a structure, prioritising its integrity as a whole. This included the use of structural and material elements in their natural state, alongside a focus on spatial concepts, the flow of energy within space, the social context, and tendencies towards abstraction. In this early phase of the new style, the aim was not to convey aesthetic intentions, but to establish a natural spatial framework for human coexistence, with a strong emphasis on the ethical dimension of architectural creation. In the spirit of Brutalism, buildings were expected to convey a striking visual identity, a pronounced emphasis on structural clarity, and a distinctive expression of materiality.⁵ The British architectural critic and theorist Reyner Banham wrote: ‘Brutalism tries to face up to a massproduction society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work.’⁶ At the same time, it sought to present materials ‘as they are’⁷, again as interpreted by R. Banham (1922–1988). Banham was a leading

5 BANHAM, Reyner, *The New Brutalism*, *The Architectural Review*, 9. 12. 1955, available online: <https://www.architectural-review.com/archive/the-new-brutalism-by-reyner-banham> [30. 08. 2023].

6 Quoted from HAAS, Felix, *20th Century Architecture (Architektura 20. století)*, Prague 1978, p. 388.

7 See note 3. Also: UFFELEN, Chris, *Brutalism Yesterday and Today (Brutalismus včera a dnes)*, p. 14.



Fig. 4. Multipurpose hall (now Gascontrol Arena), relief decoration of the coaches' gallery in the northern part of the hall above the tribune, Havířov-Podlesí, 1965–1968, Josef Hrejsemnou, Stavoprojekt Ostrava, in collaboration with sculptor Václav Uruba, photo: Roman Polášek, 2019

theoretical proponent of Brutalism's first developmental phase, based on an ethical approach to creation. He assessed it in a programmatic article from December 1955 in the British magazine *The Architectural Review*, and later concluded this initial phase with the publication of *The New Brutalism* in 1966, published in both English and German.⁸

There are several possible sources for the origin of the name itself, as with the verbal designation *Baroque*. One interpretative version of the origin of the term Brutalism asserts that the name was derived from the nicknames of the married architects Peter (1923–2003) and Alison (1928–1993) Smithson, as P. Smithson's nickname was allegedly Brut or Brutus. To this '-ali-' from the name Alison was added, and then the suffix '-sm', which donates a style in English, the resulting creation being the word *Brutalism*.⁹ However, another interpretative version refers to a recollection by Swedish architect Hans Asplund (1921–1994) who, when commenting on a project involving two of his colleagues, called them *neo-brutalists*.¹⁰ Asplund later stated that the term then found its way to Great Britain, where it spread and became established in entirely new contexts. Yet a third version suggests that our term developed from the French name for raw concrete – *béton brut*. From the late 1940s, Le Corbusier had begun employing exposed concrete bearing the imprint of wooden formwork in the architectural shaping of sculpturally conceived buildings.¹¹

8 BANHAM, Reyner, *The New Brutalism. Ethic or Aesthetic*, London 1966. The book was also published in German in the same year – see: BANHAM, Reyner, *Brutalismus in der Architektur. Ethik oder Ästhetik*, Stuttgart – Bern 1966.

9 HAAS, Felix, *20th Century Architecture (Architektura 20. století)*, p. 388.

10 He quotes this recollection in the chapter *New Brutalism and the Architecture of the Welfare State: England 1949–1959 (Nový brutalismus a architektura sociálního státu: Anglie 1949–1959)* FRAMPTON, Kenneth, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History (Moderní architektura. Kritické dějiny)*, Prague 2022, p. 287.

11 HAAS, Felix, *20th Century Architecture (Architektura 20. století)*, p. 388.

Brutalism itself emerged, as shown above, in Western architecture in the first half of the 1950s. Among its founding fathers, we can include precisely Le Corbusier (1887–1965) with his sculptural concrete projects dating from the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, most notably the housing units in Marseille and later in Berlin, as well as the sculpturally conceived Chapel of Our Lady of the Heights in Ronchamp. While less frequently mentioned or considered, a different source of inspiration was the American work of German-American architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) in the 1940s and 1950s. In his project for the expansion of the Illinois Institute of Technology campus in Chicago, he employed steel structures, glass and bricks to express the simplicity yet sophistication of his minimalist architecture. These two developmental lines represent the so-called concrete and steel Brutalism. Paradoxically, the steel line is not much considered in the Czech context, even though steelmaking, and the engineering associated with this material, have been characteristic for the Czech lands since the 19th century.

The school complex in Hunstanton, Norfolk, England is often cited as the first example of Brutalism.¹² The married architects Peter and Alison Smithson won a competition in 1949 to design a primary school with a gym.¹³ The complex, inspired by the American work of Mies van der Rohe and using a steel frame, exposed bricks and glass, appeared as part of the broader social measures by the post-war British Labour government to reconstruct the war-ravaged country, with plans to construct 2,500 schools and new satellite towns.¹⁴

For information on the characteristics of the actual project and the implementation of the first building in this new style, we can refer to one of the first mentions of Brutalism in the Czech context dating back to the end of the Socialist Realism period. In the first double issue of the magazine *Architecture of the Czech Socialist Republic (Architektura ČSR)* from 1956, there appeared a short translation of an article from the sixth issue of the Swedish periodical *Byggmästare A* from the previous year as part of the editorial selection. The article appeared under the title *School in Hunstanton – an Example of ‘New Brutalism’ (Škola v Hunstantonu – ukázka ‘nového brutalismu’)* and reported on the construction of a school complex for more than 500 pupils. The quotation marks highlighting the naming of this new direction suggested that the new architectural style, shaped in a Western environment, was, according to the authorities of the time, not expected to be met with understanding in socialist Czechoslovakia.

The text focused on the spatial arrangement and layout of the school in addition to its structural and material solutions. The article stated ‘This school building features a welded steel structure. The steel frame components were prefabricated in a factory in which they were also welded whenever possible, meaning that only assembly was carried out at the construction site. The 12 steel staircases were likewise manufactured in a factory and delivered to the site as complete flights.’¹⁵ Although the prefabrication mentioned in fact met the official requirements of the socialist regime for machine-produced housing, concrete panel production was only just beginning in Czechoslovakia and steel was a more expensive material than reinforced concrete, and as such was earmarked for strategic purposes and public structures. What’s more, the forms that Peter and Alison Smithson applied in their work were so radical that similar examples only appeared in Sovietised Central Europe after the definitive abandonment of Socialist Realism and the gradual rehabilitation of Modernism, and thus with a significant delay.

12 *Atlas of Brutalist Architecture*, p. 198.

13 For more about the project and its implementation, see JOHNSON, Philip, *School at Hunstanton, Norfolk*, by Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Architectural Review*, 19. 8. 1954, available online: <http://www.architectural-review.com/buildings/school-at-hunstanton-norfolk-by-alison-and-peter-smithson> [30. 08. 2023].

14 See FRAMPTON, Kenneth, *Modern Architecture*, p. 287.

15 *School in Hunstanton – an Example of ‘New Brutalism’ (Škola v Hunstantonu – ukázka ‘nového brutalismu’)*, *Architecture of the Czech Socialist Republic (Architektura ČSR)*, 1956, vol. 15, No 1–2, p. 87.

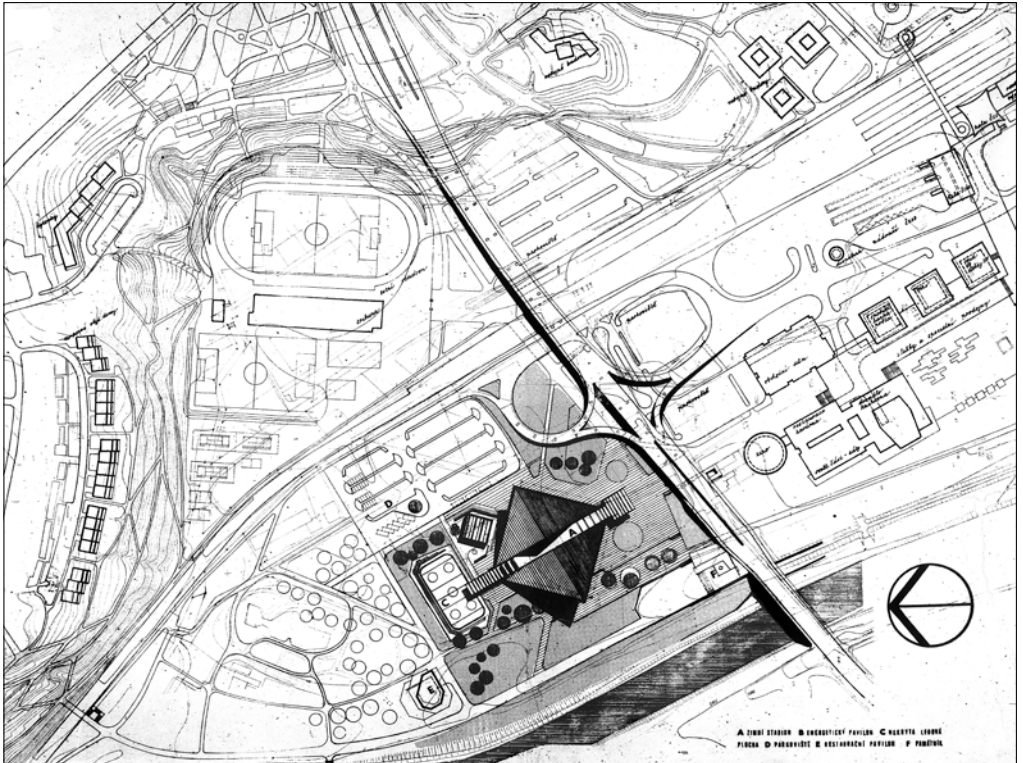


Fig. 5. Multipurpose sports hall in Frydek-Místek, site plan – integration of the hall into the new conurbation, undated, Oskar Chmiel, Stavoprojekt Ostrava, source: archive of the Department of Urban Development and Building Regulations, Frydek cadastral office, file 3126

The article also discussed the principles of New Brutalism, which emphasised, among other things, an honest approach to materials and their unembellished, exposed use. ‘The Smithsons advocate aesthetic principles in architectural design according to which each and every material in a building should be appreciated in a way that corresponds to the surface that the material had when delivered to the construction site, principles that are close to the Dadaism of Moholy-Nagy’s school and to “Bauhausism”’.¹⁶ ‘They want to achieve an aesthetic effect through the use of bare building materials and structures without any surface finishing,’ the text added with a certain detachment. The editors of *Architektura ČSR* clearly shared the Swedish periodical’s critical view of the new English school building’s final appearance, as evidenced by the article’s conclusion, which was presented without any commentary. The text ended with ‘The actual appearance of the results of such architectural work can best be seen in the published photographs of the new school in Hunstanton and the interior of its assembly hall’,¹⁷ while the photographs showed the austere steel structures, brick walls and glass panes of the building, diametrically different from the standardised and somewhat traditional designs of the domestic school buildings in housing estates conceived in the spirit of Late Functionalism and Socialist Realism.

The Genesis of Brutalism and its Acceptance in the Czech Context

While the reserved response presented above to the first Brutalist building in *Architektura ČSR* in 1956 was against the backdrop of lingering Socialist Realism in Czechoslovakia, changes over the following years led to a revival of the ethos of Late Modernism in its

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

milder variety with the Late International Style, labelled in the domestic context as the Brussels Style. However, even the Brussels Style did not become a universally accepted norm in the Czech context, although the majority of society saw in it an ethos of modernity. Some members of the architectural community did not embrace its principles with understanding, partly because of a certain superficial sense of trendiness and partly due to the outdated forms characteristic of the preceding decades. This segment of the architectural community was simply looking for new and more convincing stylistic expressions of current trends, and saw their fulfilment in the more radical manifestations of Modernism.

In the 1960s, there was more awareness of international architectural work, meaning a number of Czech architects gradually came to adopt as their own the more radical conceptual shifts of Late Modernism, including the sculptural architecture and Brutalism being developed in the West. Within the context of state design institutes, the most prominent actors in this development included the architectural studios of Věra and Vladimír Machonin, Karel Filsak and Karel Prager.¹⁸ The result was a whole series of projects and implementations developing Brutalist approaches to creation leading to similarly designed buildings in the 1960s and 1970s not only in the urban centres of the country, but also on its periphery, meaning in small-town settings and in mountain regions, where they came to represent the modern ambitions of society.

Of the projects implemented in Prague, I would mention the Kotva department store¹⁹ by Věra and Vladimír Machonin, built between 1969 and 1975, and declared a heritage site in 2019, and the *House of Residential Culture (Dům bytové kultury)*²⁰ in Prague-Krč by the same authors and built between 1968 and 1981. Brutalism principles combined with High-Tech were also applied in the design for the new departure hall of Prague's Main Railway Station by Josef Danda, Jan Bočan, Alena and Jan Šrámek and Julie Trnková, which was built between 1970 and 1979.²¹ This extension is part of a heritage conservation complex together with the Art Nouveau station building, yet is today threatened by plans to demolish a significant part of it for the construction of a new, uncovered hall.

While the Kotva department store has been declared a heritage site, there was also a failed proposal for the similar designation of the most important example of Brutalism in Czech architecture, namely the Intercontinental Hotel²² in Prague's Old Town built between 1966 and 1974 by a team of architects under Karel Filsak, even though it is the most striking product of that period and style in the country. The failure to designate the Transgas building²³ by architects Václav Aulický, Jiří Eisenreich, Ivo Loos and Jindřich

18 For more details, see ŠVÁCHA, R., *Architecture 1958–1970 (Architektura 1958–1970)*, pp. 66–69.

19 Kotva department store, Prague – Old Town, in: *Heritage Catalogue*, available online: <http://pamatkovykatalog.cz/obchodni-dum-kotva-13287276> [30. 08. 2023]. From more recent literature, see URLICH, Petr (ed.), *Kotva Department Store. History, Urbanism, Architecture (Obchodní dům Kotva. Historie, urbanismus, architektura)*, Prague 2018.

20 AS [SCHRÁNILOVÁ, Anna], *House of Residential Culture (Dům bytové kultury)* [Prague 4 – Krč], in: VRABELOVÁ, Renata (ed.), *Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s in the Czech Republic, Part I (Architektura 60. a 70. let v České republice I.)*, Prague 2020, pp. 96–97.

21 AS [SCHRÁNILOVÁ, Anna], *New Departure Hall of Prague's Main Railway Station (Nová odbavovací hala Hlavního nádraží Praha)* [Prague 1 – New Town], in: VRABELOVÁ, Renata (ed.), *Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s in the Czech Republic, Part I (Architektura 60. a 70. let v České republice I.)*, Prague 2020, pp. 104–105.

22 HOUŠKOVÁ, Kateřina et al., *Hotel Intercontinental in Prague. History, Urbanism, Architecture (Hotel Intercontinental v Praze. Historie, urbanismus, architektura)*, Prague 2019. See also AS [SCHRÁNILOVÁ, Anna], *Hotel Intercontinental* [Prague 1 – Old Town], in: VRABELOVÁ, Renata (ed.), *Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s in the Czech Republic, Part I (Architektura 60. a 70. let v České republice I.)*, Prague 2020, pp. 90–91.

23 GORYCZKOVÁ, Nada (ed.), *Transgas. Complex of the Control Centre for the Transit Gas Pipeline and the FMPE Building in Prague. History, Architecture, Heritage Potential (Transgas. Areál řídicí ústředny Tranzitního plynovodu a budova FMPE v Praze. Historie, architektura, památkový potenciál)*, Prague 2019. See also MK [KRACÍK, Matyáš], *Transgas* [Prague 2 – Vinohrady], in: VRABELOVÁ, Renata (ed.), *Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s in the Czech Republic, Part I (Architektura 60. a 70. let v České republice I.)*, Prague 2020, pp. 76–77.

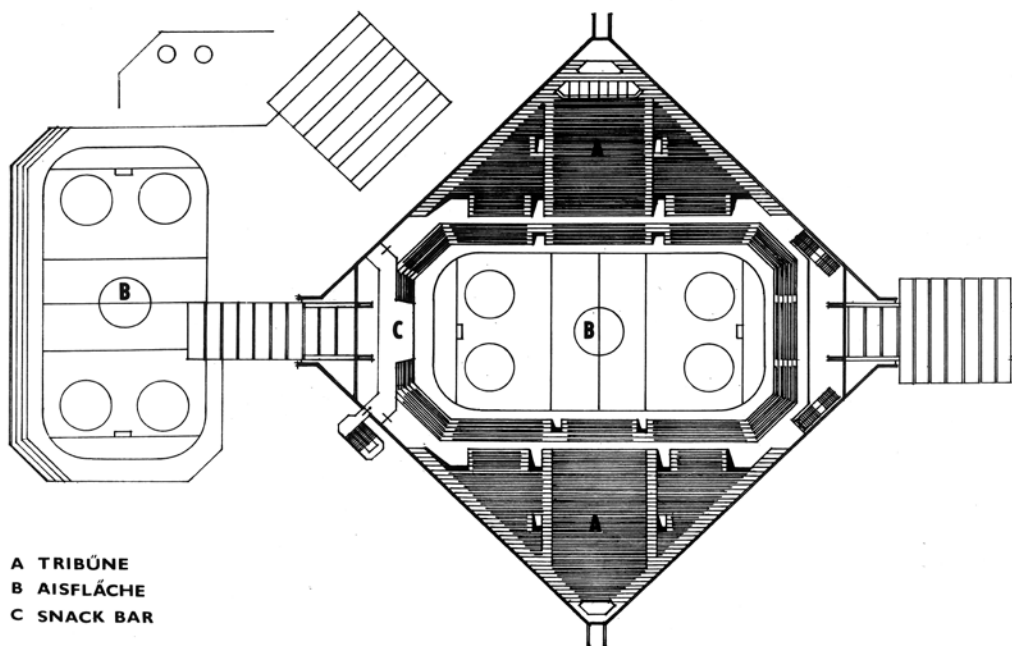


Fig. 6. Multipurpose sports hall in Frýdek-Místek, floor plan of the hall showing the layout of the ice hockey area, Oskar Chmiel, Stavoprojekt Ostrava, source: private archive of O. Chmiel

Malátek from 1966 to 1978, in which Brutalism was intertwined with High-Tech, actually led to the demolition of the complex. The fact that this stylistic mode did not exclusively apply to a specific typological group or to buildings of international significance is demonstrated, for example, by the Urology Clinic (Urologická klinika)²⁴ in Prague's New Town by a team led by architect Vratislav Růžička between 1970 and 1976, and the sports hall in Prague's Folimanka²⁵ by Jiří Siegel, built between 1972 and 1976.

The new expression also gained ground in the regional cities. In Plzeň, this is exemplified by the Ural Hotel, now Central,²⁶ built between 1967 and 1972 to a design by architect Jaroslava Gloserová, in the central historic square. A similar building in Brno is the Institute for Further Education of Secondary Medical Staff (Ústav pro další vzdělávání středních zdravotnických pracovníků)²⁷ by Vladimír Selzer and Miloš Holeček, built between 1965 and 1968. In the cities elevated to regional status after the administrative reform of 2000, there is a notable example of Brutalism in the world-famous spa town of Karlovy Vary, where the Hotel Thermal²⁸ for international spa clients by architects

24 MK [KRACÍK, Matyáš], *Urology Clinic (Urologická klinika)* [Prague 2 – New Town], in: VRABELOVÁ, Renata (ed.), *Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s in the Czech Republic, Part I (Architektura 60. a 70. let v České republice I.)*, Prague 2020, pp. 106–107.

25 AS [SCHRÁNILOVÁ, Anna], *USK Sports Hall Prague (Sportovní hala USK Praha)* [Prague 2 – Vinohrady], in: VRABELOVÁ, Renata (ed.), *Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s in the Czech Republic, Part I (Architektura 60. a 70. let v České republice I.)*, Prague 2020, pp. 108–109.

26 MB [BRÍZOVÁ, Miroslava], *Hotel Ural / Central* [Plzeň], in: VRABELOVÁ, Renata (ed.), *Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s in the Czech Republic, Part I (Architektura 60. a 70. let v České republice I.)*, Prague 2020, pp. 292–293.

27 AP [PTÁČKOVÁ, Andrea], *Institute for Further Education of Secondary Medical Staff (Ústav pro další vzdělávání středních zdravotnických pracovníků)* [Brno – Old Town], in: VRABELOVÁ, Renata (ed.), *Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s in the Czech Republic, Part II (Architektura 60. a 70. let v České republice II.)*, Prague 2020, pp. 506–507.

28 JKH [KONŮPKOVÁ HORVÁTHOVÁ, Jana], *Hotel Thermal* [Karlovy Vary], in: VRABELOVÁ, Renata (ed.), *Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s in the Czech Republic, Part I (Architektura 60. a 70. let v České republice I.)*, Prague 2020, pp. 260–261.



Fig. 7. Multipurpose sports hall in Frýdek-Místek, view of the main entrance façade from the south, 1974–1986, demolished in 2013, source: private archive of O. Chmiel

Věra and Vladimír Machonin was built between 1964 and 1977. In local centres, it also proved possible to implement several remarkable examples of the new Brutalism, for example the Cultural Centre in Žatec (kulturní dům v Žatci)²⁹ by Vratislav Štelzig in collaboration with František Machač, built between 1965 and 1971, the Cultural Centre in Březnice (kulturní dům v Březnici)³⁰ by Karel Prager, Jan Louda and Zbyšek Stýbl, built between 1978 and 1984, and the funeral hall at the cemetery in Svitavy³¹ based on a project by architect Pavel Kupka, completed in collaboration with sculptor Karel Nepraš between 1968 and 1971.

Multipurpose Sports Halls (Haviřov, Frýdek-Místek, Ostrava)

While examples of concrete Brutalism predominate in the above list, steel Brutalism dominated in the Ostrava Region. The Ostrava agglomeration had been associated with the production and use of iron since the 19th century. Moreover, after 1945, it underwent a significant transformation which, following the communist coup of February 1948, took the form of the building of new socialist cities in the spirit of Socialist Realism, with a propagandistic emphasis on developing the ‘steel heart of the republic’.

29 LH [HÁJKOVÁ, Lenka], *Moscow Cultural Centre / Salmon Social Centre (Kulturní dům Moskva / Společenský dům Losos)*, in: VRABELOVÁ, Renata (ed.), *Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s in the Czech Republic, Part I (Architektura 60. a 70. let v České republice I.)*, Prague 2020, pp. 232–233.

30 ŠK [KOUKALOVÁ, Šárka], *Workers' Community Centre / Březnice Cultural Centre (Sdružený klub pracujících / Kulturní dům Březnice)* [Březnice], in: VRABELOVÁ, Renata (ed.), *Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s in the Czech Republic, Part I (Architektura 60. a 70. let v České republice I.)*, Prague 2020, pp. 152–153.

31 EP [PRAŽANOVÁ, Eva], *Funeral Hall (Smuteční obřadní síň)* [Svitavy], in: VRABELOVÁ, Renata (ed.), *Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s in the Czech Republic, Part II (Architektura 60. a 70. let v České republice II.)*, Prague 2020, pp. 378–379.



Fig. 8. Multipurpose sports hall in Frýdek-Místek, view of the hall's side façade from the Ostravice River from the northwest, 1974–1986, demolished in 2013, source: private archive of O. Chmiel

The destalinisation in the second half of the 1950s and the renewed acceptance of Modernism were also reflected here in the extensive application of standardisation, mechanisation and prefabrication, as evidenced by the mass panel housing construction of the period. In the early 1960s, large cultural centres were being completed and, as the decade continued, the construction of large housing estates reached full speed. New cities such as Havířov required not only large public buildings, but halls primarily designed for sporting activities yet that were also adaptable for other purposes. In short, from the 1960s to the 1980s, not only in the Ostrava region but primarily there, projects and realisations of multipurpose halls emerged, distinguished by striking volumetric configurations, the use of steel structures, and the integration of these buildings into a broader urban context.

The first example of the three large multipurpose halls built in the Ostrava Region is the Multipurpose Sports Hall in Havířov-Podlesí (Víceúčelová sportovní hala v Havířově-Podlesí) (Těšínská 1296/2a, Havířov-Podlesí). This building was constructed on the southern edge of the large Podlesí housing estate built during the 1960s and 1970s.³² The design was prepared by architect Josef Hrejsemnou (1928–2010), who studied architecture in Leningrad from 1951 to 1957 under Ivan I. Fomin, where he experienced both the remnants of Socialist Realism and the beginnings of the destalinisation of Soviet society and the rise of Late Modernism. In his work he applied the principles and forms of modern architecture, and he was the author of the project for the Havířov railway station building, the grammar school in Havířov-Podlesí, part of the local residential

32 STRAKOŠ, Martin, *Havířov-Podlesí Housing Estate (Sídliště Havířov-Podlesí)*, in: SKŘIVÁNKOVÁ, Lucie – ŠVÁCHA, Rostislav – NOVOTNÁ, Eva – JIRKALOVÁ, Karolína (eds.), *Prefabricated Apartment Blocks Part I: Fifty Housing Estates in the Czech Lands (Paneláci 1. Padesát sídlišť v českých zemích)*, Prague 2016, pp. 262–269.



Fig. 9. Multipurpose sports hall in Frýdek-Místek, interior of the hall's playing surface with central skylight, view from a side tribune, 1974–1986, demolished in 2013, source: private archive of O. Chmiel

development and other projects in the city.³³ In his designs for both the station building and the sports hall, he sought to solve the challenge of creating a large hall using a steel structure complemented with architectural elements and artworks characteristic of the era, in the spirit of the Brussels Style or the emerging Brutalism. For example, for the Havířov railway station, Hrejsemnou collaborated with sculptor Václav Uruba (1928–1983), who created a concrete sculpture called *Guidepost (Směrník)* for the forecourt, located in front of the headquarters of the National Heritage Institute in Ostrava since 2015.³⁴

With the Havířov sports hall project, Hrejsemnou had to use a standardised hall structure, which he then had to equip with façades appropriate for the building's intended social use. He of course also addressed its integration into the housing estate's urban planning, including the addition of the necessary infrastructure for the building, and also had to take a creative approach to the space in the hall. As with the Havířov railway station, he incorporated fine art and collaborated with his contemporary, sculptor Václav Uruba. The latter contributed to the sculptural forming of the concrete ticket pavilions in front of the main façade of the hall, and also designed the main façade itself as a Brutalist concrete relief. In the hall interior, Uruba adorned the gallery above the northern

33 STRAKOŠ, Martin, *After Socialist Realism, Brussels, Metal, Glass, Structures and Concrete: Chapters on Architecture and Fine Art of the 1950s and 1960s from Brussels to Ostrava (Po sořele brusel, kov, sklo, struktury a beton. Kapitoly o architektuře a výtvarném umění 50. a 60. let 20. století od Bruselu po Ostravu)* Ostrava 2014, p. 198.

34 IVÁNEK, Jakub, *Václav Uruba's Guidepost in Its Old and New Context (Směrník Václava Uruby ve starém i novém kontextu)*, in: STRAKOŠ, Martin (ed.), *Odboje 1941/1 – The Restoration of a Modernist Architectural Landmark (Odboje 1941/1. Obnova památky moderní architektury)*, Ostrava 2016, pp. 85–90.

tribune with cladding shaped like biomorphic bubbles in a relief style. These sculptural inserts were characterised by an unusually expressive style for the local environment, which was typical of Uruba's works at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s.

The national enterprise *Construction of the Ostrava-Karviná Mines (Výstavba ostravsko-karvinských dolů)* constructed the Haviřov hall. The foundations were laid and a prefabricated hall with a steel structure was built in 1967, while in 1968, work focused on enlarging the auditorium as the prefabricated hall originally had smaller dimensions than the intended new building.³⁵ The expanded auditorium space allowed a larger number of spectators to watch matches and other events, including concerts. The hall officially opened on 13 November 1968 with a second-league ice hockey match between AZ Haviřov and Dukla Hodonín, attended by 3,500 spectators.³⁶ The hall thus became part of the civic amenities of the youngest city in the republic. Haviřov bus station, featuring a remarkable pavilion-style dispatch hall designed by architect Milan Hartl, was built next to it between 1966 and 1967.³⁷

The construction of cultural centres and sports facilities reflected the overlapping ambitions of the local national committees, the regional national committee, state enterprises, the Communist Party and the trade unions. The enterprises had significant influence over the proposed designs and, in some cases, even took charge of their implementation. A prime example is the horse racing complex in Slušovice, which reflected the ambitions of the local unified agricultural cooperative. Another example, in Ostrava, was the multipurpose hall known as the Palace of Culture and Sport in the Zábřeh nad Odrou district, although it is often incorrectly placed in Ostrava-Vítkovice, as the hall was actually built in the vicinity of Vítkovice. The main initiator of the construction was the *Vítkovice Ironworks and Engineering Works of Klement Gottwald (Vítkovické železárný a strojírný Klementa Gottwalda)*, as the enterprise was officially named at the time. The construction of the Palace of Culture and Sport was championed in the early 1970s by the then general director of the Vítkovice Ironworks and one of Ostrava's key communist figures, engineer Rudolf Peška (1924–1996). He persuaded the then leadership of the city of Ostrava and representatives of the Office of the Chief Architect of Ostrava that the planned sports and social complex with its large hall should not be built in the city centre but rather next to the Heavy Mechanics plant at the Vítkovice Ironworks, and that it should be developed and operated under the auspices of this, the largest industrial enterprise in Ostrava.

The architecture and technical equipment of the hall were intended to match the ambitions of both the general director and the enterprise. From 1974, the design was developed by Bratislava architect Vladimír Dedeček (1929–2020) at Stavoprojekt Bratislava, one of the most prominent figures in Slovak architecture of the second half of the 20th century.³⁸ He collaborated with the Bratislava design division at the Vítkovice Ironworks, which specialised in designing steel structures. This design division also served as the link between Dedeček and Peška, as the general director of the Vítkovice Ironworks had consulted them in the early 1970s about the steel structure of the Slovak National Gallery extension. That project convinced him to approach Dedeček to create the concept for the new hall in Ostrava.³⁹

35 *Construction of a Multipurpose Hall (Výstavba víceúčelové haly)*, in: Chronicle of the City of Haviřov, 1967, p. 9, available online: <https://www.kronikahavirov.cz/doku.php?id=rok1967> [30. 08. 2023].

36 *Multipurpose Hall – Opening (Víceúčelová hala – otevření)*, in: Chronicle of the City of Haviřov, 1968, p. 29 (31), available online: <https://www.kronikahavirov.cz/doku.php?id=rok1967> [30. 08. 2023].

37 The pavilion structure of the dispatch hall at Haviřov bus station was demolished in 2014, with the artistic decorations there, including a ceramic fountain and a relief, also disappearing at the same time. The original building was replaced with a new structure of very poor architectural quality.

38 For more, see MITÁŠOVÁ, Monika (ed.), *Vladimír Dedeček. Interpretations of an Architectural Work (Vladimír Dedeček. Interpretácie architektonického diela)*, Bratislava 2017. See also DEDEČEK, Vladimír, *Ostrava Palace of Culture and Sport Vítkovice (Ostravský Palác kultury a športu Vítkovice)*. Author's note, *Projekt*, 1991, vol. 33, No 1–2, pp. 13–15.

39 MITÁŠOVÁ, Monika (ed.), *Vladimír Dedeček. Interpretations of an Architectural Work (Vladimír Dedeček. Interpretácie architektonického diela)*, p. 470.

Architect Jaroslav Nemeč collaborated with Dedeček, the project's chief architect, on the hall's interior and artistic elements. The implementation project was created by Rudolf Fresser, Mária Oravcová and the 4th Studio for University and Cultural Buildings at Stavoprojekt Bratislava, under Dedeček's leadership.⁴⁰ The structural engineering was handled by Miloš Hartl, Mária Rothová, Ján Bustin and Jozef Šubr from the aforementioned Bratislava design division at the Vítkovice Ironworks. The implementation project was finalised between 1979 and 1980, and construction began in the year it was completed. Construction continued with several interruptions until the mid-1980s, with trial operation beginning in the autumn of 1985. The official opening took place during the 10th Women's Volleyball Championship in 1986, and the building was finally completed two years later.

This implementation in Ostrava represents, according to Monika Mitášová, the materialisation of Dedeček's idea of a large-scale multipurpose hall. Mitášová quotes a statement by him, in which he emphasised that 'the architectural concept reflects the spiritual movement of the end of our century: a large space – a place for cultural, social and sports gatherings, especially for the young generation, an octagonal amphitheatre covering over a hectare and covered by a metal vault. A large space for mass social events that amplifies feelings of social integrity, mainly through its acoustics, which we had the opportunity to experience at Karel Kryl's concert at the turn of 1989.'⁴¹

Massive reinforced concrete towers, originally clad in black slate, together with the robust steel structure connecting them, form the structural core of the building. The hall's equipment was supplemented with movable furniture and adaptable technology, enabling the interior to be reconfigured for a variety of uses. The variability of the hall space offered the possibility of up to 30 different configurations, ranging from a cinema, theatre or concert venue for 6,200 spectators, through sports events (ice hockey, figure skating, volleyball, basketball, handball, tennis, table tennis and gymnastics) usually accommodating between 6,200 and 9,200 spectators, all the way to large-scale events. When arranged for track and field with a running track, the events could be watched by 7,600 spectators. At the time of completion, the maximum capacity was 13,500.⁴² The hall became a venue for various sports and cultural events, and was enthusiastically embraced by many of the fans, seeing it as primarily a sports-related icon of the city. It also remains the largest building by a Slovak architect outside Slovakia – an iconic structure comparable to another of Dedeček's works, the aforementioned extension and reconstruction of the Slovak National Gallery complex, based on a design created between 1962 and 1968, built between 1969 and 1979, and renovated between 2016 and 2022.⁴³

The complexity of the Ostrava project was also evident in the fact that it proved impossible to complete the urban complex according to Dedeček's original plan. The second hall he had designed, supposed to be embedded below the terrace level, was never built. Nor was the hotel's slab-like vertical structure, which was meant to form a perpendicular to the terrace's horizontal line above which the main mass of the completed hall rises. Instead, in 2004, a block-shaped annex for the office building was added beneath the slope of the western stand, which needlessly disrupted the original composition based on the contrast between the terrace and the crystalline form of the hall's body rising above it – composed of the funnel-shaped tribune, cinched by a ring in the middle section and crowned by a pyramidal roof.

This structural intervention shows that the hall's managers did not – and still do not – understand the quality of Dedeček's architecture, and do not perceive care for the hall as an important obligation, not only in terms of this particular structure but also in relation to the image of the city of Ostrava and the profile of the local architectural heritage.

This is also shown through other structural modifications, such as the extension to the hall with the ice rink and the hotel, functions that Dedeček's project had actually

40 Ibid., pp. 469 and 471.

41 Ibid., p. 471.

42 Ibid., p. 473.

43 Ibid., p. 89n.



Fig. 10. Palace of Culture and Sport (now Ostrava Arena), view of the main façade from the north, taken from Ruská Street, Ostrava-Zábřeh, 1974–1986, Vladimír Dedeček, Stavoprojekt Bratislava, photo: unknown author, circa 1986, source: archive of the Institute of Construction and Architecture of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

planned for. Although the architect of the extension, Radim Václavík, sought to connect the new structure with the original design of the Palace of Culture and Sport, the new structure built to the northwest of Dedeček's building on a site where the original concept envisaged a hall below the terrace level, maintains a certain distance, meaning that its compositional distinctness only adds to the fragmentation of the whole, something particularly evident when viewed from the adjacent streets.⁴⁴

The hall received recognition in professional circles soon after its completion, and this continued even after 1989. Ivan Šimko even referred to it as the 'Ostrava beauty'.⁴⁵ Thus, despite the aforementioned modifications, it should be emphasised that this Ostrava project by one of the leading Slovak architects of the second half of the 20th century is a unique contribution not only to the collection of buildings that define Ostrava's image, but also to the group of sports and cultural architecture in Central Europe of the 1970s and 1980s. This makes all the more unsettling the report published in the media stating that the city of Ostrava has commissioned a study to determine the future of the hall, ranging from a possible major reconstruction to demolition and replacement of the existing structure with a new hall with different specifications.⁴⁶

A troubling indication showing one possible scenario for the fate of the Palace of Culture and Sport is illustrated by the third example of a prominent multipurpose hall built in the Ostrava Region, namely the Multipurpose Hall in Frýdek-Místek, which can now only be discussed in the past tense as it was demolished in 2013.⁴⁷ That hall

44 VÁCLAVÍK, Radim, *Vítkovice Sports Hall – Extension (Sportovní hala Vítkovice – přístavba)*, *Architekt*, 2007, vol. 53, No 10, pp. 23–29.

45 ŠIMKO, Ivan, *Vítkovice Palace of Culture and Sport in Ostrava (Ostravský palác kultury a sportu Vítkovice)*, *Projekt*, 1991, vol. 33, No 1–2, pp. 11–13.

46 Neither the media nor the city of Ostrava provide many significant details, so it is unclear who is preparing the study and what the commissioning criteria are.

47 For more on this topic, see: STRAKOŠ, Martin. *Report on a Lost Potential Monument of Late Modernism: The Multipurpose Sports Hall in Frýdek-Místek (Zpráva o zaniklé potenciální památce pozdního Modernismu: Víceúčelová sportovní hala ve Frýdku-Místku)* in: *Proceedings of the National Heritage Institute in Ostrava 2013*, Ostrava 2013, pp. 68–81.



Fig. 11a. Palace of Culture and Sport (now Ostravar Arena), view from the southeast, Ostrava-Zábřeh, 1976–1986, Vladimír Dedeček, Stavoprojekt Bratislava, photo: unknown author, circa 1986, source: archive of the Institute of Construction and Architecture of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

was a landmark at the northern end of the modern – yet never completed – centre of this conurbation on the border of Moravia and Silesia, which had been conceived as a unifying modern urban district on the right bank of the Ostravice River, between the historic cores of Frýdek and Místek. The hall project was created by architect Oskar Chmiel (* 1938) in 1971 after an internal competition organised by Stavoprojekt Ostrava.⁴⁸ His design for the hall won 3rd prize in 1973 in the ‘Study’ category at the Exhibition of Architectural Works of the Union of Architects of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in 1973.⁴⁹

Chmiel designed the hall on a rhomboid floor plan, with its main longitudinal axis aligned with the longitudinal axis of the city centre. The structure was topped with a gabled roof oriented transversely to this axis which, together with the side tribunes, created the building’s distinctive silhouette, one that defined the character of this part of the city. As the author himself stated, the lightness and dynamism of the structure arose primarily from the design of the cantilevered tribunes, conceived as projecting wings hovering above the ground. Its mass was further lightened by a central skylight cutting through the roofline and framed by the main welded steel beams.⁵⁰ Chmiel embodied the design approach characteristic of architecture in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s when shaping the layout and, above all, the roof itself with its hovering tribunes. At that time, architects of large-span halls were experimenting with various methods

48 For more on the project and its implementation, see - In - [NĚMEC, Ladislav], *Contemporary Architecture. Multipurpose Sports Hall in Frýdek-Místek (Současná architektura. Víceúčelová sportovní hala ve Frýdku-Místku)*, *Cultural Monthly (Kulturní měsíčník)*, 1986, vol. 4, No 2, pp. 20–21; O. CH. [CHMIEL, Oskar], *The Multipurpose Sports Hall in Frýdek-Místek (Víceúčelová sportovní hala ve Frýdku-Místku)*, *Czechoslovak Architect (Československý architekt)*, 1988, vol. 34, No 23, p. 3. The author thanks the family of architect Oskar Chmiel for providing copies of the hall project documentation and photographs of the completed building.

49 *Czechoslovak Architect (Československý architekt)*, 1973, vol. 29, No 13, p. 2.

50 O.CH. [CHMIEL, O.], *Multipurpose Sports Hall (Víceúčelová sportovní hala)*, p. 3



Fig. 11b. Palace of Culture and Sport (now Ostravar Arena), view from the southeast, Ostrava-Zábřeh, 1976–1986, Vladimír Dedeček, Stavoprojekt Bratislava, photo: Roman Polášek, 2009

of roofing.⁵¹ While organic forms based around the use of suspended cable systems, sometimes combined with structural crystalline systems of steel truss frameworks, were often favoured in the 1960s, the hall in Frýdek-Místek reflected the influence of Brutalism through its more robust forms and its emphasis on an orthogonal and diagonal compositional foundation in both its structural system and layout.

The roof extended over both entrances to massive canopies, with its beams transitioning into the building's base. The hall thus represented a fusion of a concrete base with a steel structure forming its above-ground part. The concrete was architecturally, indeed sculpturally, formed into Brutalist, modelled pedestal bases for the steel structure. This applied to the bases of the main beams at the public entrance on the southern side and at the rear entrance facing the training field on the northern side. The substantial metal canopy of the public entrance facing the flyover consisted of a projecting, robust roof with sheet-metal-clad gutters, conceived as a modern transformation of gargoyles in a Brutalist interpretation. There were articulated bases made of exposed concrete directly beneath them, on which rested the main part of the hall's steel structure, consisting of two welded beams shaped like the legs of a triangle, with a hypotenuse 110 metres in length. The imaginary hypotenuses of these forms were parallel to the hall's longitudinal axis and, as I mentioned earlier, aligned with the longitudinal axis of the main street of the new city centre. These beams were connected to four lateral truss girders supporting the roof structure, the tribunes and the ceilings of the individual floors of the hall.

The roof was covered with 'Covervar' system aluminium sheets. Inside the hall, the roof soffit, composed of reflective orange panels, ensured good acoustics. The tribunes were individual prefabricated reinforced concrete elements. The steel ceilings of the floors beneath the tribunes contained concrete infill. The white exterior cladding of the hall was an example of the F-300 prefabricated system, complemented with dark brown cladding on the load-bearing parts of the side tribunes, as well as glazing and

51 ŠVÁCHA, R. (ed.), *Onward! (Naprejl!)*, p. 193n.



Fig. 12. Palace of Culture and Sport (now Ostravar Arena), connecting staircase in one of the side towers, Ostrava-Zábřeh, 1976–1986, Vladimír Dedeček, Stavoprojekt Bratislava, photo: Roman Polášek, 2011

daylighting through vertical window slits and diagonal strip windows. These illuminated both tribunes and were composed of narrow rectangular aluminium windows with parapets, arranged in a serial and cascading sequence.

The steel structures were painted brown, while on the exterior, some metal parts (such as the side staircase) were also finished with white paint. The grey of the concrete, the brown of the metal structures, and the white of the façade cladding were complemented by façade sections clad in brown sandstone. Brown ceramic tiles were used that complemented the dark brown wall panelling in the vestibule of the main entrance under the west tribune. In the ground-floor vestibules beneath the stands themselves and illuminated by large windows and display cases, marble flooring was applied to create a colourful accent, combined with dark brown wall panelling and yellow wired glass in the railings of the staircases leading to the upper parts of the tribunes. Aluminium window and door frames completed the overall design. Green-stained wooden wall panelling further enhanced the atmosphere of the tribunes, alongside the red ceiling under the roof and wooden seating, and brown-painted steel beams.

The building permit for the second part of the structure was issued in 1976, and the permit to complete the final phase of the project dates from 1984.⁵² The project, prepared by Oskar Chmiel in collaboration with Miroslav Čeladín and Helena Svobodová from Stavoprojekt Ostrava, was supplemented with artworks by academic painter Josef Treichel and academic sculptors Oto Ciencala, Jana Chrásková and Dagmar Škopová.⁵³ Construction of the hall had already begun in 1974 as part of the 'Action Z' (volunteer work) initiative, with landscaping and preparation of the area for a temporary ice rink.

52 The individual stages of the project documentation and construction of the multipurpose sports hall in Frýdek-Místek are recorded in a partially preserved file stored in the archives of the Department of Urban Development and Building Regulations of the Frýdek-Místek City Hall, Frýdek cadastral area, file No p. 3126.

53 O.CH. [CHMIEL, O.], *Multipurpose Sports Hall (Víceúčelová sportovní hala)*, p. 3. Despite the author's efforts to learn more about the fate of these artworks, the hall owner did not respond to a written inquiry, so it is most likely that they were destroyed during the demolition of the hall.

The actual construction of the hall was commenced by the Frýdek-Místek District Construction Company (Okresní stavební podnik Frýdek-Místek) only in the second half of the 1970s. Available sources and literature contain conflicting reports, stating that construction started either in 1976 or as late as 1980.

The hall's steel structure was manufactured at a plant belonging to the Vítkovice Ironworks in the Lískovec district of Frýdek-Místek. The total cost of constructing the hall amounted to 75,892,000 crowns. Contemporary texts by O. Chmiel and L. Němec indicate that certain difficulties had caused the work to take so long.⁵⁴ There was a lack of money, disregard for the needs of the district town by the Regional Investment Institute, problems with construction capacity, and shortages of materials. These conflicts and the shortcomings of a planned economy, usually hidden in documents or newspaper articles behind phrases about problems in 'supplier-customer relations', caused significant delays elsewhere as well. This is likely why the hall was only completed 15 years after the project study was created. The final inspection of the Multipurpose Sports Hall took place in December 1985, with the official opening held on 15 February 1986.

Comparison: Multipurpose Hall in Frýdek-Místek and Palace of Culture and Sport in Ostrava

The Multipurpose Sports Hall in Frýdek-Místek and the Palace of Culture and Sport in Ostrava are part of a group of large multipurpose sports and cultural buildings designed and constructed in the 1970s and 1980s. Both became local landmarks, due not only to their urban design within the respective city structure, their placement and their unusual shape and composition, but also because of their distinctive form and structural concept, and the consequent unconventional architectural design. Among other examples are ice rinks distinguished by their uninterrupted spatial flow and robust steel frameworks, such as the Rondo Hall in Brno by Brno architect Ivan Ruller, built between 1971 and 1983, and earlier examples like the ice rink in Plzeň by Vladimír Urbanec, Pavel Janeček and Ladislav Švábek, built between 1966 and 1970, and the ice rink at Prague's Exhibition Grounds built between 1957 and 1962.⁵⁵

Although these buildings have different designs, the basic principles are the same. These are standalone structures conceived as multipurpose complexes with striking volumetric and spatial compositions, integrated into the new urban planning concepts of the mentioned settlements, and developed within the framework of the socialist transformation of these cities. Equal emphasis was placed on the functional programme of these public buildings – their cultural and sporting roles – as well as on the aesthetic expression of form and structure. This approach culminated in sculptural compositions designed to create striking visual perspectives from both the immediate surroundings and more distant vantage points. In the case of the hall in Frýdek-Místek, visual connections played a significant role – both views from the river and reverse sightlines from the building's interior, particularly from the western vestibule, towards the Ostravice River. For the Palace of Culture and Sport in Ostrava, Vladimír Dedeček likewise addressed the question of integrating the hall into a broader urban framework with other sports facilities and a planned hotel.

The design for the Palace of Culture and Sport in Ostrava included 30 different layouts. The Frýdek-Místek hall was also conceived for a broader range of uses, including ice hockey, figure skating, public skating and light athletics, ball games, and even popular music concerts. The hall offered a maximum seating capacity of 6,000 using the two side tribunes.⁵⁶ The capacity of the hall was based on assumptions made at

54 O.CH. [CHMIEL, O.], *Multipurpose Sports Hall (Víceúčelová sportovní hala)*, p. 3.; - In - [NĚMEC, L.], *Contemporary architecture (Současná architektura)*, p. 3

55 ŠVÁCHA, R. (ed.), *Onward! (Napřed!)*, pp. 204–207, 216–219.

56 Various sources report slightly differing figures for the hall's capacity. Depending on the use of the playing area and modifications for cultural or sports events, it ranged from 3,500 seats (for film screenings, variety shows and concerts), to 5,700 and 6,000, and up to 6,500 when including the ice surface.



Fig. 13a. Palace of Culture and Sport (now Ostrava Arena), view of the hall layout for film screenings, Ostrava-Zábřeh, 1976–1986, Vladimír Dedeček, Stavoprojekt Bratislava, photo: unknown author, circa 1986, source: archive of the Institute of Construction and Architecture of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

the beginning of the study and the optimistic forecast for the development of Frýdek-Místek from the 1950s to the 1970s, which anticipated more than one hundred thousand inhabitants by 2000. The unexpected economic downturn and associated population decline in Frýdek-Místek since the 1980s brought about a radical change in both the city's needs and its potential. Indeed, the large capacity of the hall, considering the city had 57,523 inhabitants in 2013 and only 54,188 at the last census in 2021, was one of the frequently repeated arguments in favour of its demolition and the construction of a new hall, called Polárka.

Yet the public's view of the architectural solution for the Frýdek-Místek Multipurpose Hall was more or less positive at the time, with architect Ladislav Němec commenting quite openly for several years in the pages of Ostrava's *Cultural Monthly* (*Kulturní měsíčník*) on various architectural works and the transformations of contemporary architecture. In an article from 1986 about the Multipurpose Sports Hall in Frýdek-Místek, he wrote, inter alia: 'This is not architecture in form and scale intended for the intimate interior of the city, and the composition accepts and acknowledges this predisposition for open space, without it being to the detriment of the quality of the location. In the sensitive environment created by the historic architecture of Frýdek and Místek, the result is positive, even though many of the building's details (as a random example, the roofing was supposed to be green) are unintended compromises.'⁵⁷

After 1989, the attitude toward the hall's architecture did not significantly change, and the broader public mostly began to regard it as a symbol of the city. Yet the low quality of some housing estate construction from the 1970s and 1980s, together

57 - In - [NĚMEC, L.], *Contemporary Architecture (Současná architektura)*, p. 21.

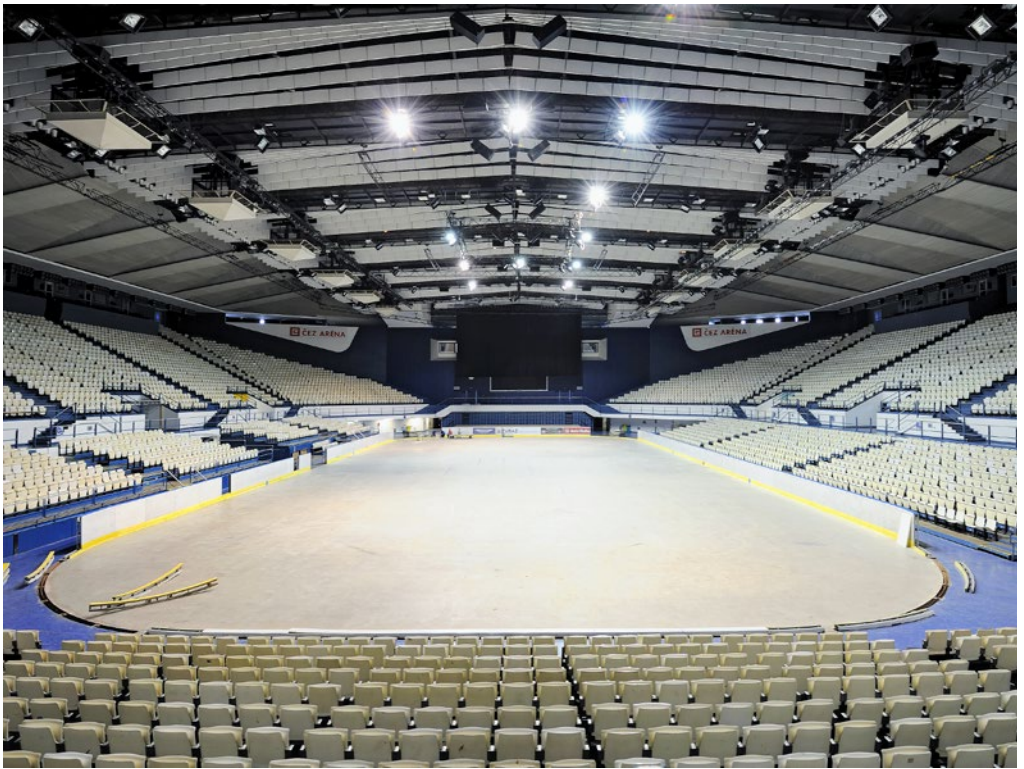


Fig. 13b. Palace of Culture and Sport (now Ostrava Arena), view of the hall's interior design, Ostrava-Zábřeh, 1976–1986, Vladimír Dedeček, Stavoprojekt Bratislava, photo: Roman Polášek, 2011

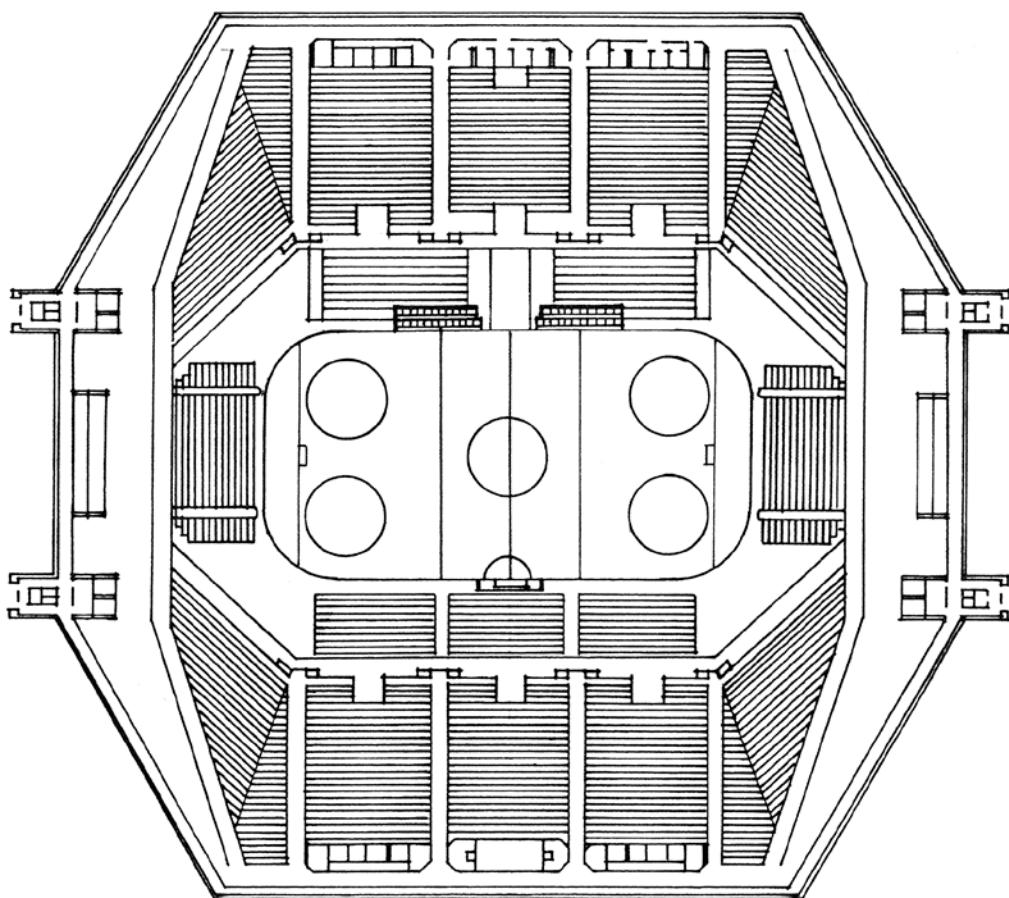
with related criticism of socialist construction, state socialism and the Communist Party's dictates, led to the spread of a general belief in the universally low value of all architecture from that era. As an example, one can cite Karel Kuča's commentary in his monumental work *Cities and Towns in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia (Města a městečka v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku)*. He did not mention the sports hall in his work, which is rather unusual because at the time Kuča's book was published, the hall was a dominant feature of Frýdek and, regarding the city's redevelopment during that period, Kuča wrote: 'The consequences of the socialist urbanism of the 1980s in Frýdek (and in Místek) rank among the most destructive in the entire Czech Republic.'⁵⁸ The fact that the clearance of large parts of the Frýdek-Místek conurbation and the construction of the housing estates destroyed the historic urban structure, particularly in the suburban areas, led this author and others to the unequivocal conclusion that no valuable buildings could have been created in the 1970s and 1980s.

Yet such generalisation fails to encompass the full breadth of architectural culture. Simply put, we must accept the fact that a valuable building or urban ensemble could actually emerge even during this period of great destruction. Reality was, and still is, full of paradoxes and contradictions. The construction of the Frýdek-Místek hall did not require the removal of any valuable historic buildings. The hall was created – according to architect Oskar Chmiel, the project's author, and architect Ladislav Němec, a commentator on contemporary events in the pages of *Cultural Monthly* – through a difficult struggle between the creative architect and the limitations of the construction industry in that period, yet at the same time was a work of iconic

58 KUČA, Karel, *Cities and Towns in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia Part I (A–G) (Města a městečka v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku I. (A–G))*, Prague 1996, p. 832.

character. Its architectural and urban significance stemmed from its typologically distinctive role within the city centre's urban fabric and from the individuality of its architectural design.

Unfortunately, during the heritage conservation proceedings, neither the city as the authorised municipality, the region, nor the Ministry of Culture agreed with the declaration of the building as a cultural monument. The executive bodies of the state heritage conservation and administrative authorities did not take the building's qualities into account, instead emphasising its alleged shortcomings, allegedly a damaged steel structure and the fact that the building showed signs of deterioration. Yet there was no relevant diagnosis of the steel structure of the hall, so the claim that it was damaged was based solely on impressions, while the degree of deterioration was typical considering the hall's age and was not extreme. The proceedings for declaring it a cultural monument took place in 2012 and 2013, the proposal coming from concerned members of the public, while a positive assessment with a recommendation in favour of the declaration was



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Fig. 14. Palace of Culture and Sport (now Ostravar Arena), floor plan of the hall arranged for an ice hockey match, Ostrava-Zábřeh, 1976–1986, Vladimír Dedeček, Stavoprojekt Bratislava, photo: unknown author, circa 1986, source: archive of the Institute of Construction and Architecture of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

prepared by the Ostrava branch of the National Heritage Institute. Nevertheless, after the proposal had been ultimately rejected, the hall was demolished between September and October 2013.⁵⁹ The Frýda shopping centre was built in its place, while a smaller ice hockey arena named Polárka, with a seating capacity of 2,000, was constructed behind Frýda under Zámecký Hill.

The failure of the efforts to secure heritage protection for the Frýdek-Místek Multipurpose Hall does not mean that the building lacked value or could not have become a monument. By their very nature as instruments of power, authorities cannot serve as reliable guarantors of value-based criteria. Dependence on their assessments is inherently problematic, as such positions are typically shaped by prevailing political pressures, dominant power discourses, and the speculative interests of property owners and developers – a dynamic clearly evidenced in the evolution of this locality. The refusal to designate the building as a cultural monument by the administrative branch of state heritage protection – at the level of municipal authorities with delegated powers, the Moravian-Silesian Regional Office and the Ministry of Culture – suggests that the arguments of key property and power stakeholders prevailed. These were primarily driven by the intention to sell the land beneath the hall, subsequently construct a new sports facility and, in this strategically significant urban location, replace the original structure with a shopping centre and retail gallery.⁶⁰

Swimming Pool and Steel Brutalism

The fourth sports building I classify as an example of architectural Brutalism and include in this study was built in a housing estate in the 4th district of Ostrava-Poruba. It is an indoor swimming pool (address: Generála Sochora 1378/10, Ostrava-Poruba) designed by architect Antonín Buchta (1948) at Sportprojekt Praha.⁶¹ The structural design was developed in collaboration with Jan Jirka, while the interiors were entrusted to Ostrava-based architect Václav Šafář. The dominant feature of the horizontally composed building is the ventilation duct, designed as a rounded cylindrical form set against the otherwise flat roofscape, positioned on the southern edge above the slightly inclined strip window of the pool hall.

The building is embedded into a slope, so on the street on the northern side it opens with a low ground-floor façade featuring entrance areas leading to a forecourt with paving and the fountain *Water and Us (Voda a my)* designed by architects Antonín Buchta and Evžen Kuba and sculptor Evžen Scholler.⁶² The pool hall, on the other hand, opens towards the opposite side with a glass façade facing three sides of the local valley. The building itself was not intended to be a one-of-a-kind masterpiece, but on the contrary a replicable design. A similar project was initially used for the construction of an indoor pool in Prague-Troja, but Aquacentrum Šutka (address: Čimická 848/41, Prague-Troja) was ultimately completed in a modified form in 2011 due to financial and other issues, and opened two years later.⁶³

The activity within the Poruba indoor pool is also visible from Opavská Street to the south, overlooking the level of the pool hall. From this vantage point, the view toward the building is still preserved, and the illuminated strip of the hall's glass façade is clearly visible in the evening. Recently, however, the plots of land along Opavská Street have been gradually built up, meaning it is only a matter of time before this view is obscured by new buildings with the associated issue of possible park landscaping, which would separate the new development from the pool and the adjacent outdoor swimming area. The visual contact between the new buildings and the public sports facility that we have today will prove problematic, and we can expect users of the pool and the

59 STRAKOŠ, M., *Report on a Lost Potential Monument (Zpráva o zaniklé potenciální památce)*, pp. 74–79.

60 Ibid.

61 SEDLÁKOVÁ, Radomíra, *Swimming Pool in Ostrava (Plavecký bazén v Ostravě)*, *Architecture of the Czech Socialist Republic (Architektura ČSR)*, 1989, vol. 48, No 3, pp. 17–20.

62 See <https://ostravskesochoy.cz/dilo/104-Voda-a-my> [30. 08. 2023].

63 See <https://www.sutka.eu/historie> [30. 08. 2023].



Fig. 15. Swimming pool in Ostrava-Poruba, view from Opavská Street from the southeast, 1980–1987, Antonín Buchta, Sportprojekt Praha, photo: Roman Polášek, 2009

outdoor swimming area to exert pressure for some kind of barrier – such as a wall or trees – to block these views.

The building itself features a combination of a reinforced concrete base with the pool hall and a steel structure – painted red – for the upper sections, with masonry finished in brick strip cladding. The red-painted steel structure, positioned between Brutalism and High-Tech, is not only featured on the exterior but also forms a significant element of the building's interior design. Combined with the brick cladding, the steel of this robust structure represents an important component of the expressive language of steel-and-brick Brutalism, while the technical execution, based on the monumentalisation of technology, does not yet convey the subtlety of High-Tech architecture. The finish of the interior walls with wooden, ceramic and brick elements in their simple, unadorned forms, is closer to Brutalism. With this material palette, Antonín Buchta created a connection between the industrial aesthetics of steel structures – with their exposed roughness – and the poetic quality of the materials, specifically the motif of brick masonry and the restrained wooden soffits. The diving tower of exposed concrete and shaped like the letter A on the short western side of the pool hall, also conveyed a raw impression. However, the tower's structure was poorly executed and so the diving platforms had to be shortened, and later the exposed concrete was painted over.

The building features changing rooms for men and women, separate saunas, bathrooms, gyms, a small children's pool and, above all, Ostrava's only fifty-metre swimming pool. However, most of the interiors, including the bathrooms, changing rooms and the entrance, have been modified with the replacement of the wall and floor tiles and the ceilings, and the abandonment of the original austere Brutalist aesthetic. During these modifications, some artworks also disappeared. Behind the entrance vestibule with its snack bar, there was a corridor leading to the changing rooms decorated with a ceramic wall covering titled *Rhythm of Movement* (*Rytmus pohybu*), created by Marie Rychlíková, Děvana Mírová and Lydie Hladíková.⁶⁴ This relief cladding fell victim to the modifications, as it was destroyed in 2015 during the reconstruction of the entrance area, including the access to the changing rooms in the building's entrance tract. The main entrance, which originally led from the entrance pergola into the vestibule, was also impacted by changes disregarding the original concept. The original triangular vestibule was shortened to create an irregular quadrilateral floor plan, while the main entrance was shifted away from the access axis leading from the pergola to the vestibule. There were also interventions in the changing rooms, bathrooms and pool hall, whose

⁶⁴ See <https://ostravskesochoy.cz/dilo/105-Rytmus-pohybu> [30. 08. 2023].

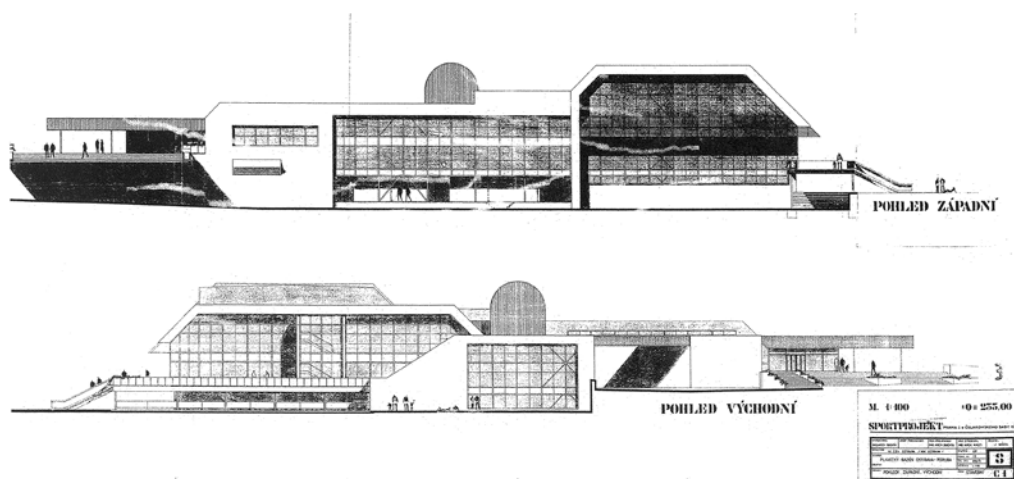


Fig. 16. Swimming pool in Ostrava-Poruba, east and west view, undated, source: author's archive

aesthetics evoke the kitsch of the 'bathroom aesthetics' typical of provincial homes. A cabin added to the tribune in the pool hall features cladding with a 'wave' motif, and the front wall on the eastern side of the hall – originally clad with brick strips – is now covered with orange tiles.

Only the entrance vestibule still retains the original Brutalist aesthetic, yet the current trend clearly shows that within a few years the interior of the Poruba pool will no longer resemble a cohesive architectural work at all. Instead, its interior spaces will become a patchwork of assorted wall and floor tiles, without it occurring to anyone that the building represented a specific architectural mode. Nevertheless, even today the Poruba indoor pool retains certain Brutalist elements. In addition to the red-painted steel structure and the remnants of the wall and floor cladding and ceiling panels, there are also preserved artworks. Besides the vestibule, the original access to the children's pool one floor below the vestibule also conveys a sense of cohesion. This space is decorated with an impressive colourful figurative mosaic titled *Children's World* (*Dětský svět*), also known as *Rainbow Gate* (*Duhová brána*), by the artist Stanislav Holý.⁶⁵ The mosaic creates an unusual colourful accent in the otherwise restrained interior, where the steel structure, brick floor and wall cladding, wooden ceiling panels and the large window opening to the exterior once again dominate.

Although the Poruba pool still retains, externally and, to some extent, internally, the spirit of Brutalism and High-Tech, the fragmentary alterations disregarding the architectural integrity of the building, as seen through the only partially successful modernisation of the entrance, changing rooms, bathrooms, saunas, former restaurant, and other spaces, are gradually erasing the strong character of the original concept, effectively destroying the Brutalist architecture of this sports facility.

Conclusion

In the local context, Brutalism's paradox lay in the very aspects that contemporary Czech and Slovak society sought to suppress – and which, within a Europe divided by Cold War tensions, it could not fully comprehend. As P. Banham noted, Brutalism was primarily constituted as a movement of ethically oriented design, which on the one hand developed the tradition of Modernism and reflected certain tendencies aligned with the welfare state, while serving as a counterbalance to Socialist Realism on the other. Advocates of Brutalism's initial phase sought to express the social and living environment of local inhabitants through a design approach centred on the inherent qualities of materials (for example, the brick architecture of England). At the same time,

⁶⁵ See <https://ostravskesochoy.cz/dilo/106-Detsky-svet-Duhova-brana> [30. 08. 2023].



Fig. 17. Swimming pool in Ostrava-Poruba, 1980–1987, view from Generála Sochora Street from the north, showing the *Water and Us (Voda a my)* fountain by Evžen Scholler, created in collaboration with architects A. Buchta and Evžen Kuba between 1987 and 1989, Antonín Buchta, Sportprojekt Praha, photo: Roman Polášek, 2009

they sought to convey the tendencies of the welfare state, particularly in the newly built environments for England's lower social classes.

Both these goals were reflected in large-scale public buildings, robust in mass, structure and spaces intended for social functions. Yet it is impossible to clearly separate other social communities, as the success of Brutalism meant that it became a stylistic expression adopted by the upper social classes as well. By then, it was already receiving positive responses in the Soviet Union and its satellite states. In Eastern and Central-Eastern Europe, however, Brutalism primarily developed with an emphasis on its aesthetic role, distinct from that in the West. In the Soviet bloc countries, it initially represented an exclusive style intended partly for Western clientele and representatives of state socialism, and occasionally as a style for prominent monuments and memorial structures. It was only later that it evolved into a style reserved for public buildings with broader application.

Put simply, Brutalism initially penetrated into Czechoslovakia only with great difficulty amid political crisis and a shift in values away from the perspective of official structures. During the 1960s, it first became an exclusive style for hotel projects intended primarily for an international clientele, yet subsequently spread more widely, until in the 1970s and 1980s it represented one of the stylistic modes of local architectural production reserved for public buildings (cultural centres, funeral halls and sports facilities). Its strength lay in the focus on materiality, the solidity of forms, and the sculptural articulation of volumes. In the spatial layout of many of these buildings, provision was made for a continuum of interconnected spaces intended for mass gatherings. This was tied to the social dimension of these buildings and their capacity to channel and concentrate the collective energy of human communities. Brutalism transformed, as noted by R. Banham, the monumentalisation of form and technology into a distinctive expressive language, marking the second phase of mass society's technical-informational evolution.

In this context, it is important to emphasise one fundamental fact. Just as with High-Tech style buildings, Brutalist structures also build upon domestic traditions; they are not merely a reflection of developments elsewhere, as is the case with other stylistic or design trends. In this regard, steel Brutalism and High-Tech architecture build upon and

advance the domestic tradition of steel design, fabrication and construction, particularly in large-scale public projects. In the Czech lands, this line can be continuously traced since the second half of the 19th century. Large metal bridge, railway station hall, industrial building, market, exhibition and sports facility structures are a characteristic part of the local architectural and heritage stock. In this context, it is no coincidence that, in a situation in which a number of steelmaking enterprises in the Czech environment have disappeared, there is an almost programmatic 'dismantling' of buildings based on robustly conceived steel structures. Yet it is precisely these newer structures, examples of so-called steel Brutalism, that represent a unique demonstration of the ability of local architecture, construction and industry to work with steel structures and take advantage of their distinctive properties.

The paradox of Brutalism in the post-socialist space lies in that it is often fully associated with state socialism, and its contradictions and original intentions are obscured by layers of prejudices and misinterpretation. These apparent contradictions are not a recent phenomenon, but originate in the very genesis of the work, where currents of Western and Eastern architectural theory and practice converge. It is precisely due to these contradictions that the following question becomes highly relevant: Does Brutalism, as part of the modernist expressive group, not embody certain enduring principles of architectural creation, similar to those represented in the concept of traditionalism and its associated modes? Since this is more of a rhetorical question – because I assert that it does – we can derive from it a continuation of the inquiry: Since we care for and restore monuments originating in all periods – from the Romanesque style through Baroque, Historicism, Art Nouveau, Modernism and Functionalism – should not Brutalism and other forms of architecture from the second half of the 20th century also be fully-fledged parts of our heritage portfolio? The answer is also 'yes' in this case.

As regards care for architectural heritage, the term Brutalism carries broader connotations. The concept of Brutalism entered the scene in the context of Czechoslovakia during a period when Czech – and by extension, Czechoslovak – heritage conservation was undergoing a complicated evolution, oscillating between the proclaimed progress within state socialism and the complex, often futile struggle to protect the heritage stock in the context of a state with a planned economy and a political system governed by organs of the Communist Party. Some examples of Brutalism were constructed literally within historic settings and in areas cleared by demolitions of historic structures. As a result, to this day, part of both the general public and professional community perceive them as overly contrasting examples of new construction in a historic environment, even though they are architecturally valuable objects in and of themselves. This tension emerges in various texts and evaluations addressing notable instances of Late Modernism, including seminal Brutalist works. This is exemplified by the controversy surrounding the architecture of the Transgas complex, reflected in the differing views of the professional community and the state heritage authorities. Another is the architecture of the Hotel Thermal complex in Karlovy Vary, where some conservationists point to the loss of the historic environment. Similarly, critical reactions arose, for instance, during the construction of the Kotva department store in Prague's Old Town, which included the necessity of excavating the local archaeological site.⁶⁶

Since 2000, it has become more and more apparent that examples of Brutalism are coming under economic and social pressure, and not only in the Czech and European

66 TRYML, Michal, *The History of a Former Old Town Block (Historie jednoho bývalého staroměstského bloku)*, in: URLICH, Petr, *Kotva Department Store. History, Urbanism, Architecture (Obchodní dům Kotva. Historie, urbanismus, architektura)*, Prague 2018, pp. 87–105. The complicated process of assessing the Transgas complex in the context of decisions by state heritage institutions was addressed, for example, by KRACÍK, Matyáš, *Evaluation from the Perspective of Heritage Conservation (Hodnocení z hlediska památkové péče)*, in: GORYCZKOVÁ, Naďa (ed.), *Transgas: The Control Centre Complex of the Transit Gas Pipeline and the FMPE Building in Prague. History, Architecture, Heritage Potential (Transgas. Areál řídicí ústředny Tranzitního plynovodu a budova FMPE v Praze. Historie, architektura, památkový potenciál)*, Prague 2019, pp. 149–154.



Fig. 18. Swimming pool in Ostrava-Poruba, interior of the pool hall with some secondary modifications – see the cabin conversion, 1980–1987, Antonín Buchta, Sportprojekt Praha, photo: Roman Poláček, 2011

contexts. Proof can be found in the SOS Brutalism online database, which focuses on mapping Brutalist examples around the world and on saving these ‘concrete monsters’, as the subtitle of this initiative somewhat humorously proclaims.⁶⁷ The authors of the architectural exhibition and the two-volume catalogue prepared by the German Museum of Architecture in Stuttgart in cooperation with the Wüstenrot Foundation, addressed the public using the same evocative title.⁶⁸ The exhibition premiered in November 2017 and ran until the following April. It was then reprised at the Vienna Architecture Centre from May to August 2018, and since then has been traveling around the world – so it would certainly be worthwhile to host a reprise in a gallery in the Czech Republic.⁶⁹

The exhibition and its catalogue – the result of a prior initiative – presented several dozen buildings around the world representing Brutalism as a highly successful and distinctive architectural style of its time, with numerous exemplary cases of these generously dimensioned public and corporate buildings. Many of them, following the advent of Postmodernism, slipped to the margins of attention among both professional and lay audiences, or became targets of critical attacks aimed at convincing the public that the architecture had no right to exist. The consequences of this did not take long to appear. While, for example, in Africa, many examples of Brutalism continue to function as modernist promises of a better future, and those presented in the catalogue at least look very good, in other parts of the world, especially in Europe, the birthplace of this 20th century modernist style, the situation was and remains quite the opposite. In some

67 SOS Brutalism, available online: <https://www.sosbrutalism.org/cms/15802395#home> [30. 08. 2023].

68 The catalogue was published in both German and English editions, see ELSER, Oliver – KURZ, Philip – SCHMAL, Peter Cachola (eds.), *SOS Brutalism. A Global Survey*, Zürich 2017.

69 The exhibition had reprises not only in Vienna but also in the German cities of Bochum (2020) and Aalen (2020), in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan (2020), and at Yale University in New Haven, the United States (2022).



Fig. 19. Swimming pool in Ostrava-Poruba, entrance corridor with decorative wall designed by Marie Rychlíková, Děvana Mírová and Lydie Hladíková, 1985–1987, Antonín Buchta, Sportprojekt Praha, destroyed during the reconstruction of the entrance area in 2015, photo: Roman Polášek, 2011

cases, the shift away from Brutalism has resulted in certain buildings being left to rot or considered for demolition. A prime example of this is the fate of the central library building in Birmingham, UK, designed by architect John Madin and built between 1969 and 1973, which was demolished in 2015 and 2016 despite public efforts to preserve it.⁷⁰ A documentary by director Andy Howlett was even made about this complex process in the city, where demolitions of other Modernist buildings are still taking place. In the documentary, he captured the futile struggle of a group of enthusiasts and professionals to save this significant example of British Brutalism.⁷¹

The documentary captures complex reflections on the heritage of Modernism, on its limits, ruthlessness and beauty, as well as on the effort to erase a hated past from urban space. This has happened and continues to happen for several reasons: these buildings and complexes are provocative in terms of their expression and overall design; they tend to be expensive to operate; and they were conceived as multipurpose structures, while today many of their functions are fulfilled differently and elsewhere, leaving these structures or parts of them standing empty. These circumstances – only some of which relate to the architectural expression of the buildings, as they stem from the neoliberal curtailment of public space and interest – contribute to the view that these ‘monsters’ should be eliminated. Hence the call from SOS Brutalism is not limited to Germany

⁷⁰ The complicated history of Birmingham’s central library is documented in its Wikipedia entry, which also includes coverage of the initiative to save the Brutalist building, available online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birmingham_Central_Library [30. 08. 2023]. See also *Atlas of Brutalist Architecture*, London – New York 2018 (2022), p. 196.

⁷¹ The efforts to save the Brutalist Birmingham central library are revealed in the documentary by director Andy Howlett titled *Paradise Lost. History in the Unmaking*, Great Britain, 2021.



Fig. 20. Swimming pool in Ostrava-Poruba, children's hall with mosaic by Stanislav Holý titled *Children's World / Rainbow Gate (Dětský svět / Duhová brána)*, 1985–1987, photo: Roman Polášek, 2011

and Austria, nor even to Western Europe. As our numerous experiences in this country have shown, this threat has become a broader trend since 2000, and has gradually manifested across the entire developed world. The examples of the multipurpose hall in Frýdek-Místek and Transgas in Prague, along with other buildings, show that the same transformations are also taking place in the Czech Republic. The local architectural and heritage community will also have to address these issues, as will the state heritage authorities, including the National Heritage Institute and the Ministry of Culture.

The available options for saving Brutalist buildings lie primarily in declaring them cultural monuments. Yet this presupposes that the state heritage authorities are consciously prepared to address this agenda. It demands a certain degree of social consensus, as it is a complex process that primarily requires the owner's consent, even though the law allows a building to be declared a monument when the owner is opposed. A second option, but one much more complex and long-term, is heritage and architectural education – the work of people engaged in art history, architecture, heritage conservation, restoration, teaching, journalism, scholarly research and other 'soft' skills. When a proposal to grant monument status is rejected, part of the public assumes the structure lacks value and may be altered or even demolished – particularly when the ministry, influenced by the owner's objections and state heritage authorities, declines to designate it as a cultural monument. However, as I have already mentioned, the process of declaring something a monument remains primarily a bureaucratic procedure and is by no means a universal decision regarding the aesthetic, functional or historic values of the given structure or group of structures. Often, despite the qualities of the architecture and urbanism in specific cases, a subjective legal opinion prevails – sometimes driven by property speculation, by arrogance, ignorance or even a defiant a priori rejection. Therefore, assessing the qualities of potential architectural monuments based on whether

a building has been declared a monument or not, and on what stance a particular authority has taken regarding its value, tends to be a rather short-sighted approach.

From the perspective of heritage conservation for architecture of the second half of the 20th century, including representative examples of Brutalism, Czech society represents a typical post-socialist version of a society confronting its own limits – such as the absence of a broader architectural culture, the low level of public education in architecture and urbanism, and a certain indifference of the population toward the architectural and urbanistic heritage of local settlements and landscapes. Adding the complex genesis of Brutalism to this equation gives a sense of how challenging the current task of protecting and presenting this segment of architectural heritage truly is. In the recent past, the same applied to technical monuments which, only three or four decades ago, were still considered ordinary and aesthetically uninteresting heritage, undeserving of broader protection. Yet today, a significant part of society has embraced the value of historic industrial buildings: conversions of technical monuments for new uses are taking place, and many structures are preserved not only out of a narrow, specialised interest in protecting industrial heritage, but also through the perspective of broader public interest.

This demonstrates the broader impact of the professional branch of state heritage conservation assessing the architectural stock. Systematic research – grounded in documentation, analysis and the presentation of mid-20th century architectural values, including Brutalism – combined with targeted educational initiatives, can gradually transform perceptions of this cultural heritage. In the case of sports buildings, sports fans' patriotism can also play a role, as they regard the headquarters of their clubs and the associated halls as iconic structures of the respective club, city or sport. Of course, as the example of the hall in Frýdek-Místek shows, one cannot blindly rely on such aspects. Beyond administrative measures, environmental factors – together with knowledge and education supported by dedicated tools – offer a viable path to promoting principles of preservation and high-quality care, even for previously overlooked forms of mid-20th century architecture, including Brutalism.

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