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Urban Planning of Podskalí Quarter in Prague in the Last Third of the 19th Century

ANNOTATION

Based on urban plans of the last third of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century the study analyses building morphology proposed for historical Prague territory, mainly the Podskalí Quarter in The New Town, where the comprehensive rebuilding process commenced and lasted the longest. Its advanced level preceded the development in other Prague areas. In addition to the early plans based on 1864 building regulations, the study focused on neglected layout plans following the 1886 building regulations for Prague and adjacent municipalities, especially on a completely unknown major layout plan of 1888, which regulated most of newly built buildings, sanitation included. The traditional descriptions understand period urban planning as a priori, schematic concept of house block formations. However, the rebuilding process was more layered. Regulations often complicatedly followed each other; in Podskalí, for example, there are about ten rebuilding layers. At the same time, at certain periods, the tasks have been addressed in variants. The complicated search for the definitive urban shape was strictly bound by period law and aimed mainly at the creation of a continuous street network, derived in principle from Prague historical ground plan, which differed fundamentally from adjacent municipalities outside the walls. The influence of period competitions was limited; the dominant role was played by engineers of the city building office, who also were the winners of the most important period urban competitions. Particular attention is paid to morphology of the most comprehensively rebuilt, sanitised territories, and to typical Prague urban features brought to the historical space by this epochal task. Especially, the street infrastructure is monitored, forming of corners and diagonality in the plan in confrontation with plans emerging outside the authority, especially with later proposals by known architects for the front of the Emmaus Monastery, rejecting the existing logic of urban planning. This is a single section where the original layout plan was replaced by authorial urbanism according to the design by the architect Bohumil Hypšman.

SUMMARY

The development of Podskalí, peculiar riverfront enclave of Prague New City, defined by rocky terrain urbanized from the Middle Ages, was the subject of modern rebuilding interventions since the mid-1870s. Due to the construction of stone waterfront embankment and Palacký Bridge, the coherent rebuilding process in the scale of this quarter started on this heterogeneous territory earlier than in other locations of historic Prague within the walls. Advanced rebuilding of Podskalí preceded the development of other Prague territories, and the process here also lasted the longest. In its framework, the most variants of urban designs from the entire territory of Prague were developed. Therefore, Podskalí is the best territory for the demonstration of the basic features of the contemporary consideration of urban planners. Prague urbanism of the reported period has been previously examined mainly on the results, i.e. on the built urban structures, or generally on derived plans published in print, and interest was limited mainly in the territory where the sanitation took place. Greater attention was paid to the sanitation laws that allowed the lawful form of easy appropriation and relatively smooth new construction in its place, than period building law, in particular the 1886 building regulations for Prague and the adjacent municipalities. The original plans that were proposed in compliance with these period regulations have been practically unknown and unpublished. The major discovery was the manuscript set of original layout plans, especially the 1888 layout plan, which regulated most modern premises of Prague within the walls. This enables to describe the intentions and the initiators of urban plans more accurately and to show their transformation in administrative proceedings led by period building law. So far, the period urbanism was considered mechanical, unmethodical and "non-recurring". Traditional descriptions understand the period Prague urban planning, which was the work of urban engineers, as an intellectually inferior, schematic concept of creating house blocks. At the same time, the basic corpus of the modern Prague urban planning from 1886-1887 is too early to reliably trace in it the influence of Camill Sitte, for example, and took place on built-up and too small territories to be credited to Otto Wagner ideas. Also due to Prague topographical and administrative conditions the spatial layout completely eludes the elderly concepts by Ludwig Von Förster known from Vienna or Brno. It finds itself as if without a desirable reference framework. But its framework is historical-genetic, based on the expansion and straightening of the current street grid and is free of plan view symbolism and urban micro themes. The proposed plan schemes took into account the irregular shape of

the rebuilt area, so it could not reasonably develop a regular orthogonal principle; new streets often lead obliquely or, if we want, diagonally. Urban ideas cannot be easily grasped on visually mostly unattractive plans of austere technician form. In addition, the rebuilding process was layered, with proposals often being modified repeatedly. Street lines, where the owner had the building plot approved by the distributive plans, could not be changed. In practice, it also meant that urbanists were dependent on the emerging parts of the city or individual buildings that could not be proposed to demolition in the currently processed rebuilding that, however, did not always meet the intended change and did not allow the latest ideas to develop the fullest. Therefore, space for new rebuilding was gradually diminished. Regulations often followed in complicated process, the more recent ones adopted sections of earlier regulations and softened the resulting urban structures, but in different manner than the a priori artificial layout plan. There were many regulation layers of the period; about ten are documented in Podskalí for example. At the same time, at certain periods, different variants of partial tasks were examined. Complex search for the definitive urban shape was bound by period law and struggled mainly for radical enlargement of public space in continuity of the streets, which derived in principle from historical ground plan. The development in the territory of historic Prague thus differed fundamentally from adjacent cities. The final form of urban structures is often the result of surprisingly laborious development, as is presented in several competitions of period plans. However, some parts of the historic Prague in the Old Town or Josefov were rebuilt easily, nonrecurring or nearly nonrecurring. The influence of contemporary public urban competitions, which attracts attention to architecture historians, was limited. Dominant role was played by Alois Bulíř and Josef Václavěk, the engineers of the Municipal Building Office; other city engineers headed by Alfred Hurtig, the upper geometer of the Municipal Building Office, were the winners of the most significant period urban competitions. From its inception in 1883, the Office has taken over the planning agenda, has revised earlier urban proposals by the economic authority and the planning process fully reflected the aims at resolving the city's route structures. The concept of this design was based on the need to interconnect the city; it did not show efforts to formal dimensional or visual composition or preservation of partial historical panoramas. The block structure derived secondarily, and was solved in subsequent dividing (plotting) plans. The city urbanists fundamentally designed spatial planning. This way of planning the city has produced criticism already in its period due to the antisemitism ethos, both by the ideas of modern architects concentrated mostly on the visual, formal orthogonal layout. The effort to reform the period urbanism culminated in a proposal for a new legislation, the building regulations for Prague and some other large Czech cities from 1898, but it was not concluded. This instigated traditional scorn towards urban engineers – urbanists in Czech professional reflection, which is rather an acquired cultural formula than the result of objective historical considerations. Prague urban planning of the last third of the 19th century had its micro history not only in terms of continuity, but also differences in conceptual approach to the basic arrangement of streets and blocks; the implemented urban schemes are older than the publications considered. The study pays particular attention to the morphology of the most comprehensively rebuilt, i.e. sanitised territories, and to typical Prague urban features newly brought by this epochal task. In particular, street infrastructure is monitored, forming of corners and diagonality in the plan in confrontation with plans emerging outside the authority, mainly later proposals of known architects for the front of the Emmaus Monastery in Podskalí, rejecting the existing logic of urban planning. This is a single section where, with complications, the original layout plan was replaced by the authorial urbanism according to the design by the architect Bohumil Hypšman.

Fig. 1. Depiction of timber rafting freight plots (Holzgarten) on a stable cadastre map (Plán 1856 Edice SK). Updated 1880. (All plan documentation was compiled and edited by the authors.)

Fig. 2. Elevations of Podskalí on **A** – plan by Jüttner (Plán 1815 Jüttner, czech edition), **B** – Kaumann (Plán 1884–1885b Kaumann) and **C** – prospectus by Havránek (Plán 1865 Havránek).

Fig. 3. The earliest modern plan for rebuilding the entire Podskalí (Plán 1876c HÚ).

Fig. 4. 1884 plan for rebuilding the northern, central and part of the southern Podskalí (Plán 1884 HÚ).

Fig. 5. Overlay drawing of street routes variants from Palacký Bridge to Charles Square (underlay: Plán 1878b HÚ). Plans according to the legend: **1850** – Plán 1850 SÚ; two variants of street lines **1876 (a) + 1876 (b)** – Plán 1876c HÚ; three variants **1878 (a) + 1878 (b) + 1878 (c)** – Plán 1878b HÚ; **1884** – Plán 1884 HÚ; two variants **1886 (a) + 1886 (b)** – *To us and the future ones* (Plán 1885–1886 Hurtig et al.); **1888** – Plán 1888a SÚ (implemented variant). (Graphic edition by the authors and N. Oweyssi.)

Fig. 6. Overlay drawing of the Emmaus block rebuilding development (underlay: Plán 1897a Kříženecký). Plans according to the legend: **1888 (a)** – Plán 1888a SÚ; **1888 (b)** – Plán 1888b SÚ; **1894** – Plán 1894a SÚ; **1897 (a)** – Plán 1897b SÚ; **1897 (b)** – Plán 1897a Kříženecký; about **1898** – Plán 1897b SÚ; **1907 + 1908** – Plán 1908 SÚ. (Graphic edition by the authors and N. Oweyssi.)

Fig. 7. Cover sheet, the general planimetric plan and the investigated section at the winning competition proposal *To us and the future ones* for rebuilding the Podskalí area (Plán 1885–1886 Hurtig et al.).

- Fig. 8.** Overlay of the stable cadastre map (Plán 1856 Edice SK) and the map of present-day buildings from georeferenced IPR documents (Plán 2020 IPR).
- Fig. 9.** Overlay drawing of the street grid on 1856 stable cadastre map (Plán 1856 Edice SK) and street network designed on the 1889 *Layout plan with altitudes* (Plán 1889 SÚ) from georeferenced IPR documents. (Graphic edition by the authors and N. Oweyssi.)
- Fig. 10.** *Layout plan with altitudes of the Royal Capital of Prague* (Plán 1889 SÚ), the title sheet and the section of the investigated territory.
- Fig. 11.** *The Planimetric plan of the Royal Capital of Prague, part on the right bank of the Vltava* (Plán 1888a SÚ), the title sheet and sheet 15 with the investigated territory.
- Fig. 12.** Orientation map for *The Planimetric plan of the Royal Capital of Prague, part on the right bank of the Vltava* (Plán 1888b SÚ).
- Fig. 13.** Overlay of *The Layout plan with altitudes of the Royal Capital of Prague* (Plán 1889 SÚ) and the map of present-day buildings from georeferenced IPR documents (layer of of Plán 2020 IPR).
- Fig. 14.** Overlay drawing of rebuilding lines on period urban plans, blocks by Palacký Square (underlay: Plán 1884 HÚ). Legend of the plans: two rebuilding variants **1876 (a) + 1876 (b)** – Plán 1876c HÚ; **1878** – Plán 1878b HÚ; **1884** – Plán 1884 HÚ; **1886** – *To us and the future ones* (Plán 1885–1886 Hurtig et al.); **1888 (a)** – Plán 1889 SÚ; **1888(b)** – Plán 1888a SÚ; **1888(c)** – Plán 1888b SÚ (only the line of the back side of the block by Palacký Square); **1907 + 1908** – Plán 1908 SÚ. (Graphic edition by the authors and N. Oweyssi.)
- Fig. 15.** Overlay of stable cadastre map (Plán 1856 Edice SK) and *The Layout plan with altitudes* (Plán 1889 SÚ) in layers from georeferenced IPR documents.
- Fig. 16.** The problematic section below the northern part of the Emmaus Hill on *The Layout plan with altitudes* (Plán 1889 SÚ), showing the original street design and modified rebuilding line (**dashed**).
- Fig. 17.** Prague 2-New Town, Street Na Moráni, the south side, houses No. 352, 1749 and 1750/II from 1892. **A** – present-day photograph (photo by O. Němec, 2020), **B** – elevation and section of a house No. 352/II (Plán 1891b Brož); **C** – plotting plan for future construction of houses No. 352, 1749 a 1750/II (Plán 1891a Brož).
- Fig. 18.** Design plans of Palacký Riverbank in the section near the bridge, south access ramp / waterfront wall. **A** – Plán 1877b HÚ; **B** – Plán 1876e HÚ.
- Fig. 19.** Overlay of *The Layout plan with altitudes* (Plán 1889 SÚ) and the plan *To us and the future ones* (Plán 1885–1886 Hurtig et al.).
- Fig. 20.** Overlay of the plan *To us and the future ones* (Plán 1885–1886 Hurtig et al.) and a plan from sewage competition (Plán 1884–1885b Kaumann).
- Fig. 21.** The Palacký Square designed on the plan *To us and the future ones* and on earlier official plans: **A** – Plán 1885–1886 Hurtig et al.; **B** – Plán 1884–1885b Kaumann, overlay with Plán 1885–1886 Hurtig et al.; **C** – Plán 1884 HÚ, overlay with Plán 1885–1886 Hurtig et al.
- Fig. 22.** Rebuilding plans of Podskalí with two proposals of different street profile width. **A** – partial rebuilding plan (Plán 1876b HÚ), **B** – total rebuilding plan (Plán 1876c HÚ).
- Fig. 23.** The period photographs of the elevation relations in Podskalí. **A** – Palacký Square, around 1923 (© Prague City Archives, Collection of photographs, Sign. I 53); **B** – view from Palacký Square to the south, around 1909 (© The Prague City Museum, inv. No. H 041 712).
- Fig. 24.** Concept of Palacký Square on an unrealized version of *The Layout plan with altitudes* (Plán 1889 SÚ). Additional violet highlighting and blue and blue-white lines.
- Fig. 25.** Unrealized design plans of iron Palacký Bridge from the first half of the 1870s. **A** – Plán 1873a Anonym; **B** – Plán 1873b Anonym.
- Fig. 26.** Concept of Na Moráni Street as a connecting ramp, general view and detail (Plán 1878a HÚ).
- Fig. 27.** Designs of riverfront embankment walls in the interior of the city (Plán 1876f HÚ).
- Fig. 28.** Historical ground conditions at Na Moráni Street. **A** – historical photograph of the Pod Slovany Street

leading to Na Moráni Street, around 1924 (photo B. Střemcha; © The Prague City Museum, inv. No. HNN 008 705); **B** – section of a house No. 352/II at Na Moráni Street on a construction plan (Plán 1891b Brož).

Fig. 29. The design of the street below Slovany and the Emmaus Hill on a drawing by Rudolf Kříženecký (Plán 1897b Kříženecký).

Fig. 30. Evolution of the rebuilding plans of the part before the Emmaus Monastery (Plán 1923 SRK).

Fig. 31. Dryák's proposal (1910) and derived official plans and model: **A** – Plán 1910c Dryák; **B** – Plán 1913 SÚ; **C** – photograph of a paper model for Plán 1913 SÚ (view from Smíchov bank); **D** – photograph of a paper model for Plán 1913 SÚ from above; **E** – Plán 1910d Dryák.

Fig. 32. **A** – Official proposal (Plán 1913a SÚ/Hofman) derived from the 1910 proposal (Plán 1910c Dryák); **B** – photograph of a paper model for Plán 1913a SÚ/Hofman (view from Smíchov bank); **C** – photograph of a paper model for the Plán 1913a SÚ/Hofman from above.

Fig. 33. Hofman's official plans, ground plan, model, sectional elevation: **A** – plan of plots Plán 1913c SÚ/Hofman; **B** – photograph of a paper model for Plán 1913b SÚ/Hofman (view from Smíchov bank); **C** – photograph of a paper model for Plán 1913b SÚ/Hofman from above; **D** – Plán 1913d SÚ/Hofman.

Fig. 34. Hypšman's proposals in official form (1913): **A** – Plán 1923 SRK; **B** – photograph of a paper model for Plán 1913 Hypšman/SÚ (view from Smíchov bank); **C** – photograph of a paper model for the Plán 1913 Hypšman/SÚ from above.

Fig. 35. Hypšman's later proposals of buildings and detailed urban design: **A** – Plán 1922 Hypšman/SÚ; **B** – model to Plán 1921 Hypšman.

Fig. 36. Modification of the 1932 rebuilding plan, the Emmaus block and the southern end of Na Moráni Street. Outlined by the authors in Plán 1932 Hypšman.

Fig. 37. Modification of the 1936 rebuilding plan, the Emmaus block and the south side of Na Moráni Street (Plán 1936 SRK).

Fig. 38. Urban design plan rebuilding the area by Josef Havlíček, 1944 (Plán 1944 Havlíček).

Fig. 39. Design of the SPA Building by Karel Prager, 1972, including the unrealized 2nd phase (Plán 1972 Prager).

Fig. 40–43. Analytical drawings showing the structure of the Old Town, Josefov and New Town development according to the dating of the street line (compiled by the authors, 2021).

Translation by Linda Foster