OPAVA – THE CITY MEMORY CHANGES UNDER DIFFERENT COUNTRIES AND REGIMES

Ondřej Jirásek

Abstract:
Opava has always been a city on the border. So there have been many changes of regimes and states to which Opava belonged, as well as changes of the city’s ethnic composition. The most numerous and rapid changes happened during the 20th century; whereby the city was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918, then the first Czechoslovak republic until 1938, then part of the German Reich until 1945, then returning to be part of the Czechoslovak republic until 1993 and finally, as part of the Czech Republic till today. Within the century, Opava experienced a constitutional monarchy and periods of liberal democracy alternating with Nazi and Communist dictatorships. In addition to this, the circumstances of the Second World War changed the ethnic composition of the city. Thus, the history and cultural heritage of Opava are interesting sources for studying the politics of memory, the processes of urban space nationalization, as well as the symbolic changes.

The politics of memory are, in certain forms, an expression of ideologies and efforts to fit memory by commemorating chosen cultural moments while other cultural moments are omitted by removing the links that lead to their remembrance. The main power groups try to convince the public of the legitimacy of their government by maintaining an awareness of the history held by the authority position or ideas that justify its legitimacy. In practice, the possibility to decide which elements of the past should be remembered have become an important source of power.

The aim of the paper is to analyse and compare the politics of memory and efforts to change Opava’s symbolism. The study focuses primarily on the projection of ideologies and identities onto the symbolic landscape under different regimes during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Within the research the concept of urban symbolism is used in dealing with the city’s cultural dimension with a focus on the distribution and meaning of symbols and rituals in relation to the cultivated surroundings. Urban symbolism is expressed through different phenomena, such as the city layout, architecture, monuments and memorials, street and place names, as well as rituals, festivals and processions, as well as myths, novels, films, poetry, music, and websites. All of them can be considered symbol bearers.

The study is limited to the analysis of urban public space aspects, such as the destruction and construction of symbolic sites (plaques, statues, monuments, buildings, graves), the renaming of streets and places, and commemorative rituals. In addition to literary sources, chronicles, periodicals and archival sources consulted. Also unrealized plans were taken into account, because especially plans testify to the politics of memory and the effort to change urban symbolism. The ambition of this article is to answer the following questions: How had been changing the politics of memory during the 20th century in Opava? How the city symbolism had been transforming in relation to the changes of jurisdiction to different states or political regimes and how sublimated into present form. How different approaches of political regimes and states to national history and cultural memory?

The paper synthesizes the results of research of urban symbolism and politics of memory in the public space of Opava. It interprets and shows how urban public space has been adapting to the changes of regimes and the city symbolism has been modified consciously but also indirectly. Within all the regimes were obvious significant attempts to “transcode” the urban public space by removal of the sites of memory and the commemorative events and establishing
The physical and symbolic aspect of the city was influenced by the ideological and cultural values of its representatives and inhabitants as well as by specific socio-political circumstances and the ethnic composition of the city.

The politics of memory has always been reflected in street names. Each regime attempted to delete the symbols of the previous one. The regime of the first Czechoslovak Republic wanted to change the monarchic Austrian city into a free Czech city (taking into account the German majority) and commemorated mainly prominent Czech individuals and victims of the First World War. Nazi Germany wanted to change the city image into a clearly German one. After the end of the Second World War, Czechoslovakia returned to the ideals of the “first republic” and tried to abolish not only the Nazi but also German past. The communist regime continued with transforming the public space according to socialist ideology. After the Velvet Revolution all symbols connected with communist dictatorship were removed from public spaces, and once again we can see a return to the ideals of the “first republic”. After the separation from Slovakia in 1993, the politics of memory has not significantly changed and public space is further shaped and transformed with the same approach to the urban symbolism.

Despite the fact that the fluctuations between Germany and Czechoslovakia changed significantly the city symbolism from 1945 until today, some similar aspects can be traced, such as commemorating the victims of both wars, celebrating important Czech individuals, heroes and Soviet liberators. Likewise, all these regimes left the cultural memory of the unpleasant history associated with the persecution against Germans after the Second World War. And finally, the regimes of the first Czechoslovak Republic, German Reich and the third Czechoslovak Republic, all tried to make the national identity in the city stronger through a searching of the national architecture.


### Introduction

The politics of memory are, in certain forms, expression of ideologies and efforts to fit memory by commemorating chosen cultural moments, while other cultural moments are omitted by removing links which lead to their remembrance. Many power groups try to convince the public of the legitimacy of their government by maintaining an awareness of the history of the held authority position, tenure in it or ideas that justify its legitimacy. In practice, the possibility to decide which elements of the past should be remembered have become an important source of power. The relative and slow process of gradual changes are disrupted by periods of radical social changes that are reflected in the much more dynamic transformation of the spatial arrangement. Taking a stand on the past in connection with its commemoration, and forming an attachment to it becomes actual, especially in situations of sudden reversal in society. In this time, the order determining the identity of the community is questioned. Therefore, it is necessary to reconstitute its position using shared history and values and collective memory-shaping through the reinterpretation of the past. A combination of the power and memory need not be oriented only to the past or present, but also to preserve links for future remembrance.

Opava has experienced several shifts of borders and regime changes. The most numerous and rapid changes happened during the 20th century when Opava firstly belonged to Habsburg Empire until 1918, then to the first Czechoslovak republic until 1938. This was followed by being part of the German Reich until 1945, then to the third Czechoslovak republic until 1948, followed by the Communist regime until 1989 and democracy under Czechoslovakia, and lastly, since 1993, under

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the Czech Republic. Under all the regimes, there are obvious significant attempts to “transcode” the urban public space by the removal of the sites of memory and the commemorative events, and by establishing new ones. In addition, the circumstances of the World War II changed the ethnic composition of the city. Until 1938 there was a large Jewish minority, and till 1945 a strong German majority, both of which have practically disappeared. Nowadays, Opava lies on the edge of the Silesia part of the Czech Republic on the border with Poland and has about 60,000 inhabitants with over 90% of Czech nationality. Thus, the history and cultural heritage of Opava are interesting sources for studying the politics of memory, processes of urban space nationalization, as well as symbolic changes.

The study focuses primarily on the projection of ideologies and identities into the symbolic landscape under the different regimes during the twentieth Century. It aims to analyse and compare the politics of memory and the efforts to change the city’s symbolism from the late monarchic era until today. The paper has an ambition to answer the following questions: How were the politics of memory and urban symbolism in Opava changing during the 20th century? How was the city’s symbolism transforming over the changes of jurisdiction to different countries and regimes in the 20th Century and sublimated into today’s appearance? How did the approaches of the regimes and countries differ in regards to the national history and cultural memory?

In the paper are analysed aspects such as the destruction and construction of symbolic sites (plaques, statues, monuments, buildings, graves), the renaming of streets and places and commemorative festivities. I use the concept of urban symbolism which is a part of the symbolic ecology dealing with the city’s cultural dimension and focusing on the distribution and meaning of symbols and rituals in relation to the cultivated surroundings. Urban symbolism examines relationships between space, power and identity, which are necessarily mediated by symbols. A symbol is understood as a concrete reality (a building, a statue, etc.) that communicates something intangible (an idea, a value, a feeling). The urban symbolism is one of the tools for the reproduction and imposing of social values, including ideologies and identities. The concept understands city as a code, a language of symbols that provides insight into cultural norms and values of a community that embodies and shapes the identity of its inhabitants. A place can be considered as “symbolic” whenever it means something to a group of individuals, in such a way that it contributes to giving group identity. Although different actors attribute space with different meanings, it is ultimately the powerful one which determines the “correct” meaning of the space. Urban planning, architecture, design or aesthetic character of the environment are not semantically neutral; they are holders of a meaning that physically makes the present. The meaning is thus produced and interpreted only in the context in which it emerges.

The research examines material and symbolic changes in the city. Among other sources were consulted chronicles, periodicals and archive sources. Unrealised plans were also taken into account, because especially large unrealized plans testify to the politics of memory and an effort to

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change the urban symbolism. Urban symbolism is expressed through different phenomena, such as the city layout, architecture, monuments and memorials, street and place names, as well as rituals, festivals and processions. But we can include also myths, novels, films, poetry, music, and websites. All of them can be called symbol bearers. The analyses is limited to urban planning, architecture, monuments and memorials, names of street and places and commemorative activities.

**Until 1918**

Opava became an administrative and religious centre by the decree of Ottokar I of Bohemia confirming its municipal privilege in 1224. From the 18th Century, Opava had a predominantly German character. After the defeat of Maria Theresa in 1742, as a result of which the Habsburg monarchy lost most of Silesia, Opava became the capital of Austria Silesia and enjoyed great prosperity. The 19th Century was for the city a period of industrial development, establishing of associations and institutions and the pursuit of its own university. The Czech character was greatly promoted – exemplified by the establishment of a Czech gymnasium in 1883, which successfully competed with the older German one.

After the loss of most of Silesia during the Prussian-Austrian wars, Opava acquired the status as the provincial capital the city was trying to promote its new found exclusivity. In the first half of the 19th century, following the trend of the other European cities, the medieval city fortification wall was demolished and there were built spectacular public buildings (such as, the City Theatre, schools and state institutions) and new parks. The parks surrounded the whole original historical centre of the city and around them was built a new urban circuit (following the example of the Ringstraße in Vienna). This urbanistic concept was practised almost until the end of the first republic.

The character of the Opava public space was affected by political and economic changes in 1848, the character of public space in Opava changed. New buildings were built with new, artificial decoration (e.g. the Silesian Museum, the Austro-Hungarian Bank, the City Hall, the City Savings Bank), in the city parks were erected monuments to great (especially German and Austro-Hungarian) personalities (e.g. Friedrich Schiller, Josef II) or small architectural structures (e.g. fountains). Intensive building activity also affected the city centre, and streets were straightened and expanded. The demands of its inhabitants matched the city’s growth with increased building activity from the citizens themselves. Thus, Opava during the 19th century was increasingly rebuilt and built up. This naturally led to an increase in the interest of architects. Among the most prominent ones in Opava belonged C. Kerna, F. Ohmann, R. Eisler, F. Kachler, Hubert Gessner and Leopold Bauer. However, it should be added that even though we still speak about the provincial city, Opava was on the periphery of the empire. In addition to this, Opava was one of the less populated cities within the monarchy. Nevertheless, due to its relative remoteness from the centre it is clear that many new trends and opinions were more readily accepted as it lay some distance away from the “Vienna filter”.

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The national conflict between the German majority and the Czech minority worsened. The idea of a “Silesian-ship”, which had previously connected city citizens, increasingly segregated them depending on whether they claimed allegiance to Czech or German Silesia.\(^8\) This environment was also influenced in the form of the acceptable neo-architectural styles typifying Germanic history\(^9\) while an affiliation of the Czech minority was clear in other architecture (of course, to a much lesser extent). The official “Czech national architecture” at that time was neo-renaissance, with the concept of the “Czech Renaissance” being a flat, non-classical, sgraffito-covered facade, with a high stepped shield and a lunette ledge. In Opava, the Czech Bourgeois School (1909 – 1911) in the adjacent village Jaktar (now city district) is the main representation of Czech national architecture. The meaning of the building for the Czech national movement in Silesia corresponded with the applied Czech-style neo-renaissance on the front façade, decorating the stone reliefs in the segment niches – which was representative of the Czech cultural and pedagogic icons František Palacký and Jan Amos Komenský\(^10\).

The dynastic culture in the public space was reflected where the monarch - especially Joseph II and Franz Joseph - was commemorated. At the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century, new squares were established (e.g. "Franc-Josef’s square" or "Josef’s square" in 1900). In the Franz Joseph’s Square (today, the Republic square), there was an unrealized proposal to build a monument commemorating the 60\(^{th}\) anniversary of his reign; today only known through a photo of a model of it from 1913. From the 1870s, there was a plinth in Joseph’s park placed on the occasion of the 100\(^{th}\) anniversary of Joseph II’s ascension to the throne, where the statue of Joseph II was supposed to stand (1890) but instead in the end took place of honour in the Kaiser Josef-Park (contemporary Park of Freedom). Portraits of Joseph II and Franz Joseph were hung in all offices, schools and other public buildings.\(^11\) Apart from local events\(^12\) and religious feasts, the monarch’s birthday and the anniversary of the coronation of Franz Joseph I were celebrated when the city was ceremoniously illuminated and decorated with Austro-Hungarian flags.\(^13\)

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\(^8\) GAWRECKI, Dan. Opava znovu v čele Rakouského Slezska. In MÜLLER, K. Opava..., pp. 234.
\(^9\) E.g. the building of the City Hall or the City Bank in the Nordic Neo-Renaissance style
\(^10\) Photography of the stone reliefs is available at this page: http://www.zaopavu.cz/Prilohy/Image/Sochy_opavska/1909_Ceska_mestanska_skola.jpg
\(^11\) MÜLLER, K. Opava..., pp. 434
\(^12\) Exhibitions of museums, anniversaries of the founding of local associations, anniversaries of prominent personalities associated with the city, opening of public buildings, commencement of railway operations etc.
The First Republic 1918 – 1939

The first Czechoslovak Republic was built on the ideas of T. G. Masaryk. It was thus characterized by oppositional tendencies towards the monarchist regime. The basic principles of the new political system were the ideas of republicanism, democracy, social radicalism, anti-Catholicism and so-called “Czechoslovakism”. In Opava, the establishment of Czechoslovakia was welcomed with enthusiasm within the Czech ethnic group. However, Opava was still the centre of German political and cultural life in the western part of Czechoslovak Silesia. The German majority feared losing its privileged position and demanded the right to self-determination. After an unsuccessful attempt to build the Sudetenland province, they had to accept the settlement of the First World War and the new state organization. The national disputes seemed to be often decisive. For instance, in 1924 president Masaryk was welcomed by the mayor in the “German city”. In addition, within the German majority among activists there was a strongly dominated affiliation with negativist parties, and the influence of the Nazi coup in Germany only strengthened the position of radical nationalists. The Jewish community had to face anti-Semitism from Germans throughout the whole period.

When Czechoslovakia gained its independence, the names of streets, squares, and army barracks connected with the Habsburg monarchy or sympathetic to Opavian Germans or historically Prussia were changed. In the new nomenclature, we can see a celebration of the new freedom of Czechoslovakia, promoting significant Czechoslovak personalities and the translating of German

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15 GAWRECKI, D. Opava znovu v čele ..., pp. 271.
17 GAWRECKI, D. Opava znovu v čele ..., pp. 274.
names into Czech. In 1919 the Kaiser Josef-Park was renamed the Park of Freedom (Sady svobody), Herrengasse to Masaryk’s street (Masarykova třída), Franz Josef-Platz to Republic Square (Náměstí republiky) – Republikplatz and Oberring to Horní náměstí (Upper square) – \textit{Oberring} \textsuperscript{18}. The last two examples show that even when there were significant efforts to use only Czech names, the special character of ethnicity in Opava was taken into account and German version of the names or even former nomenclature were left in the names and were also written on the street signs - although after the Czech ones.

In 1924, Opava became a statutory city, but a few years later, in 1928, Silesia was re-connected with Moravia, and Brno became the capital of the Moravian-Silesian region. The loss of the provincial capital status did not give much hope for improving the position of the city and its prospects for the future, but economically the development of the previous century continued. The marginalization of the city was not felt by its citizenry who still felt Opava as the capital of Silesia. This self-confidence was inherent not only within those identified as German but more and more within the Czechs. The aspirational development in interwar Opava reveals its unwillingness to give up the position that the city had held in the region before World War 1 and neither its competition with the nearby richer Ostrava to be the capital of Czech Silesia. The city wanted to impress on a metropolitan scale and character.\textsuperscript{19} Ambitious administrative building projects remained, for economic reasons, mostly only on paper, including proposals for building a representative house (the \textit{Stadthaus}), a new town hall, a city hotel\textsuperscript{20} and the plan for a garden city on \textit{Kylešovice hill (Kylešovský kopec)}.\textsuperscript{21}

However, there were realised symbolic projects including the biggest department store in the then Czechoslovakia \textit{Breda & Weinstein} (1927 – 1928) and \textit{Church of St. Hedvika} (1933 – 1938), the patron saint of Silesia, both by architect \textit{Leopold Bauer}. The church more represented the ideological values of that time. For the Opavians of the 1930s, its construction was clearly political, social, and national symbol visualizing the Silesian idea, which connected the Czech and German Silesians. Additionally, it was a memorial to the victims of the First World War.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} According to the design concept of Czech architect Jindřich Freiwald it was abandoned at the beginning of the 1920s. Instead of it were built blocks of traditional rental houses, residential blocks and houses for state employees or solitary villas. The most significant example is the development of a new, stylishly integrated urban complex for state employees on Peter Roseggergasse’s street (later Božena Němcová’s) in the middle of 1920s, or a block of apartment houses near st. Hedvika in 1930s.
In this period, is obvious restoring of local architects mainly of German origin linked to the Viennese artistic circles by Czech architects through official orders by government. Vienna, which had determined the architectural appearance of Opava, was replaced by Prague. Attempts to develop a new national style and demonstrate the dynamics of the emerging young Czechoslovakia are most evident again within the construction of Czech schools in Opava. The most significant example of that interwar Czech neo-classicism is the building of Masaryk Higher Agricultural School (H. Zápal 1924 – 1928). The hallmark of its national manifestation was also in the symbolic date of the school opening ceremony on March 6, 1927, the day before T.G. Masaryk’s seventy-seventh birthday. As Pavel Šopák has written: “If we are looking for building in Opava, which should express an unwavering conviction about the stability of the republican values and democratic ideas of the first Czechoslovak Republic, then it is this school.” Nevertheless, architects of German origin were able to express themselves; for example, Karl Schmelzer and Hans Kalitta (architects of the officer houses on Kylešovský kopec, 1922 – 1924) or Karl Gottwald (Masaryk Second City School on Rieger street or the so-called Franciskaneum, 1928 – 1930).

In private buildings, there are obvious differences between German and Czech architects. While for Germans decorativism and classicism is typical, Czechs turned away from decorativism to purism and functionalism. Such examples of this are the rebuilding of the historical post office by Miroslav Kopřiva (1927 – 1929) or the outdoor swimming pool by Otto Reichner, (1930 – 1931)

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23 E.g. Čeněk Brada, Hanuš Zápal, Miloslav Kopřiva, Jaroslav Stockar-Bernkopf.
in the Municipal Park (Městské sady). Both expressing the freedom, modernity and new democratic lifestyle.\(^{27}\)

All the symbols of monarchy had to be removed and replaced by new symbols aligning better with the ideology and promoted social values of Czechoslovakia. However, at that time this did not apply to references to German past and culture. Thus, the statue of Josef II could be replaced by the statue of Friedrich Schiller in the Park of Freedom (Sady svobody). In public space started to appear orders of Czech patriotic themes through the Bohemization of cultural and social life. A completely new phenomenon were Czech memorials like the memorial of Bedřich Smetana in Smetana’s park (Otakar Španiel, Stanislav Sucharda, 1927)\(^{28}\), the memorial of Božena Němcová (Bedřich Neužil, 1927)\(^{29}\) and the memorial plaque T.G. Masaryk on Masaryk street (Vincent Havel, 1935).\(^{30}\) Commemorations of important Opavians were also built, and here we can see the competition between Czech and German nationalism again. In 1937 was unveiled the fountain of Emil Rochowanski, German mayor of Opava 1892 – 1908, which had been planned since 1909. The unveiling was criticized by the Czech minority; there was no Czech text on the fountain label and there was no speech made in Czech. In the same year, thanks to a purely Czech initiative, was erected the monument commemorating the establishment of the first Czech firefighting brigade, and its founder Rudolf Gudrich.\(^{31}\) A frequent phenomena of the time was commemorating of the victims of the First World War, presented as heroes who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of Czechoslovakia. Here we should mention at least the sculpture of the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the cemetery in Jaktář,\(^{32}\) monuments to the First World War victims in the cemeteries in Opava and Kateřinky,\(^{33}\) or the above-mentioned church of st. Hedvika.\(^{34}\)

**Under Nazi-rule 1938 – 1945**

The Munich Agreement\(^{35}\) sealed the fate of Czechoslovakia. The Sudetenland was detached from Czechoslovakia and annexed to the German Empire. Opava became part of the “Reich” and the capital of the Eastern Sudetenlands. All political power went into the hands of the Nazi administration.\(^{36}\) Most of the Jewish community immediately left the borderland.\(^{37}\) The German  

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\(^{28}\) The memorial is situated in formal place of statue of Friedrich Schiller.


\(^{31}\) SKALÍK, T. Opavské sochy II..., pp. 88-89.


\(^{33}\) SKALÍK, T. Opavské sochy III..., pp. 43, 109.

\(^{34}\) ŠOPÁK, P. Kostel sv. Hedviky..., pp. 224.

\(^{35}\) September 30, 1938


population still prevailed there and welcomed the annexation. But despite the fact that German majority in Opava wanted to be part of the Reich, the Opavian Czechs preferred the new Czechoslovak Republic. The German troops entered Opava on October 8th, 1938, warmly welcomed by the German community, and immediately accompanied by a wave of anti-fascist, Jewish and Czech activist arrests.

Character of the city was changed again with the new regime. Celebrations connected with the previous regime, especially the anniversary of the establishment of Czechoslovakia, or the anniversary of Masaryk's birthday were simply cancelled. In December 1942, the usual processions and pilgrimages were forbidden, so that the Czechs could not meet, associate, sing or pray in Czech. Also, the honorary citizenship of the former head of the district office Josef Michalek and president Masaryk were cancelled. In contrast, the Nazis took great pleasure in celebrations accompanied by decorating the city with Nazi symbols. During this period, there were regular German commemorations, especially including the military successes of the regime and also the honouring of fallen war heroes and victims. More especially, the celebration of the capitulation of France at the end of June, 1940; the 11-year anniversary of Nazi rule on January 30th, 1944; a defence of fighting day “Wehrkampftag” organized by the SA on September 17th,

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38 VALÍK, M. Matěj Valík..., pp. 50-72.  
39 MÜLLER, K. Opava..., pp. 291.  
40 VALÍK, M. Matěj Valík..., pp. 121.  
41 VALÍK, M. Matěj Valík..., pp. 136.  
42 VALÍK, M. Matěj Valík..., pp. 89.  
43 VALÍK, M. Matěj Valík..., pp. 147.
In 1944, on October 19th, 1944 when gauleiter Konrad Henlein justified the necessity of setting up the Volkssturm and urged the Germans to fulfil their last duty towards their homeland. Of a festive nature were the glorified official visits by leading German statesmen and celebrities; for example, the Reich Finance Minister Count Schwerig von Krosigk and gauleiter Konrad Henlein in order to officially appoint dr. Jacke as President of the Chief Financial Directorate on May 9th, 1939, and the visit by “Reich Schatzmeister” Franz Xaver Schwarz on August 11th, 1942. In 1940, fallen soldiers of the Second World War were commemorated with the participation of marshal Eduard von Böhm-Ermolli at the city cemetery. At the end of 1941, marshal von Böhm-Ermolli died and Hitler organized a state funeral for him in Vienna. Opava also buried him with great public honour. At a public funeral for the victims of the second bombing attack in Opava (December 18, 1944), when a monastery on Olomoucká street was hit, there was a mourning procession with portraits of the dead victims on December 18th, 1944.

Germans also maintained their cultural traditions in Opava. This was especially true musically. The most prominent was the Mozart festival organized at the end of 1941. His music was highly appreciated by Nazi cultural policy as a symbol of German cultural tradition.

Nazi symbolism was immediately reflected in the renaming of the streets and places. New names were only in German and according to Nazi patterns, ideals and heroes. Upper square—Oberring was renamed Adolf Hitler-ring, Republic square—Republikplatz as Hermann Göring-Platz. The new names where used to strengthen the German present and future, but also to bridge the Czechoslovak past by using former German names. Thus, Masaryk street obtained its former name Herrengasse. Within the new nomenclature, the Park of Freedom-Freiheitpark was an exception because the name, clearly linked to the values of Czechoslovakia, remained until 1943; this was possible because the former title included also the German name, and the meaning of “freedom” was transcoded into a symbol of liberation of local Germans from Czechoslovak power. It was renamed Bürgermeister Kudlich-Park, but the statue of Friedrich Schiller was left in its place because of its symbolism to German culture as well as the German past of Opava.

The first half of the 1940s showed the leanings towards a radical urbanistic change of the historic centre according to Nazi “Heimatsstil” and “Reich classicism”. However, it was unrealized because of the war circumstances. So, even though there was abundant urban development during the period, we mostly cannot find a significant conscious transcoding of the public space connotative meaning, but instead a reaction to the circumstances of the current time and an urban space adaptation. However significant ideological reasoning can be seen in the destruction of the buildings, which did not match the ideological foundations of the new regime. During the

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44 VALÍK, M. Matěj Valík..., pp. 154.
45 VALÍK, M. Matěj Valík..., pp. 155.
46 VALÍK, M. Matěj Valík..., pp. 73.
47 VALÍK, M. Matěj Valík..., pp. 132.
49 It was organized to commemorate the 150th anniversary of his death.
50 VALÍK, M. Matěj Valík..., pp. 107.
51 VALÍK, M. Matěj Valík..., pp. 46, 72-107.
52 German mayor of Opava (1908 – 1919) killed on the eastern front on August 25th, 1943. On September 12th, a memorial ceremony was organised for him in Opava and the park was given his name.
53 Authors were mostly architects Thony Thiele and Louis Gaillard.
“Kristallnacht”, the synagogue in the city centre of Opava was set alight on early morning November 10th, 1938. After the “Kristallnacht”, a number of anti-Jewish orders and later even anti-Semitic laws were adopted. Many of the Jewish buildings were looted, damaged and burned.

Sculptures and memorials connected with the values of “the first republic” were removed from public space. Both, directly for ideological reasons and indirectly by Czechs fighting against the new ideology. The best example of the direct ideological impact is the removal of the statue from above mentioned Dr Emil Rochowanski´s Fountain in 1940 by the sculptress Marie Melzerová, because of her Jewish origins. An indirect impact was the removal of artworks by Czech patriots wishing to save them from destruction by the Nazi regime.

Post-war period 1945 – 1948

The Red Army liberated Opava on April 22nd, 1945. The German nation was accused of “collective guilt”. The same persecution applied by Nazis against the Jews and “non-Aryan nations” was then applied, to a certain extent, to the German community. Opava was liberated on April 22nd, 1945, but the war brought great losses. Opava was after the Second World War one of the most destroyed cities in Czechoslovakia. The population was significantly reduced and also its national character was changed. Its revival began, but the city has never achieved such prestige again. After a three-day bombing and battles within so called Ostrava-Opava operation was destroyed about 70 % of the city. Streets were covered with dead soldiers and civilians. For dead Red Army soldiers were created improvised burial grounds in various places.

In addition, the city had to cope with the transformation of the cultural and social situation. The fate of the German nation was sealed, accused of “collective guilt”. At the end of May 1945 a decree was issued requiring all people of German nationality over the age of 6 to be identified by the letter N. Large-scale arrests occurred and there was internment for those considered guilty in camp-type facilities. The detention and labour camp for Germans was firstly called “concentration camp”. It was set up in the former Böhm-Ermolli Barracks. This was followed by a relocation to...
the newly-built wooden houses at *Svatopluk Čech square*. By the end of April 1946, there were more than 6,000 people. The camp was officially closed in May 1946 and without further public mention, disappeared from the collective memory.

The urbanist structure of Opava was damaged by the war in many places throughout the city, and a number of narrow streets disappeared. Despite this, part of the Czech public perceived the destruction of the centre positively as a suppression of the city’s German character. As most of the German population was displaced, the new administration sought to remove all German symbols. Opava had to be restored in terms of “Czech” modern architecture. The new city representatives wanted to create a completely new Czech city. Between 1946 and 1947, Adolf Liebscher worked out a regulatory plan that imagined a radical re-visioning of the rest of the historical centre. The plan considered only medieval or Baroque monumental buildings as valuable, while the architecture of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century was rejected as too closely related to the German past. Thus only the most important buildings were selected for preservation. Liebscher planned Opava as modern city of the future, which should present Czech character in its architecture. According to his view, the “self-serving hobby of conservationists and lovers of old times” should not be re-stored. He wanted to leave only the *Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (kostel Nanebevzetí panny Marie)*, the theatre and *Hláska* on the *Upper square*. They should be surrounded by completely new public and residential buildings. The public spaces and streets were planned to be transformed into spacious and airy boulevards and squares and should not follow the then scheme of a historic street network. There were planned new streets that had to sacrificed a significant part (even undamaged) of the existing build environment. But Opava

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64 ŠVÁBENICKÝ, F. *Troppau 1945...*, pp. 177-191.
65 E.g. Jaroslav Pelan, Bohuslav Fuchs, Zdeněk Alexa, Adolf Liebscher, Oldřich Liska. Of the pre-war architects, who knew Opava's conditions, only Erich Geldner and Josef Krischke remained, who were recognized as loyal and were not subject to deportation.
needed to invest a lot to liquidation of ruins and to put into operation the main functional city features, so finally in these 3 years there were realized just few small segments of the plan.

At the end of the summer 1945, new signs appeared on most streets and squares, for the first time in the history only in Czech. Immediately in the first days after the liberation by the Red Army, the names of the most important streets and squares were quickly changed, and soon was established a commission for general renaming. Ideologically inappropriate names associated with the Nazis, but in general also with the German past, were changed and a new Czech street-naming was established. The renaming was characterised by honouring prominent Czech people. National (Čapek) and regional personalities (Prasek), but also foreign artists (Pushkin) scientists (Linné) victors against Nazism (Churchill), important days (May 1st), groups of interest (the Silesian Movement) and important places (Lidice) appeared on street names. Herrengasse became again Masaryk street, Adolf Hitler-ring was renamed Dr. E. Beneš Square and Hermann Göring-Platz returned to Republic square, and then in 1946 was renamed Stalin Square.

Artworks that had been saved by Czech patriots, were returned to the public space. There were new memorials erected commemorating mainly dead soldiers and victims of the Second World War, e.g. in Republic Square (Náměstí republiky) was unveiled the Red Army monument on July 8th, 1945. The above mentioned statue from Dr Emil Rochowanski’s Fountain was returned without its original German label and the symbol of Dr. Rochowanski and the narrative of the statue have disappeared from cultural memory with the displaced Germans. However, the statue of Friedrich Schiller was removed from the Freedom park (Sady svobody) because of his German origin.

![Republic square with the monument and mass grave of the Red Army](image)

Figure 5: Republic square with the monument and mass grave of the Red Army

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67 SIOSTZONEK, J. Fotografické ..., pp. 56.
68 Czechoslovak president 1935 – 1948 and leader of the Czechoslovak resistance.
69 Opavský věstník, 8. 7. 1945, Vol. 1, No. 18, Odhalení ruského památníku, s. 7.
Communist Regime 1948 – 1989

After the coup in 1948, a communist regime was established in Czechoslovakia and the development was more concentrated in nearby Ostrava, which was an industrially important city. Soon after taking the power, the Communist Party leaders “solved” the nationalist problems by the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat through class struggle against the “bourgeois elements”. It was followed by the liquidation of the middle and the rest of the higher social classes, a preference of manual labour and heavy industry, artificial political processes, collectivization and other typical phenomena of the so-called foundation period of the Communist regime. The commemorative events were mainly for the celebration of Czech and Soviet military successes, and important days connected with Soviet or Czech socialism. In the event of the death of important political and cultural figures, remembrance ceremonies took place in the city centre.

As a result of the regime change and the nationalization of private companies, the way of work and possibilities of architects and construction companies had completely changed. Private design companies ceased to exist and architects were obliged to associate in design institutes. In architecture, Stalin's socialist realism prevailed; thus in 1948 the war-damaged theatre’s facade was rebuilt changing from neo-renaissance to the socialist realist style. In addition, this architecture of post-February Czechoslovakia was applied to several larger residential areas, to the individual development of damaged residential blocks on the periphery, as well as in the city centre itself.

With the fall of socialist realism, the ideas of late-modernism, and late international style returned to architecture from the mid-1950s. During the 1950s and 1960s, most of the gaps in the city centre were gradually filled. The shortage of apartments prompted a wave of rapid construction, using every available space in the city centre. The issue of the historic town future prevailed with a reconnection of the Czech Opava dating back from the Middle Ages. The wounds of the past were slowly healing with modern concepts in urban planning and architectural realizations. Despite the cultural revival of the 1960s, demolitions continued. At that time, it could not be justified by war damage. There were cases of demolitions of historicist or Art Nouveau buildings of exceptional architectural quality. Opava began expanding in size and, as in many other cities in the then Czechoslovakia, new panel-built housing estates were established on the outskirts of Opava in the mid-1960s.

All the symbols referring to the previous regime, but also to the German past of the city, had been removed and replaced to reflect the ideology and values of the new regime. In 1958, in the Park of Freedom (Sady Svobody) in the previous place of the statue of Frederick Schiller and before Josef II was erected new statue of a half-dressed woman representing the Reborn Opava by Vincenc Havel. His sculpture entitled Victory of Socialism also complemented the new “SOREL” appearance of the theatre. Within public space were also erected new monuments of personalities.

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70 E.g. celebrations of the Great October Socialist Revolution on November 7th; Laying of wreaths on memorials of fallen heroes of the Soviet Army at the City Cemetery and the Liberation Memorial at Liberators Square, or commemorating events on the anniversary of Slovak National Uprising (SNP), took place in Opava.

71 Birthday of J. V. Stalin, anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party, etc.

72 Commemorative ceremony for Antonín Zápotocký (communist prime minister) in 1957 or for Petr Bezuč (Silesian poet esteemed by the Communist regime) in 1958.

of political and cultural life. The statue of communist president Klement Gottwald (by Havel again) was erected in Smetana’s park (Smetanov sady) in 1955. In 1967 in Bezruč’s park was erected the monument to Petr Bezruč as a joint work by Vladimír Kýn, Jaroslava Lukešová and Jan Benetka. There were also several monuments built and memorial plaques for the fallen soldiers and victims of the Second World War. At the former headquarters of the Gestapo a commemorative plaque was unveiled with a text resembling “Nazi torture”.

Also sculptures with new themes and abstract forms began to appear in public space, such as the Opavian Sphere in the fountain in the main square which was built in 1971 by Ivo Klimeš. It became one of the main symbols of the city.

![Figure 6: Sculpture of Opavia Sphere in the Upper Square in the background with the building of the City Theater rebuilt in the style of socialist realism.](image)

In 1970 was built in Liberator’s Square (Náměstí Osvoboditelů) the monument of Opava liberation by the Red Army – Lime of Freedom. The abstract sculpture did not correspond to the taste of the communist leaders, and thus on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the liberation of Opava, a new monument to the Red Army soldier by Ivan Kalvoda and Jaroslav Hampl was built there and Lime of Freedom was relocated to the city park. In contrast, the afore-mentioned Monument to the Red Army in Republic Square (Náměstí republiky, see Fig. X) was actually removed and replaced as a parking space for clients of the new hotel Kamišín.

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74 SKALÍK, T. Opavské sochy III..., pp. 114.
Regarding place names, the main square was renamed from Dr. E. Beneš Square to May 1st Square. Although street names did not undergo many significant changes right after the coup, some small changes reflect in the loosening up of society during the 1960s and then the more severe normalization period of the communist dictatorship after the Soviet occupation in 1968. For instance, Stalin Square was renamed Defenders of Peace (now Liberation Square) in 1962. Victorious February street (Třída Vítězného Února) was renamed Masaryk street in 1968, and again to Victorious February in 1973.75

Since 1989

After the Velvet Revolution on November 17th, 1989, the Communist regime fell and democracy was established again. In 1990, Opava regained its statutory city status. The establishment of a liberal capitalist system has brought changes to social values again. Urban changes and the architecture created under the regime, including the artworks as a part of housing estates, were preserved and only façades were changed. The separation of Slovakia in 1993 did not change the politics of memory or city symbolism.

From the point of view of politics of memory, in the renaming of the streets it is possible to see the preference of the First Republic values, when the names from this period were returned. Thus, Victorious February street (Třída Vítězného Února) became again Masaryk street (Masarykova třída), May 1st Square (Náměstí prvního Máje) was renamed again to Upper square (Horní náměstí) and Defenders of Peace (now Liberation Square) to Republic square (Náměstí republiky).

Architecture and artworks without overt symbolism of the communist regime were preserved, and only the insulation of the building’s façades were changed. But symbols with clear connotative

75 KNAPÍKOVÁ, J. Opavský uličník..., pp. 103.
meaning directly linked to the previous regime had to be removed. Thus, the Municipal Theatre façade including two statues in the style of socialist realism on Upper square were rebuilt again back to the former neo-renaissance style. Memorials of communist regime representatives were removed, including the afore-mentioned statue of Klement Gottwald.

During this era were again honoured victims and heroes of both World Wars, but now also of the communist regime. In 1994, a Memorial to victims of totalitarian regimes by Jiří Klima was unveiled, where an annual act of piety now takes place. In 2000, the Commemorative Plaque of general Heliodor Píka was unveiled in the Upper square, where commemorative acts take place every year. In 2012 a Commemorative Plaque of Jan Kubiš was unveiled in the Town Hall, the former military barracks. The plaque is a reminder of his military service in these buildings. In 1999 a new commemoration to German soldiers was unveiled at the Municipal Cemetery. It is a mass grave of 472 German soldiers killed in WW2. Monuments of the Red Army remained in public space till today, only the Monument of Red Army soldier was during its reconstruction moved from its pedestal in the middle of the Librators Square to a secluded corner. However, every year commemorations to the liberation take place there. In addition, in 2007 in the same place, a memorial to Czechoslovak soldiers who also contributed significantly to the liberation of the region was erected. Additional commemorative acts associated with paying tribute to the heroes and victims of previous wars and regimes, and a return to the values of the First Republic, can be observed, as exemplified by the laying of flowers at Masaryk’s memorial plaque on March 7th (Masaryk’s birthday).

The German (non-Nazi) past is no longer ignored; an example could be again seen in Librators square where a monument of J.M.Olbracht, and a replica of a fountain in Darmstadt were built in 2008. This place of memory has over time significantly changed in its meaning and today it refers not only to German past, but also to the liberation of Opava by the Red Army and at the same time by Czech soldiers.

The above-mentioned Lime of Freedom changed location again in 2009 and, with some irony, it was moved to Joy Adams Park, formerly Svatopluk Čeh Square, the work camp for Germans. Narratives of the place and the meaning of the monument have disappeared from the collective memory. On the other hand, the history of the city’s Jewish population and their Nazi persecution is still commemorated. In 2013 the former place of the Opavian Synagogue became a place of memory with the erection of the monument referring to the Jewish minority and their persecution by the Nazis. Also the street name recalls the former function of the place – U Synagogy. The realization of the monument was initiated by two Opavian activists and financed by a private Israeli pharmaceutical company TEVA with a branch in city district Komárov.

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76 Representative of foreign anti-Nazi resistance and a victim of the communist regime.
77 A member of the group who assassinated the Reich Protector Reinhard Heydrich.
78 SKALÍK, T. Opavské sochy III..., pp.130.
79 Famous German architect and local native.
Opava has been always a border city what affecting its public space. Its physical and symbolic aspect was influenced by ideological and cultural values of its representatives and inhabitants, but also by specific socio-political circumstances and the ethnic composition of the city. Urban space has adapted to the changes of regimes and the city symbolism has been modified consciously but also unconsciously. Politics of memory has always been reflected, at least, in street names. Each regime attempted to delete the symbols of the previous one. The first Czechoslovak Republic wanted to transcode the monarchical into a free Czech city (although it took into account the German majority) and commemorated mainly Czech prominent personalities and victims of the First World War. Nazi Germany wanted to change the city image to a clearly German one. Nazi ideology was reflected, apart from street names, especially in unrealized plans for rebuilding the city. In addition, it was reflected in the removal of Jewish symbols. After the end of the war, Czechoslovakia returned to the ideals of the first republic and tried to abolish not only the Nazi but also German symbols. However, the plans to rebuild the city in a purely Czech style have also never been realized due to the time-consuming need to remove the damage of WW2. With the advent of the Communist regime, everything was subordinate to regime ideology. Socialist realism became a national architecture, and monuments of great personalities compliant with the regime ideology were built. After the Velvet Revolution, the Communist dictatorship symbols were removed from the city, and once again, there was a clear return to the ideals of the CSR1. Opava commemorates victims and heroes of both world wars and Nazi and Communist crimes against Czechs. However, the liberation by the Red Army is still commemorated. However, the persecution of Germans in labour camps just on the basis of their ethnicity has not been commemorated since its removal, and quickly disappeared from the cultural memory. The separation of Slovakia in 1993 did not change the politics of memory. Despite the fact that the fluctuations between Germany and Czechoslovakia

Figure 8: The burning synagogue during Kristallnacht (left) and the Monument of the Synagogue (right).

Conclusion

Opava has been always a border city what affecting its public space. Its physical and symbolic aspect was influenced by ideological and cultural values of its representatives and inhabitants, but also by specific socio-political circumstances and the ethnic composition of the city. Urban space has adapted to the changes of regimes and the city symbolism has been modified consciously but also unconsciously. Politics of memory has always been reflected, at least, in street names. Each regime attempted to delete the symbols of the previous one. The first Czechoslovak Republic wanted to transcode the monarchical into a free Czech city (although it took into account the German majority) and commemorated mainly Czech prominent personalities and victims of the First World War. Nazi Germany wanted to change the city image to a clearly German one. Nazi ideology was reflected, apart from street names, especially in unrealized plans for rebuilding the city. In addition, it was reflected in the removal of Jewish symbols. After the end of the war, Czechoslovakia returned to the ideals of the first republic and tried to abolish not only the Nazi but also German symbols. However, the plans to rebuild the city in a purely Czech style have also never been realized due to the time-consuming need to remove the damage of WW2. With the advent of the Communist regime, everything was subordinate to regime ideology. Socialist realism became a national architecture, and monuments of great personalities compliant with the regime ideology were built. After the Velvet Revolution, the Communist dictatorship symbols were removed from the city, and once again, there was a clear return to the ideals of the CSR1. Opava commemorates victims and heroes of both world wars and Nazi and Communist crimes against Czechs. However, the liberation by the Red Army is still commemorated. However, the persecution of Germans in labour camps just on the basis of their ethnicity has not been commemorated since its removal, and quickly disappeared from the cultural memory. The separation of Slovakia in 1993 did not change the politics of memory. Despite the fact that the fluctuations between Germany and Czechoslovakia
have significantly changed the city’s symbolism, from 1945 until today, some similar aspects can be noted, such as commemorating the victims of both wars, celebrating important Czech personalities, heroes and Soviet liberators. Likewise, all these regimes omitted from the cultural memory the unpleasant history associated with the persecution against Germans after WW2. The CSR1, The German Reich and CSR3, all tried to make the national identity in the city stronger through national architecture. Since the Velvet Revolution, new architecture and public space artworks are more ideologically neutral and instead reflect the emphasis on artistic and aesthetic values rather than national identity.

In the list of sculptural works in individual periods, one name resonates, which has influenced urban symbolism for several generations. It was Vincent Havel, whose art work appeared in public space during the First Republic and whose works were both removed and re-erected for ideological reasons until the last regime change. His works reflected the politics of memory in individual stages almost throughout the entire 20th century. The memorial plaque of President Masaryk was removed after the annexation of Opava by the German Empire and after the war it was returned again and still serves as a place for reverence. After the communist coup, in a public space his sculpture of the Victory of Socialism in front of the city theatre was erected, this was followed by the statue of President Gottwald and the statue of the reborn Opava, which unlike the previous two survived the so-called Velvet Revolution and became one of today's symbols of Opava.

**Figure 9**: Map of chosen symbolic bearers in Opava between 1918 and 2018

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