

A Utopia of Modernity : Zlín International Symposium May 19 – 23 2009, Zlín and Prague

May 19–23 2009,
Zlín und Prag

Today the Czech city of Zlín is two things at once: a historically important architectural monument and a dynamic city boasting an energetic social and commercial life, the location of the Tomáš Baťa University, where some 10,000 students are currently enrolled. Built by the Baťa shoe company in the 1920s as a factory city where living and working were to enter into a perfect symbiosis, Zlín possesses a rich cultural heritage, epitomizing key ideas and architectural impulses of Modernity which are still palpable and traceable everywhere today. Looking at the former factory buildings located in the city center reveals that the past, the present, and the future of the modern educational and service industry location of Zlín exist next to one another in apparent harmony; strung out adjacent to the former company headquarters in Building 21, today the main offices of the District Authority, are the former factory buildings which are still awaiting re-utilization allocation or refurbishment. The new university buildings in the center fit seamlessly into the cityscape, fully in accord with the strict row layout and standardized facades of the Baťa buildings which give the city its distinctive character.

Zlín is a prime example of a planned city in which all aspects of life, namely domestic living, education, and leisure time, were geared towards achieving a single goal, in this case optimizing the efficiency of a rapidly expanding shoe company. This constitutes its current relevance for city planners and architects. Located in the middle of the southern Moravian countryside, this modern planned city is unique in Europe. Based on the Fordist model, workers manufactured a product on the assembly line that was to soon turn the Baťa brand into a worldwide name.

Zlín seems to be a manifest social utopia: besides the modern architectural stylistic vocabulary, both the functional separation of the urban domains of living, workplaces, recreation, and transportation, as well as the design of the residential quarters inspired by Ebenezer Howard's garden city, were entwined with an extremely advanced utilization of modern mass media serving educational and promotion purposes. Not only was a serially manufactured industrial product worked on in Zlín, but a 'new man' was to be created. Structurally this model drew on leftist societal ideas and its perspective, envisaging an optimistic future, can be considered progressive. At the same time however, the company boss Baťa also presided over a control apparatus which subordinated the life of an entire city to meeting economic objectives. Admiration for the efficiency of this genuinely capitalistic model was thus soon joined by a criticism of the anti-democratic conditions prevailing there. Zlín was not only a center of serial industrial work – the city itself soon became a serial model. The company built new satellite cities and towns across the globe, all based on Zlín and identical architectural parameters.

The symposium featuring prominent international scholars and theorists – including urbanists, architects, and historians – pursues the question if Zlín is relevant for issues currently faced by city planners and architects and thus represents a learning model for the future. From a contemporary perspective Zlín is an irritating example, for it concords neither with the critical articulations of Post-modernism, nor with the certainties proclaimed by defenders of Modernity. For the idea of Zlín Baťa himself drew on a specific model: while traveling through the USA he closely studied the Fordist production methods, and their general influence on Modernity in Europe needs to be discussed. As far as current planning considerations are concerned, property and ownership relations also play a role: they are entwined with the complex legal situation that has emerged as part of the privatization of former state property after 1989. Any debate on possible learning effects from the former social utopia of Zlín needs to address the hierarchical control mechanisms installed in this planned city – these have to be placed in relationship to our current understanding of democracy. It remains

a paradox that the entrepreneur's spatially organized mechanism of discipline and control was also a place of emancipation. Another question of relevance is if Zlín, given contemporary ideas of urban life, characterized for instance by density and functional intermingling, is even an urban city at all. This line of questioning is reinforced by the critical Postmodernist thesis of modern cities. In many respects Zlín is the perfect example for reviving discussion of this issue. Zlín was obviously nothing less than a corporate identity set in stone. The development of the Baťa brand, which the company founder had intermeshed with the planning of Zlín, seems exemplary today: this mechanism appears closely related to current relevant branding strategies, which can be highlighted and discussed against this background. The technologically advanced utilization of mass media for advertising and promotion purposes points far beyond the historical period of the city's origins, while in many respects the education system can be considered as exemplary for following generations.

The symposium is not limited to a single location – it is conceived as a meandering format which aims to turn the topics up for discussion – architecture and the urban environment – into tangible experiences. With "Walks & Talks", thematic sojourns conceived and conducted by experts, the symposium provides an opportunity to traverse the Baťa cosmos and show what the everyday life of current residents looks like in this monument of Modernity. Guided excursions take us to housing units where the original state has in part been altered considerably by rebuilding work. One-time Baťa employees are given a forum to express their views when we visit the "Former Employees Club"; in the vein of oral history, the stories of the employees – spanning several generations and now scattered across the globe – come to life. Inspecting the urban building ensembles from the 1920s and 1930s on site will show concretely where the interests of monument protection collide with the technological and spatial demands of re-utilization, raising the question if, and to what extent, conservation and an energetic use of a site are compatible. The former Baťa headquarters (Building 21), subject to refurbishing plans, is the most prominent excursion site to be visited revolving around the question of monument protection. The historical genesis of the shoe as an industrial product will be discussed and presented in the Zlín Shoe Museum: its evolution from a luxury good to an affordable article of daily use was not only motivated by economic gain but also had a social-utopian aspect – it was namely accompanied by extensive orthopedic research. Finally, another "Walk" takes us to the Zlín Film Studios, where from 1936 onwards the company produced its advertising films. This location turned into a progressive hub of Czechoslovakian film and later produced outstanding trick and marionette films – an idea of this production can be gained during a long film evening.

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Tuesday,
May 19 2009
PRAGUE

2 pm

“Zlín is a resplendent phenomenon.” This famous remark by the architect Le Corbusier serves as the leitmotif for an extensive exhibition entitled “The Baťa Phenomenon. Architecture in Zlín 1910-1960.” The Regional Gallery of Fine Arts in Zlín and the National Gallery in Prague are presenting this exhibition from March 19 through to May 31 2009 in Prague (further information available at: www.ngprague.cz).

The first day of the symposium features a tour through the exhibition and an accompanying lecture program. Speakers include the curators of the exhibition **Radomíra Sedláková** (curator at the National Gallery in Prague) and **Ladislava Horňáková** (deputy director of the Regional Gallery of Fine Arts Zlín) as well as **Tomáš Vlček** (director of the National Gallery’s contemporary art collection) and **Dagmar Prášilová** (architect, Paris).

To be followed by a reception given by the director of the National Gallery, **Milan Knížák**.

Wednesday,
May 20 2009
ZLÍN

HIGHLIGHT TOUR Beginning at 3 pm

A tour of the architectural highlights of Zlín shall illustrate the urban planning concept and present the design and construction principles behind this “city of functionalism.”

Contributors include:

Ladislava Horňáková (deputy director of the Regional Gallery of Fine Arts in Zlín),
Rostislav Koryčánek (director of the The Brno House of Arts,
formerly editor-in-chief of the architecture journal era21),
Dagmar Nová (chief architect of the Zlín District Authority),
Zdeněk Pokluda (former director of the State District Archive in Zlín)

Duration: ca. 3 hours

OPENING 6.30 pm

As part of the activities marking the opening of conference in Zlín two lectures provide important impulses for a distanced reflection on the historical constellation and a general orientation for examining this early model of a social and city utopia. The opening lectures – from an American and European perspective respectively – present the architectural history of the ideal city and the company town, plotting developments through selected examples. In addition, taking Zlín as an example, the influence such conceptions have had on Modernity is to be shown.

Opening lectures by **Richard Ingersoll** (architecture historian and philosopher; professor at the Syracuse University, Florence/ Italy) and TBA.

To be followed by a reception given by the Zlín District Authority.

Concert / Installation

For the symposium the former grain silo is to be adapted and serve as a meeting place and lounge for the international guests and the local culture scene. As part of the symposium the Hucot Society, devoted to supporting and promoting contemporary audiovisual culture in Zlín, will stage a series of concerts and present audiovisual installations by young Czech artists which explore the topography of space and landscape and the viewer's personal world of experience.

Thursday,
May 21 2009

THE BAŤA PHENOMENON AND MODERNITY 9–12 am

The interaction between economic rationalization, technological progress, and visionary architectural and societal reorganization forms the basis of the Baťa phenomenon. The experience Tomáš Baťa gained during his spell in the USA also contributed to this unique social and architectural experiment. Factory and city merged economically, socially, and communally into a unity that has continued to have an impact down to the present day. The introductory lectures look into the framework conditions of the Baťa phenomenon.

Contributors include:

Eric Mumford (associate professor at the School of Architecture, Washington University, St Louis), **Radomíra Sedláková** (curator at the National Gallery in Prague), **Vladimír Šlapeta** (rector of the Architecture Faculty and professor for theory at the Technical University, Brno).

Moderation:

Winfried Nerdinger (professor for the theory and history of architecture, art and design at the Technical University Munich and director of the architecture museum in the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich)

SOCIAL UTOPIA / CITY UTOPIA 1–4 pm

The "Zlín experiment" connected architectural ideals with those of the social engineer so as to create a new human type: progressive and oriented completely on the promises of Modernity. This ideal-type was called the "new industrial man" in Zlín. On the basis of prosperity and social harmony, this ideal-type was to loyally serve the company employing him/her for the whole of their life. "Zlín is a special city – and not only in terms of its architectural constructs. There are very few cities about which so much and so little is known at once: while there is a host of studies devoted to the aspects of architectural and urban history as well as the biography of its founder, there is hardly any well-founded knowledge about the people who lived and worked in Zlín during the period of its most extensive reorganization – the interwar years – and their everyday lives, what worried them, what they enjoyed about their place of residence." (Annett Steinführer)

The continuing extension and development of Zlín, with which Tomáš Baťa, not just as entrepreneur but from 1923-1932 in his capacity as mayor, pressed ahead, contrasts sharply with the current situation in the city center, which is shaped by a vast number of new owners and a confusing legal status.

Contributors include:

Annett Steinführer (Helmholtz Center for Environmental Research, Department of Urban and Environmental Sociology, Leipzig) and **Rostislav Švácha** (professor of art history at the Palacký University, Olomouc, and member of the Institute for Art History at the Czech Academy of Arts and Sciences).

WALKS & TALKS to choose from

Beginning 4.30 pm

Also on **Friday, May 22 2009**

and **Saturday, May 23 2009**

Thematic walks through the city accompanied by expert discussions developed specially for the symposium, these "Walks & Talks" provide an opportunity to come into closer contact with the Baťa cosmos and stimulate further discussion.

For the program, see p. 8.

FILM EVENING

Beginning 9.30 pm

To be held in the "Grand Cinema", the main building on "Labor Square" in the city center. The entrepreneur Tomáš Baťa recognized the mesmerizing power of moving pictures early on and instinctively knew how to harness them for the benefit of the company. In 1936 film studios were set up for the purpose of producing advertising material for Baťa and employing renowned directors like Alexander Hackenschmid, Elmar Klos, and Ladislav Kolda gained international fame. Besides popular advertising films and documentaries, numerous productions were devoted to industrial training for employees as well as general education in Zlín's schools, aiming to prepare pupils for life in the routine of daily production. From the 150 films created during the Baťa era only 50 copies have survived, which indicates just how broad the working spectrum of the studios was. As part of a long film evening the curator Markéta Dvořáčková presents a selection of historical films which will be complemented and thematically enhanced with works by current film studio graduates. A diverse and colorful kaleidoscope of cinematic snapshots shows modern Zlín and current perspectives on the city in a multilayered and entertaining juxtaposition.

Conception and realization:

Markéta Dvořáčková (designated director of the department for theoretical studies at the Faculty of Multimedia Communication, Tomáš Baťa University, Zlín)

Friday,
May 22 2009

WALKS & TALKS to choose from

9 am–1 pm

For the program, see p. 8.

MODERNITY AND URBANITY: A CONTRADICTION?

2–7 pm

The case of Zlín could shed new light on long-established critical positions on the modern city, entrenched by Postmodernism, which agreed that the functional city is anti-urban. Baťa's "shoe city" substantiates such an assertion in many respects: Zlín lacks a series of differentiations which are decisive in turning a city into a complex social, political, cultural, and physical space. In Zlín the mechanisms of urban regulation and planning lay in the hands of the company, while the city's residents, coming from rural areas and thus not imbued with urban traditions, were almost exclusively Baťa employees, and the architecture was based on a preset pattern with just a few variations, which had little to do with local contexts and complied more with the rhythm of the assembly line. At the same time, for new Zlín residents the city provided the comforts and conveniences of modern life: houses and apartments were of a higher than normal standard, modern leisure activities

catered for, there were education facilities and places of public entertainment – and not least emancipation from the traditional ties and obligations of rural life. Whoever wishes to write about Zlín is confronted with the paradox that this space of disciplining and control, created and overseen by the omnipresent entrepreneur, was also a place of emancipation. Against the backdrop of a general skepticism as to whether it is possible and feasible to plan a city, renewed interest has been kindled in the cities of the future planned and built in the past. Zlín could therefore serve as an interesting location to discuss the actuality of modern urbanism with architects, city researchers, urbanists, and historians.

Contributors include:

Angelus Eisinger (professor of history and culture of metropolises at the HafenCity University, Hamburg),

Arnold Reijndorp (professor for urban geographies at the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences, University of Amsterdam),

Cyril Říha (researcher at the Center for Theoretical Studies at the Charles University, Prague, member of the Czech Academy of Arts and Sciences, lecturer at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design),

Karin Wilhelm (professor at the Institute of History and Theory of Architecture and Cities, Technical University, Brunswick)

Conception and moderation:

Regina Bittner (director of the International Bauhaus College, Bauhaus Foundation, Dessau)

To be followed by a discussion round In the Future Zlín: the Future of Urbanity in Zlín

The issues of future urban planning developments for the “city of functionalism,” urban principles, and a possible “learning from Zlín” are the topics to be broached in an open, interdisciplinary discussion round featuring local experts, members of the young Czech architectural scene, and international scholars.

Participants include:

Adam Gebrian (architect, Prague), **Pavel Chládek** (architect, Zlín),

Pavel Hnilička (architect, Prague, tbc), **Lukáš Kohl** (architect, Prague), **Dagmar Nová** (chief architect of the Zlín District Authority),

Jan Obšivač (conservator, Kroměříž Monument Protection Office),

Jitka Rössová (architect and lecturer for design at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Zlín), **Svatopluk Sládeček** (architect, Brno), **Petr Všecký** (architect, Brno)

Moderation:

Igor Kovačević (architect and theorist of architecture, director of the Centre for Central European Architecture, Prague)

CONCERT / PARTY Beginning 9 pm

For the symposium the former grain silo is to be adapted and serve as a meeting place and lounge for the international guests and the local culture scene. As part of the symposium the Hucot Society, devoted to supporting and promoting contemporary audiovisual culture in Zlín, will stage a series of concerts and present audiovisual installations by young Czech artists which explore the topography of space and landscape and the viewer’s personal world of experience.

Saturday
May 23 2009

MARKETING A SOCIAL UTOPIA
9 am – 1 pm

The development of the Baťa brand, which the company founder had intermeshed with the planning of Zlín, seems closely related to current relevant branding strategies – when all is said and done, Zlín was nothing less than a corporate identity set in stone. The technologically advanced utilization of mass media for advertising and promotion purposes points far beyond the historical period of the city's origins, while in many respects the education system can be considered as exemplary for following generations.

Contributors include:

Daniel M. Abramson (associate professor of art and art history at the Tufts University, Medford), **Anette Baldauf** (sociologist and cultural studies expert, Vienna/New York City), **Gunter Henn** (architect, holder of the chair for Industrial Architecture at the Technical University, Dresden, and guest professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT), **Ladislava Horňáková** (deputy director of the Regional Gallery of Fine Arts in Zlín), **Petr Szczepanik** (lecturer at the Institute for Theatre and Film Studies of the Arts Faculty at the Masaryk University, Brno), **Mária Topolčanská** (architect, Institute of Civil Engineering and Architecture at the Slovak Academy of Arts and Sciences in Bratislava)

Moderation:

Andreas Ruby (architecture critic and theorist, Berlin)

To be followed by:

“The Company Headquarters: Building 21”

The tour of the former Baťa headquarters featuring the famous Baťa elevator, the mobile office of the company boss, is a particularly incisive example of former company architecture.

Conception and realization:

Petr Všeťečka (architect, Brno)

WALKS & TALKS

Specially developed for the symposium, this series of thematic walks and expert talks is to bring Zlín to life by providing a tangible spatial experience.

In small groups conference participants visit and inspect selected architectures and historical buildings from the Baťa epoch, guided by experts familiar with local issues and Zlín culture. These guided tours are to convey a contemporary impression of Zlín and provide perspectives on everyday routines and life in this “monument of Modernity.”

“Domestic Culture in Zlín”

The personal living space, the private milieu and traces of various uses by the residents are the themes which play a role in the walk “Domestic Culture in Zlín.” This walk explores issues revolving around city and domestic living on a variety of scales – the city space, the residential unit, and the interior space – and presents selected building types and residential quarters.

Conception and guides:

Jitka Ressořová (architect and lecturer at the design dept of the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Zlín),

Lucie Galčanová and **Barbora Vacková** (sociologists and researchers at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Masaryk University, Brno)

Duration: ca. 2.5 hours

“Vladimír Karfík and Zlín”

From 1930–1946 the architect Vladimír Karfík was employed in the construction and planning office of Baťa in Zlín, his last post being that of office director. His works decisively shaped the architecture of the company and the cityscape of Zlín. Along with residential buildings, schools, commercial premises, a Roman Catholic church, and other projects, he created what is indisputably Zlín’s landmark, Building 21, the former administrative offices of the Baťa companies featuring seventeen floors and the mobile office of Jan Baťa.

Conception and guides:

Štefan Šlachta (chief architect of the City of Bratislava Authority, president of the Slovakian Union of Architects), a renowned expert of the work of Vladimír Karfík who knew him personally, will present the architect and his architectural legacy in Zlín.

Duration: ca. 2.5 hours

“Baťa mondial – Memories“

With “Baťa’s Club of Former Employees,” which has its headquarters in a villa once owned by Tomáš Baťa, the memory of the company and its cultural and social activities is kept alive. For many of these “former employees,” today scattered across the globe, their years in the company are a key chapter in their biography. The recollections of these contemporary witnesses provide an impressive account of life and work in Zlín.

Conception elaborated in collaboration with:

Pavel Veleř (director of the Tomáš Baťa Foundation in Zlín) and

Zdeněk Pokluda (former director of the State District Archive in Zlín)

Duration: ca. 2 hours

“Shoe Fetishism: From Baťa’s Optimization of Shoe Production to Orthopedics”

Serial and thus cost-efficient manufacturing while maintaining a high quality was the declared objective of Tomáš Baťa, and it pertained equally for the architecture of the factories and the “commodity shoe”: the shoes were made for standardized people, for every type and use every day, produced in mass series, and sold worldwide. But what ideas and visions of life in general and of the every-day doings of its wearers formed the basis of the designs? What did the research and development process behind Baťa’s mass commodity look like? Where did the democratization of consumerism encounter its physical limits?

Prof. Petr Hlaváček, rector of the Technical Faculty in Zlín and one of the leading scholars on the history of the shoe and shoe production, gives an account of Baťa’s research in the area of production optimization and orthopedics using instructional materials and exhibition objects. The walk will take in the city’s shoe museum, which owns the most comprehensive collection of products manufactured by Baťa.

With:

Petr Hlaváček (rector of the Technical Faculty at the Tomáš Baťa University, Zlín, and professor for shoe development and hygiene)

Duration: ca. 1.5 hours

“Monument Protection”

The New Heritage – buildings and urban ensembles of the 1920s and 1930s and postwar architecture as well as their conservation, renovation, maintenance, and future utilization – has become the focus of international interest in recent years. With Building 21, the former company headquarters and today home to the administrative offices of the Zlín District Authority, the “Malá Scéna,” and other buildings, the city of Zlín already possesses outstanding examples of renovation which meets the demands of monument protection while fulfilling the spatial and technical requirements of contemporary usage and preserving the distinctive character of the respective building. This walk presents an overview of the monument protection situation in Zlín and provides an opportunity to exchange experiences with experts.

Conception and realization:

Petr Všecký (architect, Brno)

Duration: ca. 2 hours

“Film Studios”

A tour of the legendary Zlín film studios: the studios were founded in 1936 to produce advertising films for Baťa. Amongst the first filmmakers to work in Zlín were Alexander Hackenschmid, Elmar Klos, and Ladislav Kolda, who also produced documentaries. In the 1940s experimental animation films were created; in the 1960s Zlín became the Czechoslovakian center for producing children and youth films. The tour provides a glimpse behind the scenes of the legendary film studios.

Conception and guides:

Zdeněk Skaunic (director of the Zlín Film Studios)

Jiří Novotný (film historian, Zlín)

Duration: ca. 2 hours

Information

No attendance fee will be charged.
Registration at: zlin@projekt-zipp.de.
Conference languages: German/Czech/English
Text, program, information, and practical details
on the symposium are available at:
www.projekt-zipp.de.

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Conception and coordination: Katrin Klingan, Kerstin Gust with Rostislav Koryčánek, Petra Hlavačková, Patricia Maurer, Zuzana Jürgens in collaboration with Ladislava Horňáková and Radomira Sedlaková