

RICHARD NEMEC, DIE ÖKONOMISIERUNG DES RAUMES. PLANEN UND BAUEN IN MITTEL- UND OSTEUROPA UNTER DEN NATIONALSOZIALISTEN 1938 BIS 1945

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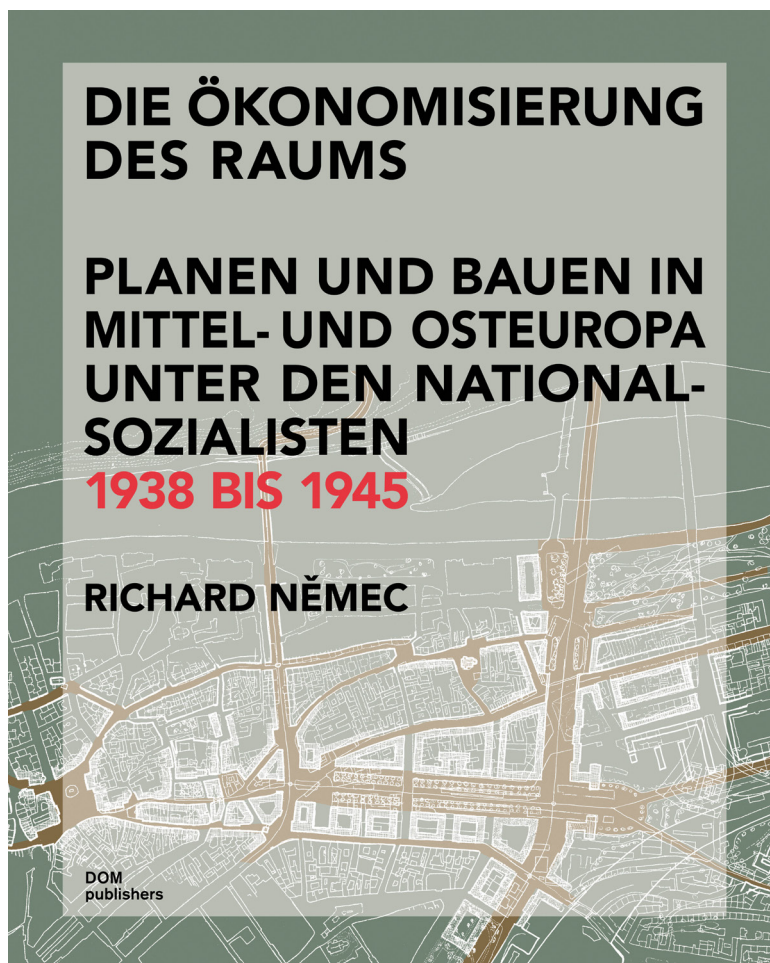
Just behind the advancing troops of the Wehrmacht, planners and architects were set to plan post-war Europe. Following the occupation of the Sudetenland in 1938 and the Czechoslovakian Republic in 1939, the National-socialist Government of Germany planned to restructure the national entities in Eastern Europe by forming a Slovak State and the colonial Constructs of the Protectorates Böhmen und Mähren, Warthegau and the “Generalgouvernement” in Poland. The towns of Reichenberg (Liberec CZ), Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary CZ), Prag and Pressburg (Bratislava SLO) were assigned as new administrative or representative centers of their respective territories.

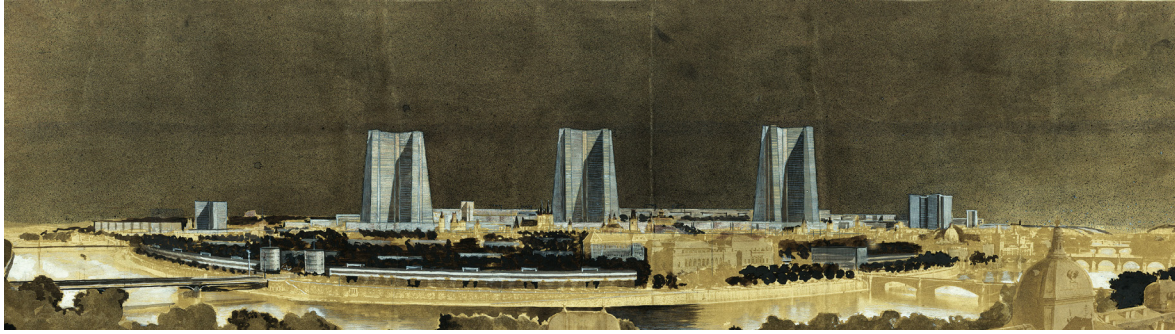
The architectural historian Ricard Nemeč – a scholar at the University of Bern – has been undertaking a dive into local public archives in Czechia, Slovakia and Germany to determine, in which ways the planning and architecture of these new administrative centres were adjusted by German occupation and their colonial agenda. All those who expect to find the bombastic and neo-classicist plans of Berlin, Linz or Nuremberg applied in the examined towns are in for a surprise.

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Based on his findings, Nemeč presents us with the thesis, the plans by the NS-planners show to be in much larger part were determined by practical and economical considerations than by ideological. By this, the author explains the somewhat klutzy title of this work – the economization of space. Whereas the planning for post-war Czechoslovakia is recognized by this “economization of space”, the plans for Poland, are to a much larger extend based on the idea of colonisation or “extermination” of the slavic population. Nemeč’s thesis also explains the surprising continuity of pre-occupation plans from the 1920s and 1930, the NS-plannings of 1939–1945 and the later realized projects during the 1950s and 60s under state-socialist rule.

Nemeč’s book shows convincingly, how the NS-system of competing administration is creating an unpredictable chaos of mandates and responsibilities. The system exposes both bureaucrats, planners and architects exposed to an administrative tohu wa-bohu, where decisions are left to competing personal interests. Beginning with Albert Speer, who resigns his responsibilities for the new cities already in January 1941, the responsibility for the planning of the





new cities is handed down to the local authorities, which are under various kinds of control by the Occupation. The ensuing chaos would also give well connected local architects opportunities to contribute with their work.

Nemec shows a number of architectural works, which show – contrary to the postulated hegemony of the classicist canon – the great influence of modern architecture during the occupation pointing to the prospect of state-socialist planning in the 1960s.

The quality of Nemec’s book is the impressive amount of documentation the author has managed to gather on the subject. This allows him to diverge from the mainstream-view of the conservative roots of NS-architecture. His findings lead the reader to the conclusion that the architectural and planning praxis in the occupied countries of Eastern Europe shows a surprising diversity which puts NS-planning closer to modern traditions. The closeness of the economic determined NS-plans to modern architecture leading from Corbusiers “city radieuse” to the car-friendly plans of the 1960s is without doubt uncomfortable – which makes Nemec’s book even more significant.

The book is illustrated by a great number of large full-color illustrations. Documents are shown which witness from the author’s meticulous work with his sources. Nemec’s work lays ground to a field of architectural history we until today knew very little about. The author’s methodical strength is paired with luscious illustrations and precise notes. The books design and layout makes the book easy and pleasurable to read. The publishing house deserves to be commended for both quality and editorial generosity.