

From Vienna to Ostrava – from Austria to Czechoslovakia: Urban Rail Transport in the Czech Lands (on the Example of the Ostrava Agglomeration), 1894 – 1924

Michaela Závodná

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The following study focuses on the development of urban rail transport in the Czech Lands before 1914, specifically regarding electrification and municipalization. The second part of the study looks at the issue of nostrification of a transport company in the aftermath of World War I. Based on a case of a specific company, the study analyses its causes, course and consequences, while placing it in the historical context of the making of so-called greater cities. It examines the economic and political motives that lead to the decision to move the transportation company's headquarters to Czechoslovakia even before being prompted to do so by the state authorities. It follows the impacts of the war on the running of the company, and the gradual permeating of members of the local authorities into the company's board of directors. Taking into account the transformation of the Ostrava city agglomeration into a modern metropolis, it analyses the factors that culminated in the local authority of Moravská Ostrava joining the transport company as the majority shareholder, as well as the consequences for the subsequent development of the company.

Key words: Nineteenth – twentieth century. City. Urban rail transport. Nostrification process. Economic history. Moravská Ostrava. Czechoslovakia. Czech Lands. Electrification. Municipalization.

The development of urban rail transport in the Czech Lands¹ has not received adequate attention and is not on par with literature focusing on outside contexts. Czech literature on transport offers only popularizing manuals, of which only a proportion focuses on the issue of technology transfer, whilst entirely omitting the social and cultural dimension of such a transfer.² At the same time, the comparative and synthetic works of transport historiography explore the Central European context only minimally, if at all.³ If the historiography pays any attention to urban rail transportation, then it is

1 Given the complex character of Cisleithanian railway legislation, the study will use the following terminology. 'Urban rail transport' is used to describe rail operations in urban settings, regardless of traction. The term 'street rail', which corresponds to the German term *Strassenbahn*, will be used for urban rail transport using electric traction. For an extensive discussion of the issue, see: ZÁVODNÁ, Michaela. Městská kolejová doprava v rakouském železničním zákonodárství do roku 1914 na příkladu Brna, Ostravy a Olomouce. In: *Hospodářské dějiny – Economic History*, 2011, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 154-173.

2 Cf. LOSOS, Ludvík – BOUDA, Jiří. *Dějiny městské kolejové dopravy*. Praha: Albatros, 1983, 296 p. LOSOS, Ludvík. Městská hromadná doprava. In: JÍLEK, František (Ed.). *Studie o technice v českých zemích 1800 – 1918*. Sv. IV. Praha: Národní technické muzeum, 1986, pp. 310-335. BAUER, Gerhard – FOJTÍK, Pavel – LOSOS, Ludvík – MAHEL, Ivo. *Tramvaje v České a Slovenské republice: Od koňky k nízkopodlažnímu vozu*. Dresden: Verlag für Verkehrsliteratur, 1998, 300 p. McKAY, John P. *Tramways and Trolleys: The Rise of Urban Mass Transport in Europe*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976, 266 p. McKAY, John P. Comparative perspectives on Transit in Europe and the United States 1850 – 1914. In: ROBERTS, Gerrylyn K. (Ed.). *The American Cities and Technology Reader: Wilderness to Wired City*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 88-97. SEMSEL, Craig. More than an ocean apart. The street railways of Cleveland and Birmingham 1880 – 1911. In: *The Journal of Transport History*, 2001, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 47-61. SCHMUCKI, Barbara. The Machine in the City: Public Appropriation of the Tramways in Britain and Germany, 1870 – 1915. In: *Journal of Urban History*, 2012, vol. 38, pp. 1060-1093.

3 Cf. McKAY, J. P. *Tramways and Trolleys...*, 266 p. MILLWARD, Robert. *Private and Public Enterprise in Europe: Energy, telecommunications and transport, 1830 – 1990*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 351 p. LOPEZ MARTINEZ, Alberte. Belgian investment in tramways and light railways. An international approach, 1892 – 1935. In: *The Journal of Transport History*, 2003, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 59-77.

mainly in relation to cities.⁴ The following study does not intend to fill in the deficit.⁵ It will only focus on two partial areas of research with two goals: to briefly characterize the development of urban rail transport in the Czech Lands before 1914 with respect to the process of electrification and municipalization; and, second, to capture the essential principles of the urban rail transport operation in the context of a newly formed state after 1918 based on the example of a selected transportation company.

Development of the Urban Rail Transport in the Czech Lands before 1914: An Overview

The development of urban rail transport in the Czech Lands, part of the Habsburg Monarchy and Cisleithania (after 1867), can be primarily characterized according to the method of traction. Until the 1890s, in the Habsburg Monarchy, so-called horse-drawn trams were the primary development. Before 1895, such trams operated in 17 towns: 11 in Cisleithania and six in Transleithania.⁶ They were predominantly started and operated by joint-stock companies with capital mainly of local and entrepreneurial circles, with minimal participation by foreign – in this period mainly Belgian – entrepreneurs⁷ or companies.⁸ For a short period of time, steam rail, which mainly developed in the industrial parts of the Czech Lands (the Brno area and the Ostrava area with the exception of Bohumín), formed a transitional type between the horse-drawn tram and street rail. Steam rail represented a transitional type in the development of urban rail transport. This was a response to the fact that Cisleithanian legislation before 1894/1895 did not include any statutory norms that would define the position of urban rail transport within the rail system, but at the same time did not allow the use of electric energy to drive urban rail transport.

4 BENDIKAT, Elfi. *Öffentliche Nahverkehrspolitik in Berlin und Paris 1890 – 1914. Strukturbedingungen, politische Konzeption und Realisierungsprobleme*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999, 682 p. CAPUZZO, Paolo. *Transportation System and urban Space Vienna 1865 – 1938*. In: *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 1998, no. 2, pp. 153-168. MELINZ, Gerhard – ZIMMERMANN, Susan. *Die Aktive Stadt. Kommunale Politik zur Gestaltung städtischer Lebensbedingungen in Budapest, Prag und Wien (1867 – 1914)*. In: MELINZ, Gerhard – ZIMMERMANN, Susan (Eds.). *Prag, Wien, Budapest. Blütezeit der Habsburgermetropolen: Urbanisierung, Kommunalpolitik, gesellschaftliche Konflikte (1867 – 1918)*. Wien: Promedia, 1996, pp. 140-176. PEŠEK, Jiří. *Od aglomerace k velkoměstu: Praha a středoevropské metropole 1850 – 1920*. Praha: Scriptorium, 1999, pp. 28-33, 151-195.

5 An essential study that compares the development of urban rail transport abroad and relates it to the Czech context is: ZÁVODNÁ, Michaela. *Koleje a město: Problematika městské kolejové dopravy ve vybraných moravských a slezských městech v letech 1850 – 1918*. České Budějovice; Ostrava: Veduta; Ostravská univerzita, 2016, 326 p. The book analyzes the urban rail transport in select towns within the Czech Republic and places them in the global context of the development of urban transport as a sociocultural phenomenon. The manuscript's disadvantage is that it is only available in Czech language with an English resume.

6 KOHN-KONTA, Ignaz. *Eisenbahn-Jahrbuch der österreich-ungarischen Monarchie*. Wien, 1869 – 1892. GOTTSLEBEN, Ferdinand. *Lokal- und Kleinbahnwesen*. In: *Geschichte der Eisenbahnen der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie. V. Band. Das Eisenbahnwesen Österreichs in seiner allgemeinen und technischen Entwicklung 1898 – 1908*. Wien; Teschen; Leipzig: Karl Prochaska Verlag, 1908, pp. 298-307.

7 The name of the Belgian entrepreneur Édouard Otlet is, in the Habsburg Monarchy, only connected with Prague. See: DUMOULIN, Michel. 'Edouard Otlet'. *Biographie Nationale*. Vol. 41, supplement sv. XIII, fasc. 1 Abbeloos – Joassart. Bruxelles: Établissements Émile Bruylant, 1979, p. 602.

8 Before 1880 in the Habsburg Monarchy, the most important company, La Société Générale de Tramways à Bruxelles, operated only in Terst and Galicia (Lviv). The company rescinded its stated intention to take over the horse-driven tram in Brno in 1875 for economic reasons. DUMOULIN, Michel. *Fonti e memorie*. Jacques Errera, un banquier venetien à Bruxelles. In: *Rassegna Storica del Rissorgimento LXXIII*, 1986, no. 3, pp. 267-279. ZÁVODNÁ, M. *Koleje a město...*, p. 101.

In 1895 there were 38 public tram companies in Germany. This was absolutely not the case in the Czech Lands.⁹ Likewise, there was no electrification. In 1893, 60 % of all street railways were electrified,¹⁰ compared to only 5.8 km in Cisleithania.¹¹

It was only Act No. 2/1895 that removed these shortcomings.¹² The Act defined the category of street rail (*Strassenbahn*) as a branch line propelled by electricity, included it in the imperial railway system, and set a relatively long-term license.¹³ Unlike Great Britain or Germany, the Habsburg (specifically the Cisleithanian) legislation did not place restrictions on municipalities' entrepreneurial activities, whether undertaken by the municipalities directly or as shareholders.¹⁴ Municipalities continued to enjoy a relatively broad field of activity in defining contractual relations within the settlement area. Local authorities were to decide the conditions for developing and operating municipal infrastructure. In contrast to Great Britain, France, and other European countries, the development of electric traction urban rail transport in the Habsburg Monarchy was not primarily connected with the electrification of existing operations but with the building of a brand new type of infrastructure, for which, as in Spain, the government defined the legislative requirements while leaving the investment and implementation on the shoulders of municipalities and the private sector.¹⁵

After timid 1890s, the Czech Lands experienced a street rail boom, mainly in the beginning of the twentieth century. The causes of the delay were not so much esthetical concerns,¹⁶ as in the relatively strong position of local gasworks on the one hand¹⁷ and the distinct inexperience of local authorities with electricity on the other

9 MILLWARD, R. *Private and public enterprise...*, p. 77.

10 SCHATZBERG, Eric. The Mechanization of Urban Transit in the United States. Electricity and its Competitors. In: ASTRAY, William (Ed.). *Technological competitiveness: Contemporary and historical perspectives on the electrical, electronics and computer industries*. New York: IEEE, 1993, p. 232.

11 Křížik's electric railway in Prague was 1.4 km long and the railway between Mödling and Hinterbrühl was 4.4 km long.

12 2. Gesetz vom 31. December 1894 über Bahnen niederer Ordnung. In: *Riechsgesetzblatt für die im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreiche und Länder*. Jahr 1895. Wien 1895, pp. 7-13.

13 In the branch line category that included street cars, it was 90 years for local administrations and 60 years for other license holders. 2. Gesetz vom 31. December 1894 über Bahnen niederer Ordnung..., art. XVI, p. 12.

14 Municipalities in the Habsburg monarchy were not required to make do with a short licensing terms or bans on individual business activities like their British counterparts following the 1870 Tramway Act. In addition, business activities in the area of the urban rail transport were not considered as concessions, so municipalities avoided police control and limitations of their own authority as was the case in Prussia and Saxonia before 1892. Cf. BAKER, Thomas C. Urban Transport. In: FREEMAN, Michael J. – ALDCROFT, Derek H. (Eds.). *Transport in Victorian Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988, pp. 134-170. McKAY, J. P. *Tramways and Trolleys...*, pp. 168-170. HIETALA, Marjatta. *Services and Urbanization at the Turn of the Century: The Diffusion of Innovations*. Helsinki: SHS, 1987, pp. 249-250. KRABBE, Wolfgang. *Kommunalpolitik und Industrialisierung. Die Entfaltung der städtischen Leistungsverwaltung im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert: Fallstudien zu Dortmund und Münster*. Stuttgart: Dt. Gemeindeverlag, 1985, pp. 66-67, 69.

15 MARTINÉZ, Alberte. Energy, Innovation and Transport. The Electrification of Trams in Spain, 1896 – 1935. In: *Journal of Urban Technology*, 2012, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 2.

16 Clearly documented opposition to above-ground electric lines and the search for relevant technical alternatives can be observed in Olomouc, Moravia. In general, there were not too many questions connected with the esthetic perception of the urban rail transport in the Czech Lands. ZÁVODNÁ, M. *Koleje a město...*, pp. 223-224. Cf. McKAY, J. P. *Comparative perspectives...*, pp. 3-21. McKAY, J. P. *Tramways and Trolleys...*, pp. 84-89. SEMSEL, R. *More than an ocean apart...*, pp. 47-61.

17 A similar problem, i.e. the relatively long perceived dominant position of gasworks, can also be found in the German Lands. Wolfgang Krabbe connects the development of gasworks with the emergence of the service administration (*Leistungsverwaltung*) that started to develop in the last third of the nineteenth

hand; it was predominantly the complicated technology that both required substantial investment with slow recoverability as well as the relevant know-how.¹⁸ The Czech Lands were also outside the main currents through which the technology spread from the USA to Europe.¹⁹ The main distributors of the technology in the Czech Lands and Cisleithania were German electric companies, supported by established institutions.²⁰ These included subsidiaries of *Österreichische Siemens-Schuckert Werke*, *AEG-Union-Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft* and *Österreichische Brown-Boveri-Werke*. The Hungarian Ganz & Comp. and Swiss Oerlikon also participated relatively strongly in the electric power sector. The major Czech company, František Křižík, had a disproportionately lesser share.²¹ Given the extent of urbanization in the Czech Lands, attention was predominantly paid to mid-sized towns, as evidenced in Table 1:

century. He describes the development of this type of infrastructure (i.e. gasworks, street rail, etc.) as part of so called municipal socialism that seeks to ensure trouble-free operation of towns and simultaneously gain control over public companies. The process through which this municipal socialism was undertaken can be called municipalization. For the connections between gasworks, power plants, and street rail as part of the *Leistungsverwaltung* process, see: KRABBE, W. *Kommunalpolitik...*, passim. KRABBE, Wolfgang. *Städtische Wirtschaftsberiebe im Zeichen des „Munizipalsocialismus“: Die Anfänge der Gas- und Elektrizitätswerke im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*. In: BLOTEVOGEL, Hans H. (Ed.). *Kommunale Leistungsverwaltung und Stadtentwicklung vom Vormärz bis zur Weimarer Republik*. Köln; Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1990, pp. 117-138. KRABBE, Wolfgang. *Die Entfaltung der modernen Leistungsverwaltung in den deutschen Städten des späten 19. Jahrhundert*. In: TEUTEBERG, Hans Jürgen (Ed.). *Urbanisierung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Historische und geographische Aspekte*. Köln; Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1983, pp. 373-391. KAUFHOLD, Karl H. *Investitionen der Städte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Köln; Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1997, 368 p. MELINZ, Gerhard. *Gas und Elektrizität als Elemente „städtischer Leistungsverwaltung“? Kommunalisierungsprozesse und -strategien in Wien, Prag und Budapest in Kontext von politischen und ökonomischen Interessen (1860 – 1918)*. In: SCHOTT, Dieter (Ed.). *Energie und Stadt in Europa: Von der vorindustriellen „Holznot“ bis zur Ölkrise der 1970er Jahre*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997, pp. 141-168. KLADIWA, Pavel – POKLUDOVÁ, Andrea – KAFKOVÁ, Renata. *Lesk a bída obecních samospráv Moravy a Slezska 1850 – 1914. II. díl. 2. sv. Finance a infrastruktura*. Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, 2009, pp. 18-62.

18 McKAY, J. P. *Tramways and Trolleys...*, p. 92.

19 McKAY, J. P. *Tramways and Trolleys...*, p. 92.

20 The interconnections between the banking sector, power plant companies, and municipal administrations in the Czech Lands is unfortunately under-researched. There are a number of studies on the formation and development of the financial sector and its connections with the industrial sphere, however, these are mostly focused on large companies (e.g. Škoda plants, Vitkovice Mining and Iron Corporation), or on personnel and financial interconnections with individual banks. Summary manuals on the formation of the banking sector either omit the Habsburg Monarchy or remain on a general level. Cf. EIGNER, Peter. *Die Konzentration der Entscheidungsmacht: die personellen Verflechtungen zwischen der Wiener Grossbanken und Industriegesellschaften, 1895 – 1940*. [Ph.D. Thesis]. Manuscript. Wien: Universität Wien, 1997. EIGNER, Peter. *Personal Networks in the Austrian Corporate Economy: Function, Structure and Development, 1900 – 1938* [online]. [cit. 05.06.2018]. Available on the Internet: <<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/559921a3e4b02c1d7480f8f4/t/5862f72c579fb33a8cef9366/1482880812576/EIGNER.pdf>>. HAUSMAN, William J. – HERTNER, Peter – WILKINS, Mira. *Global Electrification: Multinational Enterprise and International Finance in the History of Light and Power, 1878 – 2007*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 487 p. CAMERON, Rondo – BOVYKIN, V. I. (Eds.). *International Banking 1870 – 1914*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, 672 p. TEICHOVA, Alice. *Mezinárodní kapitál a Československu v letech 1918 – 1938*. Praha: Karolinum, 1994, 279 p. *Siemens-Schuckert Werke*, for example, cooperated with *Deutsche Bank*, *Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft* (AEG) with *Dresdner Bank* and *Bank für Handel und Industrie*. We can therefore only get an idea of investment into urban rail transport and mechanisms and its functioning from the example of *Niederösterreichische Escompte Gesellschaft* and *Vereinigte Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft* in connection with the operation of *Brünner Lokaleisenbahn Gesellschaft*. ZÁVODNÁ, M. *Koleje a město...*, pp. 188-195.

21 LOSOS, L. *Městská hromadná doprava...*, pp. 324-334. For the ways in which power plant companies were getting established in the Czech Lands, see: HORSKÁ VRBOVÁ, Pavla. *Počátky elektrisace v českých zemích*. Praha: SPN, 1961, p. 18 and following. BAUER, G. – FOJTÍK, P. – LOSOS, L. – MAHEL, I. *Tramvaje...*, 300 p.

Tab. 1: Street rail in the Czech Lands until 1914²²

Number of inhabitant in 1910 (Commencement of electric operation)						
< 10 000	< 20 000	< 30 000	< 40 000	< 50 000	< 100 000	> 100 000
Mariánské Lázně (1902)	Bohumín (1916)	Jablonec nad Nisou (1900)	Liberec (1897)	České Budějovice (1909)	Plzeň (1899)	Brno (1900)
		Jihlava (1909)	Opava (1905)			Praha (1891/1905)
		Most (1901)	Moravská Ostrava (1901/1909)			
		Olomouc (1899)	Ústí nad Labem (1899)			
		Teplice (1985)				
		Těšín (1911)				

But local administrations also participated in the development and operation of street rail and played the role of an equal partner, as it was mostly these administrations that applied to the government for licenses to develop and operate rail lines, provided public land to the rail companies and, often, invested money loaned from municipal financial institutions. The development of the modern style of community infrastructure took place in the form of a tender process that often chose a developer who would also be the operator.²³ Municipalities could then also offer the particular type of infrastructure for rent and stipulate its subsequent municipalization. The municipality could also enter into joint-stock companies that were established to operate this type of infrastructure. Analysis of the relevant information reveals that in the Czech Lands, the municipalization of urban rail transport, along with that of power plants, happened relatively quickly after the commencement of operations (about five years). Temporal leases allowed municipalities to overcome the increased requirements for technological know-how, including expert operation.²⁴ Municipalization, or the establishment of enterprises that included both private and municipal participation, thus proceeded very quickly: even prior to the WWI, all urban rail operations in the Czech Lands were under some degree of municipal control.²⁵

22 *Historický lexikon obcí České republiky 1869 – 2005*. I. díl. Praha: Český statistický úřad, 2006, 760 p. BAUER, G. – FOJTÍK, P. – LOSOS, L. – MAHEL, I. *Tramvaje...*, front cover.

23 For details on selected Moravian and Silesian towns, see: ZÁVODNÁ, M. *Koleje a město...*, passim.

24 BAUER, G. – FOJTÍK, P. – LOSOS, L. – MAHEL, I. *Tramvaje...*, 300 p.

25 BAUER, G. – FOJTÍK, P. – LOSOS, L. – MAHEL, I. *Tramvaje...*, 300 p.

Tab. 2: Operators of street rail transport (by 1914)²⁶

Municipal companies operated by municipality	Municipal companies operated by different operator	Joint- stock company with municipal participation
Bohumín	České Budějovice	Brno
Jihlava	Mariánské Lázně	Jablonec nad Nisou
Moravská Ostrava - Karviná	Most	Liberec
Olomouc	Těšín	Moravská Ostrava
Opava		Teplice
Plzeň		
Praha		
Ústí nad Labem		

The process was mainly motivated by economics: to balance a negative municipal account through a working company and so contribute to the development of an additional type of infrastructure. In contrast to Great Britain, Germany, Italy or Sweden, municipalization in the Czech Lands and Cisleithania was not overtly theorized.²⁷ That said, other factors, including nationalistic ones, i.e. those relating to the growth of nationalism in the Habsburg Monarchy toward the end of the nineteenth century, played a role in the decisions to municipalize companies.²⁸

The Post-WWI Situation

The dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy substantially transformed development in the Central European space. The ruins of the heterogeneous state formation, which had also suffered from growing nationalism in the final pre-war years, gave birth to successor states, including Czechoslovakia. This was, however, a heterogeneous

26 BAUER, G. – FOJTÍK, P. – LOSOS, L. – MAHEL, I. *Tramvaje...*, 300 p.

27 An interesting overview of a different approach to municipalization in Germany and Great Britain on the theoretical level is offered by HIETALA, M. *Services...*, pp. 155-178. Piero Bini and Daniela Parisi have focused on the theoretical aspects of municipalization in Italy. Cf. BINI, Piero – PARISI, Daniela. Common welfare versus the spirit of private enterprise: The experience of Italian municipalization from 1880 – 1930. In: *Euro. Journal History of Economic Thought*, 2010, vol. 17, no. 4 (October), pp. 933-956. HALLENBERG, Mats – LINNARSSON, Magnus. The quest for publicness: Political conflict about the organisation of tramways and telecommunication in Sweden, c. 1900 – 1920. In: *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 2017, vol. 65, no. 1, pp. 70-87, esp. pp. 74-79. Based on studied materials from selected Moravian and Silesian towns it seems that the major motivations for municipalization were indeed economic, and the municipalities did not overtly push for the lowering of electricity tariffs or fares. However, such a hypothesis, supporting Krabbe's statement on municipalization, requires further research. Cf. KLADIWA, P. – POKLUDOVÁ, A. – KAFKOVÁ, R. *Lesk a bída...*, p. 21. Furthermore, the preserved archival documents do not provide any information regarding the working conditions of transport companies' employees or their relationship to municipalization. Cf. BIANCO, Martha J. The Decline of Transit: Corporate Conspiracy or Failure of Public Policy? The Case of Portland, Oregon. In: *Journal of Policy History*, 1994, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 450-474. EICHHORN, Rudolf. *Die weißen Sklaven der Wiener Tramway-Gesellschaft*. Wien: [n. p.], 1885, 63 p.

28 This very specific occurrence, which is predominantly symptomatic to heterogeneous national states, is under-researched. There is only one study on the Czech context: POPELKA, Petr – ZÁVODNÁ, Michaela. Nacionální, politické a integrační aspekty městské dopravy v moravských městech do roku 1914. In: *Časopis Matice moravské*, 2012, vol. 131, no. 2, pp. 341-366. Cf. HALLENBERG, M. – LINNARSSON, M. *The quest...* The study by Swedish colleagues deals with the same issue, but, quite understandably, without any nationalist connotations.

complex of three differently developed areas: the Czech Lands (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia), Slovakia (former Upper Hungary), and Carpathian Ruthenia.

In Czechoslovakia, the new political situation initiated wide-ranging transformations in the urban environment related to the process of making so-called 'greater cities'. As in other countries, in the newly formed republic, the establishment of a unified administrative unit completed the process of agglomeration that had started in the nineteenth century. A specific feature of the Czechoslovak case, however, was the distinct nationalist direction of the process, since the merging of certain historically German town centres with their Czech suburban municipalities was designed to strengthen the Czech element in the resulting municipality's administration. For this reason, Greater Olomouc was established under Act No. 213/1919 coll. and Greater Brno as per Act No. 214/1919 coll. The reasons in the case of Greater Prague also included the fact that Prague became the capital city.²⁹

In the Ostrava area, the situation was complicated by both the strategic significance of the metallurgical and mining area and the proximity of the Polish border. The establishment of Greater Ostrava was made difficult by a dispute over the Těšín area and the disunited attitude of individual municipalities to this issue.

Until 1924, when Greater Ostrava was established, the municipality was not supervised by a local administration but by an administrative board dominated by socially-oriented Czech members led by Jan Prokeš.³⁰

It was this administrative board that negotiated with *Brünner Lokaleisenbahn Gesellschaft* as the company contemplated the next direction in its post-war existence. The greatest issue for the company, which operated urban rail transport in the Ostrava area, was that its major shareholder was the Vienna-based company *Vereinigte Elektrizitäts-Aktien Gesellschaft* (hereinafter VEAG), which was closely capitally tied to *Niederösterreichische Escompte Gesellschaft* (hereinafter NÖEG). For this reason *Brünner Lokaleisenbahn Gesellschaft* was registered at the company register in Vienna.

As late as the 32nd Special General Assembly held on June 27, 1918, the company mainly dealt with the capital assets of the company and related changes of statutes.

Even during the war, the company was preparing materials for extensive investment operations intended to be launched after the end of the war.³¹ The formation of the Czechoslovak Republic, however, brought on other pressing issues the transport company needed to address. One of the major items discussed by the members of the board of directors (in a meeting held on January 24, 1919 in the *Niederösterreichische Escompte Gesellschaft* building in Am Hof 2 Street, Vienna) was the company's further business activities in what had now become a foreign territory. As evidenced by the minutes of the meeting, which note that the change in political conditions required company's headquarters to be relocated from Vienna to Czechoslovakia, most likely to Moravská Ostrava, the members of the Board of Directors were aware of the situation.³²

29 PRZYBYLOVÁ, Blažena a kol. *Ostrava: Historie / Kultura / Lidé*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2013, pp. 336-339.

30 PRZYBYLOVÁ, B. a kol. *Ostrava...*, p. 341.

31 ZÁVODNÁ, M. *Koleje a město...*, pp. 240-250.

32 Archiv města Ostravy [Ostrava City Archives] (hereinafter AMO), fund (hereinafter f.) Společnost moravských místních drah 1886 – 1949 (1950) [Moravian local railway company] (hereinafter SMMD), zápisy schůzí správní rady [minutes from meetings of the board of directors, hereinafter minutes] 11. 6. 1917 – 19. 5. 1919, inventory number (hereinafter inv. no.) 21, zápis ze schůze správní rady dne 24. 1. 1919 [Minutes from a meeting of the Board of Directors held on January 24, 1919]. The idea that the company's headquarters would be in Moravská

The actual implementation of the decision, however, was far more complicated. Although the Reception Act (Act No. 11/1918 coll.³³) established the provisional legal continuity of Czechoslovak and Austro-Hungarian legislation, the relevant legislation that would legally support this action was in the initial stages of negotiation. The international political situation, and particularly the tense relations between Czechoslovakia and the area known as German Austria, were also not favourable.

The newly formed Czechoslovak Department of Railways in Prague had by then been operating for three months, and the German-Austrian State Department of Transport (*Deutschösterreich Staatsamt für Verkehrswesen*) also obstructed the relocation of the company's headquarters.

The relocation could also be implemented only with the consent of the company's General Assembly, followed by subsequent changes to its statutes; the statutes wording, however, was also subject to approval by the state authorities.

For the company, the resolution of this matter was key. Until the headquarters of the company were decided upon, the company could not carry out other planned amendments to the articles of the statutes, for example, to increase the capital stock of the company, as agreed in 1918. The company could also accept only provisional and temporary arrangements. These included, for example, the co-optation of the Secretary of the Administrative Board of Moravská Ostrava, Josef Koukal, into the Board of Directors, replacing the current representative of the municipality, Gustav Fiedler.³⁴

The Board of Directors continued to prepare for the above-mentioned steps at its meeting on April 11, 1919, at which interim legal representation of the company by Prague lawyer Dr Ernst Arnošt was also decided upon.³⁵

It was the 33rd Extraordinary General Assembly of Shareholders held on May 19, 1919 that was decisive. The body approved changes to the statutes' articles to reflect the current situation. The company's headquarters were to be moved to Moravská Ostrava, the company was to adopt the bilingual name of *Společnost moravských místních drah / Mährische Lokaleisenbahn Gesellschaft*, and the changes were to be applied to the company register at the County Court in Nový Jičín.³⁶ With the introduction of the Czechoslovak koruna, the share capital was to change from 2,900,000 K to 2,900,000 CZK and could be increased, pending approval of relevant authorities. Following the changes, the board of directors could have twelve members, the majority of whom

Ostrava probably originated in this meeting. The *Aktennotiz*, dated January 8, 1919, only mentions Prague and Brno.

33 HAVELKA, Jiří. *Československé železniční právo: Přednášky pro železniční odborné školy*. Praha: Ministerstvo železnic, 1922, p. 5.

34 The replacement of Josef Koukal and Gustav Fiedler on the company's Board of Directors was related to changes in the municipality's administration. As per an agreement from the 1890s, Moravská Ostrava made available two positions for representatives of the local administration. The positions were not tied to a name but only the position of the Mayor of Moravská Ostrava and a member of the local authority. The events of 1918 led to the dissolution of the existing local authorities and their replacement with 'administrative commissions'. Gustav Fiedler no longer served in the commission but Josef Koukal continued to do so. AMO, f. SMMD, minutes, inv. no. 21, zápis ze schůze správní rady dne 24. 1. 1919 [Minutes from a meeting of the Board of Directors held on January 24, 1919].

35 AMO, f. SMMD, minutes, inv. no. 21, zápis ze schůze správní rady dne 11. 4. 1919 [Minutes from a meeting of the Board of Directors held on April 11, 1919]. The representation was to cease with the relocation of the company to Moravská Ostrava. The archival documents mention the attorney alternately as Ernst Arnošt and Arnošt Arnošt.

36 Held at the County Court in Moravská Ostrava since 1922. PRZYBYLOVÁ, B. a kol. *Ostrava...*, p. 173.

were to be Czechoslovak citizens and reside in the territory of the country.³⁷ The official language of the company was to be Czech, even though a number of documents and shares were printed bilingually. Internal communications, correspondence, and minutes from discussions of the Board of Directors utilized the German language as well until the 1930s.³⁸

But the road to the implementation of the above decisions was still very long, since the amended version of the statutes needed to be approved by the relevant state ministries. Based on the minutes from discussions at this General Assembly, the Board of Directors, in cooperation with Dr Altbach and Dr Arnošt, prepared a new version of the statutes and forwarded the document to the Department of Railways in Prague for approval. But this step, which was required and necessary with respect to the state of the transport company, took place at a time when the so-called Nostrification Act, which would deal with the relevant agenda in a complex way, was only taking form.³⁹ The company was asked to relocate its seat to Czechoslovakia in a decree from the Czechoslovak Department of Railways dated July 1, 1920. Until then, the company needed to withstand the pressure of the German-Austrian/Austrian state authorities, which were attempting to intervene in the company's operation and complicating the entire situation. The situation was only legally resolved on June 26, 1920 when the company was recorded in the company register at the County Court in Nový Jičín.⁴⁰

The relocation of the headquarters to Czechoslovakia, along with the nostrification of the original *Brünner Lokaleisenbahn Gesellschaft* and its transformation into *Společnost moravských místních drah*, represented a legislative turning point in the existence of the company. But it is important to state that companies that were to be subjected to nostrification themselves urged for the law on nostrification, for the reason is that its implementation would bring much-needed stability in the uneasy post-war period. Nostrification did not mean a blanket regulation; it only concerned industrial and transport companies that operated in Czechoslovakia but whose headquarters were based abroad. Nostrification applied the rule that the company's headquarters must be in the country where the company operated, and only concerned those companies that were invited to do so by a relevant department.⁴¹

This legal measure meant that the Czech government assumed control of important strategic companies not only with regards to the personnel but also, and mainly, in economic matters. The measure was closely tied to capital repatriation and capital transfers where existing share issues were bought from their original German, Austrian

37 The company was registered at the County Court in Nový Jičín on June 26, 1920. AMO, f. SMMD, inv. no. 22, zápisy ze schůzí správní rady 27. 6. 1919 – 20. 1. 1921 [Minutes from meetings of the Board of Directors held on June 27, 1919 – January 20, 1921].

38 Cf. So-called *Aktennotiz* from the 1930s. AMO, f. SMMD, inv. no. 181, cart. no. 5.

39 For a more in-depth discussion of process of nostrification, see: ČIŽINSKÝ, Jan. *Nostrifikace průmyslových podniků v českých zemích 1918 – 1929*. [Master Thesis]. Manuscript. Praha: Univerzita Karlova, 2006, passim. AMO, f. SMMD, inv. no. 170, cart. no. 1.

40 AMO, f. SMMD, Minutes, inv. no. 21; Minutes from a meeting of the Board of Directors held on January 24, 1919. AMO, f. SMMD; Minutes, inv. no. 22, Minutes from a meeting of the Board of Directors held on January 20, 1921. AMO, f. SMMD, inv. no. 2, *Bericht des Verwaltungsrates der Brünner Lokal-Eisenbahn-Gesellschaft über das Jahr 1919: Erstattet in der XXXV. Ordentlichen General-Versammlung der Aktionäre am 21. Jänner 1921*. Mährisch Ostrau: Julius Kittl Verlag, 1921.

41 LACINA, Vlastislav. Nostrifikace podniků a bank v prvním desetiletí Československé republiky. In: *Český časopis historický*, 1994, vol. 92, pp. 77-93.

and Hungarian owners at advantageous rates and new shares were subsequently issued.⁴²

The consequence of nostrification and related capital transfers was the weakening or forcing out of original Austrian, German, and Hungarian capital and its replacement with Czechoslovak capital and the capital of other winning powers. It is nonetheless important to stress that nostrification cannot be equated with nationalization.⁴³

Given the above reasons, nostrification in the case of the street rail in the Czech Lands only concerned *Brünner Lokaleisenbahn Gesellschaft*.

At the same time, nostrification was only the first step in the company's postwar history and only a fragment of its complicated transformation into a Czechoslovak company, since the war also had a major impact on economic, operational, and investment activity.

"Municipalization"

The formation of the Czechoslovak Republic placed *Brünner Lokaleisenbahn Gesellschaft* in a difficult situation. The need to transfer the company's headquarters to the territory of the new country has already been discussed. But the company itself needed to deal with a number of other issues brought about by the war. It was forced to delay planned investment operations connected to the expansion of the railways. At the same time, it was not able to implement its planned modernization of the existing railway. The inhibition of investment operations had a major impact on the railway superstructure and the fleet. The increasing load-carrying capabilities also had negative consequences resulting in overcrowding, delays, etc.⁴⁴ These issues were augmented by periodical demands for increased wages by employees who were affected by the war, general shortages and, above all, increasing inflation.⁴⁵ The only area the company could have at least partial control over during the wartime was wages.⁴⁶ Adjustments to the amount paid and the granting of various expense subsidies, however, depended on the sole financial source the company could rely on at the time: revenues from passenger and freight transport.

But changes to the tariffs required long-term, multiparty negotiations since the transportation company was not allowed to make such adjustments on its own. To increase tariffs, the company needed approval from both the Department of Railways

42 With the monetary reform, Viennese banks found themselves in a difficult situation, since the money deposited in Viennese central banks was in the Austrian currency and could not be used to open credit for companies in Czechoslovakia. A sharp rise in inflation also quickly devalued the value of the Austrian crown. In this situation, companies that had previously been oriented on Viennese banks needed to apply for loans from Czech banks. The process of nostrification also related to an extensive increase in capital stock that, given the needs of the postwar economics, affected all joint-stock companies between 1919 and 1922. Nostrification, along with the increase of the capital stock, made space for direct capital participation by Czech banks in industrial, commercial and transport companies in Czechoslovakia. VENCOSKÝ, František a kol. *Dějiny bankovníctví v českých zemích*. Praha: Bankovní institut, a. s., 1999, pp. 231-232.

43 LACINA, V. *Nostrifikace...*, pp. 77-93.

44 ZÁVODNÁ, M. *Koleje a město...*, pp. 240-260.

45 Although, like other newly formed countries, Czechoslovakia had to deal with economic problems, it was not suffering from hyperinflation as, for example, were Germany, Austria, Hungary or Poland.

46 The problems inhibiting the modernization of the transport network were not primarily about a lack of financial resources, but rather a lack of materials. The company could, and did, order rails and cars, but the orders were not filled due to a lack of the raw materials needed for manufacturing. This situation is noted in a number of Minutes of Board of Directors' meetings from 1917 to 1920. See: AMO, f. SMMD, inv. no. 20; inv. no. 21.

and the interested municipalities of Moravská Ostrava, Přívoz and Vítkovice with which the company had contractual agreements dating from the 1890s. The key issues in these agreements were the clauses through which the municipalities received shares from the gross profits or company gains, and which simultaneously permitted them to demand lower tariffs if the gross revenue, i.e. profit, exceeded a "reasonable" amount.⁴⁷

The negotiations between the involved parties lasted from 1917 to 1919. The municipalities in question predominantly objected to the 3rd class fare that was often utilized by workers and students of local educational institutions. The municipalities gradually added further demands, making the forfeiting of their right to demand lower tariffs conditional upon further concessions on the part of the transport company. This is what the municipalities' demands looked like in May 1918: representatives of Vítkovice, led by Mayor Ziegler, demanded, among other things, shares in *Brünner Lokaleisenbahn Gesellschaft*, a seat on the Board of Directors, and that the Vítkovice – Přívoz stretch of railway should be upgraded to a double track system.⁴⁸ Representatives from Moravská Ostrava, led by Mayor Ulrich, made the same concession conditional upon increasing to 4.5 % in the gross revenue the municipality would receive,⁴⁹ while Přívoz's Mayor Petzlmann and his colleagues bartered for a 4 % share in gross revenue of the transport company, a covered waiting room shelter in the square, and free fares for local poor pupils and administrators.⁵⁰

Although *Brünner Lokaleisenbahn Gesellschaft's* Board of Directors was free to discuss all of the demands, their approval was pending a vote at the General Assembly

47 In contractual agreements with Moravská Ostrava and Vítkovice, this limit was 8 % in five consequential years of operation. The agreements with Přívoz did not specify this. The municipality of Moravská Ostrava was secured a share of 2.5 % of the company's gross revenue. In 1917, it attempted to raise its share to 6 %. The municipality's share was finalized at 3 % of the gross revenue through an amendment to the agreement from May 21, 1917. The company paid a flat rate of 3,000 CZK to the municipality of Přívoz. According to agreements from the 1890s, there were various reasons municipalities could request the lowering of tariffs. In the case of Moravská Ostrava, this could be done if the company's revenue exceeded 8 % over five consecutive service years. The municipality gave up this regulatory right in 1917 in exchange for an increase in their share of the gross revenue. The municipality of Přívoz could request the lowering of the tariffs only if the interest on registered capital exceeded 6 %, and the municipality did not plan on giving up this right. The municipality of Vítkovice was not free to intervene in the tariffs. During an audit of the agreements in 1917 and 1918, the municipality nevertheless unsuccessfully claimed the right to do so. With regards to the tariff question, municipalities limited themselves to petitions for free fares for office clerks, teachers and poor children. The number of the free passes the company made available to the municipalities did not exceed several per year. AMO, f. Archiv města Přívoz (1833) 1856 – 1923 (1939) [Municipal Archive Přívoz (1833) 1856 – 1923 (1939)] (hereinafter AM Přívoz), inv. no. 425, cart. no. 121. AMO, f. Archiv města Moravská Ostrava [Moravská Ostrava City Archives] (hereinafter AMMO), kniha zápisů ze zasedání městského zastupitelstva January 23 – December 28, 1917, Minutes from April 13, 1917, inv. no. 315.

48 Further to install a double train as theatre train to Vítkovice after 11pm, extend night train to Vítkovice, 15 trains for administrators and 30 for pupils, and offer a car with heating once regular conditions are established. AMO, f. Archiv města Vítkovice (1833) 1950 – 1924 (1938) [Municipal Archive Vítkovice (1833) 1950 – 1924 (1938)] (hereinafter AM Vítkovice), inv. no. 7, report on the municipal council meeting held on November 19, 1918.

49 Specifically, the municipality requested the following: if the transport company's revenue reaches up to 2.5 Mill. K annually, the municipality would receive 4 % from the revenue, if the revenue exceeds 2.5 Mill. K annually, the municipality will have a share of 4.5 % annually from the amount that exceeds this figure. AMO, f. SMMD, inv. no. 21, *Aktennotiz* regarding the visit of Ing. Egger v Moravská Ostrava between May 1 and May 3, 1918.

50 Other requests included: replacing, within two years from the end of the war, grooved rails for vignole rails; place a waiting room in the square, submit a project for railway from the square to the imperial border, railway connection where the municipality participates in the Přívoz – Vítkovice section; AMO, f. SMMD, minutes, inv. no. 21, report from the meeting of the board of directors of BLEG from January 24, 1919.

of Shareholders, and the Department of Railways had the last word in the matter of the tariff increase.⁵¹

The situation was not successfully resolved until October 1918, when the formation of Czechoslovakia returned the negotiations to the beginning. The company now needed to negotiate with the newly established administrative boards of Vítkovice, Přívoz and Moravská Ostrava,⁵² as well as submit its petitions to the Department of Railways in Prague.

The company's critical lack of financial means also resulted in complicated negotiations with employees, who demanded wage increases and appropriate benefits and supplements.

It was only in November 1919 that the passenger tariff could be increased. The abovementioned steps, however, were mere drops in a stormy sea. No tariff increase could cover the planned investments. The total cost was estimated at 11.5 million CZK, of which the cost of the absolutely essential second track for the Vítkovice – Přívoz line was to be 5 million CZK.⁵³

There were two possibilities for dealing with this situation. The first one was, obviously, to take out a loan, but this could not be taken into consideration given the political and economic situation: the company was in the process of moving its headquarters from Vienna to Moravská Ostrava, whereas the majority of shareholders continued to be VEAG, closely linked to NÖEG.⁵⁴ At the same time, nostrification and currency reform connected with repatriation of stock and capital more generally was being prepared in Czechoslovakia, and the banking and credit system was also being transformed.

The abovementioned Extraordinary General Assembly of Shareholders of the transport company thus agreed, on May 11, 1919, to make use of the second possibility at hand, which was increasing the company's capital stock through a new issuance of shares that had been discussed at past general assemblies.

But the new majority shareholder was not supposed to be 'just anyone'; quite the contrary. A decision was agreed on and approved that the city of Moravská Ostrava could join the company as the majority shareholder and assume a decisive influence over its management, including appropriate shares in profits, seats on the Board of Directors, and so on.⁵⁵

51 All railways of this transport company were approved as local railways (*Lokalbahn*), not short-line railways (*Kleinbahn*). As such, they were subject to different provisions that also included increased supervision by the Department of railways. ZÁVODNÁ, M. *Městská kolejová doprava...*, pp. 153-172.

52 Administrative boards replaced municipal governments and councils. These served until the formation of so-called Greater Ostrava in 1924. These administrative boards were established in December of 1918 and were dominated by representatives of Czech parties, mainly the social democratic party. After the establishment of the Czechoslovak Communist party, the party was offered to be part of the commission, but refused. The positions were filled by representatives of the social democratic party. The Communist party of Czechoslovakia thus only had representatives in the regularly appointed local board in 1925. PRZYBYLOVÁ, B. a kol. *Ostrava...*, p. 336.

53 AMO, f. SMMD, minutes, inv. no. 21, Minutes from a meeting of the Board of Directors April 11, 1919.

54 Maxime Krassny von Krassien was president of the NÖEG; the Executive and Managing Director positions, however, were filled by representatives of VEAG, Ing. Ernst and Ing. Egger. On the subject of the capital ties of banking and joint-stock companies before 1918, see, mainly: EIGNER, Peter. *Die Konzentration...*, pp. 81-82, 94.

55 The reasons for this can be seen both in the preparation of the transfer of the headquarters to Czechoslovakia and the fact that the implemented currency reform and newly issued Czechoslovak koruna were advantageous for the Austrian side. Before undertaking this, however, the articles that guaranteed current shareholders preemption for a new issuance of shares needed to be struck from the statutes. See note 42 and AMO, f. AMMO, Listiny, listy, knihy 1362 – 1941 (1957), nová registratura [documents, sheets, books 1362 – 1941 (1957), New

On November 16, 1919, the Administrative Board received a binding offer to auction shares of two companies in which VEAG was the majority shareholder: *Brünner Lokaleisenbahn Gesellschaft* and *Mährisch Ostrauer Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft*.⁵⁶ VEAG offered the municipality the option to auction a proportion of the shares that had already been issued and the option to own a proportion of the shares from the new issuance. In the case of the urban rail transport, the deal was supposed to happen as follows: VEAG would sell 2,800 shares of the transport company at the nominal price of 200 CZK/share for the price of 370 CZK/share. The municipality would also yield counterfoils and vouchers entitling the payment of dividends on these shares (up until 1920). In this case, the calculation of the sales price was 925,000 CZK.

At the same time, the company would issue new shares, since it needed to increase its capital from 2.9 million CZK to the final figure of 5.5 million CZK.⁵⁷ The difference was 2.6 million CZK, that is, a total of 13,000 shares at the nominal value of 200 CZK/share. The municipality would be issued option rights to 11,800 of the new shares, and the remainder (2,400 new shares) would be purchased by VEAG.

That said, the costs of this transaction connected with a new issuance for the municipality were calculated at 2,554,700 CZK not 2,260,000 CZK. The difference in price was due to the fact that VEAG required compensation of 5 % interest from a share (starting January 1, 1920). The remainder, 330,400 CZK, was the fee for ceding option rights (i.e. approximately 28 CZK/share).

The offer also included eight out of eleven positions⁵⁸ on the Board of Directors, with one of the eight seats reserved for the representative of the administrative board of Vítkovice, Dr Zlámal.⁵⁹ The company's president was supposed to be the representative of the Administrative Board of Moravská Ostrava, and a representative of VEAG was to be the Vice-President.⁶⁰

The financial, legal and transport division of the administrative board of the city of Moravská Ostrava examined the offer, and the expert reports were positive. The purchase of the shares was unanimously approved at the meeting of the Administrative Board on December 20, 1919. In addition to the *Mährisch Ostrauer Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft* shares, 2,500 shares from the old emission (i.e. not 2,800) and further 11,800 shares from the new emissions were to be purchased. The city intended to secure the financial

Registry] (hereinafter NR), inv. no. 269, cart. no. 33, Letter from January 19, 1920, addressed to the members of the Board of Directors.

56 AMO, f. AMMO, book of Minutes from the Board of Directors' meetings 1919, inv. no. 317, Minutes from December 20, 1919.

57 It is interesting that general assemblies in 1918 and 1919 note the increase of the capital to 5 million CZK. The figure in the offer, i.e. an increase to 5.5 million CZK was in fact approved only at the regular General Assembly on January 21, 1921. *Stanovy společnosti moravských místních drah*. Moravská Ostrava: nákladem společnosti 1921, p. 7.

58 The spot of the twelfth member of the board of directors was to be left unfilled for the time being, but if it was filled, then it should be by a representative of VEAG.

59 The Administrative Board of Vítkovice requested a greater level of participation in the operation of the transportation company, along with passing 50 shares as early as 1918 in connection with negotiations over tariff changes. The management of the company assured this, but did not keep its promise. The Administrative Board pressed the matter in 1919. The violation of the terms of the agreement on the part of *Brünner Lokaleisenbahn Gesellschaft* had to do both with internal transformations in the company's operation and issues with repatriating shares. The situation changed only when the city of Moravská Ostrava became the majority owner. Although Vítkovice did not receive its requested shares, the Administrative Commissioner, Josef Chalupník, was given a position on the Board of Directors. AMO, f. AM Vítkovice, inv. no. 7.

60 AMO, f. AMMO, inv. no. 317, minutes from May 26, 1919.

means necessary for the transaction in the same way it had in previous years: through a loan from *Moravská zemědělská banka* in bonds with a 4.5 % annuity.⁶¹

Although the transport company pledged in the offer to call the company's general assembly no later than four weeks after accepting the offer, negotiations over the sale actually took place one year later, in 1921.⁶²

On January 20, 1921 a meeting of the Board of Directors took place in Moravská Ostrava. The meeting summarized the steps the company undertook in previous years regarding the process of nostrification, the change in the majority shareholder, the increase in the company's capital stock, and proposals for amendments of the company statutes related to these changes. The following day, a regular meeting of the General Assembly of the company's shareholders took place. The meeting approved the changes proposed by the Board of Directors. The process was completed by decrees issued by the Czechoslovak Department of the Interior which, on September 24, 1921, authorized the issuance of new shares and, on February 1, 1922, validated the changes to the company's statutes.⁶³

Until the changes were approved, the number of members of the Board of Directors was limited to nine. In spite of this, the General Assembly of Shareholders passed a resolution regarding the new composition of the Board of Directors, which was recorded in the company file at the County Court in Nový Jičín on March 16, 1921. The new members were Dr Robert Altbach, an attorney from Moravská Ostrava; Jan Geisler, an industrialist from Moravská Ostrava who was also Vice-Chair of the Administrative Board of Moravská Ostrava; Jan Prokeš, a Member of Parliament and Chairman of the Administrative Board of Moravská Ostrava; František Rolla, a health insurance company administrator in Slezská Ostrava; and Václav Šílený, Head of Gymnasium in Moravská Ostrava. The following persons resigned from the Board of Directors: Dr Gothold Stern, Director of the Electrotechnic Department of Unionbank in Vienna; Dr Josef Patzau, Director General of the North Railways of Emperor Ferdinand in Vienna; Maxime Krassny von Krassien, Director of NÖEG; and Jindřich Baron Gablenz. Only the following members remained from the original members of the Board of Directors: Nathan Lichtenstern from Moravská Ostrava; Ing. Rudolf Ernst, Director of VEAG; Ing. Ernst Egger, Director General of VEAG; and Josef Koukal.

As the meeting's minutes make clear, there was no room for the representative of the Administrative Board of Vítkovice, Dr Josef Zlámal, who was supposed to be

61 The municipality had already obtained a loan from this bank in previous years, and was repaying a 4.2 million CZK loan for building a communal local railway company for the Moravská Ostrava to Karviná line. AMO, f. AMMO, stará registratura [Old Registry], inv. no. 152 C/oc., cart. no. 195.

62 The reasons for this nearly year-long break remain yet unclear. The available materials show that the board of directors probably did not even meet in 1920. The minutes from the meetings of the board of directors from June 27, 1919 until January 1, 1921 located in AMO in the SMMD fund, inv. no. 22, specifically the minutes from January 20, 1921 state that the members of the board of directors approved the minutes from November 14, 1919 and December 31, 1919. This is also evidenced by the company's annual report for 1919 that was not submitted to the General Assembly of Shareholders until 1921, not in 1920. It seems that in 1920 the agenda mainly focused on the composition of the board of directors of the company and the polishing of the proposals for the changes of the statutes that were submitted to the general assembly on January 21, 1921. Cf. correspondence between managing director of the company Otto Jaeschke and the management of VEAG for 1920. See: AMO, f. AMMO, NR, inv. no. 269, cart. no. 33.

63 AMO, f. SMMD, inv. no. 170, cart. no. 1; Výroční zpráva... za rok 1921, inv. no. 3; AMO, f. SMMD, Minutes, inv. no. 22.

included, and this probably caused a great deal of resentment.⁶⁴ The situation only calmed down in 1922 when, based on the approved statutes from September 1921, the 36th Regular General Assembly of Shareholders elected, the Managing Superintendent of Vítkovice, Josef Chalupník, to the extended Board of Directors.⁶⁵ The experienced Ing. Otto Jaeschke continued to serve as Managing Director of the company.⁶⁶

The process of nostrification and subsequent joining of the company by local municipalities was not an impulsive move but one that had larger context. In the case of Moravská Ostrava, it was part of more general ideas about the future development of the Ostrava agglomeration that culminated in the idea of creating a Greater Ostrava municipality, following the example of other Moravian and Czech metropolises (Greater Brno, Greater Prague and Greater Olomouc). But where the formation of the 'heart of steel' was concerned, the process of administrative unification between 1919 and 1924 took place with great difficulty and hit many insurmountable obstacles. The planned great Moravian-Silesian metropolis thus gave a way to an austere version of the city of Moravská Ostrava, which unified the largest municipalities of the Moravian part of the agglomeration between the Rivers Odra and Ostravice.⁶⁷

An important item of the negotiations was also the coordination of transport activities within the territory of the emerging city, which needed to deal quickly with the adverse consequences of the previous years. For a functional metropolis to emerge, it was necessary to manage the following spatial, administrative, economic, infrastructural and transport activities both practically and rationally. For this reason the attention of the Administrative Boards –predominantly that of the Moravská Ostrava Board – turned to the companies that played a strategic role in the site's infrastructure, even though the local municipality had minimal role in their operation. This is why the municipality invested a great amount of money in purchasing shares of the electric company *Mährisch Ostrauer Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft*. The case of VEAG was also pure pragmatism, brought about by post-war events.

The oppressive financial situation facing the company, increasing pressure from employees in the realm of financial politics, complicated negotiations over tariffs, the demands of the Nostrification Act and so on arguably weakened the company. The offer of a majority share in the transport company to the municipality was thus at that point logical.

VEAG remained as only a minority shareholder of the company. As the agreement makes clear, however, its position was better than that of a standard minority shareholder. In addition to dividend payments, VEAG also secured up to four spots in the 12-member Board of Directors, along with a veto right; it managed to preserve the position of the expert body, for whose counsel the municipality contractually agreed to the annual payment of 58,000 CZK; and it also gained a privileged position among the contractual suppliers of the transport company.⁶⁸ At the same time, it managed to transfer a substantial part of the responsibility for above mentioned issues, the burden of further development of the transport company, and connected municipal loan amortization to the city of Moravská Ostrava. This raises questions regarding the

64 AMO, f. AM Vítkovice, inv. no. 7, inv. no. 8.

65 AMO, f. AM Vítkovice, inv. no. 8.

66 See annual reports of the Board of Directors for 1918 – 1920 in AMO, f. SMMD, inv. no. 3 – 5.

67 PRZYBYLOVÁ, B. a kol. *Ostrava...*, pp. 336-341.

68 AMO, f. AMMO, NR, inv. no. 269, cart. no. 33.

state of the company at the time of the sale, including whether it was, in fact, something of a 'white elephant'.

The Administrative Board of Moravská Ostrava asked Ing. Hans Sonnegger, the Managing Director of the Moravská Ostrava communal local railway company which ran the line from Moravská Ostrava to Karviná, to evaluate the content of the individual articles of the prepared agreement.

He regarded the purchase of shares positively and when, analyzing the company's economic performance, concluded that the company could, under favourable circumstances, pay up to a 20 % dividend. Based on his position, however, Sonnegger was aware that this amount was completely unrealistic. His opinion thus stated that the amortization of the capital the municipality invested in the company would optimally require at least a 6 % dividend. Even this figure was somewhat exaggerated, given that until then the company had paid dividends of 4 – 5 %, possibly 5.5 %, if adding a so-called super-dividend.⁶⁹

But after 1918, the company's economic performance was negatively affected by the consequences of the war – the overall increase in prices, employee's demands for greater wages, shortages of materials and increasing inflation.⁷⁰ As noted earlier, the funds the company obtained through tariff increases were at best driving a wedge between wedges.

Investment operations were also implemented on a limited scale – the building of a new freight train station, the installation of the second track along only a limited section of the railway between Přívoz and Vítkovice, the acquisition of the railway from Svinov to Klimkovice, and the electrification of freight transport were being negotiated.

In spite of these adverse effects, the company paid its shareholders a 4 % dividend in both 1918 and 1919, and in 1919 the dividend was already paid in Czechoslovak currency.⁷¹

The years between 1919 and 1923, however, were negatively affected by the general economic crisis that also hit the Ostrava – Karviná coal district and was evident in the economic situation of the company. Despite the stagnation of passenger transport and increases in freight transport, the company managed to keep its accounting in the black, albeit at the cost of continuous increases in transport tariffs. Although the operational coefficient (the comparison between all operational revenues and all operational expenses) reached 101.14 % in 1919, the company was still able to pay

69 In case of high dividends, the Department of Railways could intervene and lower the fare. AMO, f. AMMO, NR, cart. no. 376.

70 ZÁVODNÁ, Michaela. Velká válka a městská kolejová doprava na Ostravsku (1914 – 1918). In: TETERYZ-PUZIO, Agnieszka – KOŚCIELAK, Lech – ŁĄCZYŃSKA, Ewa (Eds.). *Via viatores quaerit. Mobilność społeczna w dziejach krajów Grupy Wyszehradzkiej*. Słupsk: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pomorskiej w Słupsku, 2016, pp. 517-539. ZÁVODNÁ, Michaela. Ekonomická situace Společnosti moravských místních drah v době první Československé republiky. In: KUBŮ, Eduard – SOUKUP, Jindřich – ŠOUŠA, Jiří (Eds.). *Fenomén hospodářské krize v českých zemích 19. až počátku 21. Století: Cyklický vývoj ekonomiky v procesu gradující globalizace*. Praha: Ostrava: Nová tiskárna Pelhřimov, 2015, pp. 317-334.

71 Annual reports of the company were always presented a year later. The 1918 Annual Report was presented at the 34th Regular General Assembly of Shareholders on June 27, 1919; the 1919 Annual Report was only presented at the 35th Regular General Assembly of Shareholders on January 21, 1921. The payment of the dividend was always in two terms: part in January and part in July, in exchange for a voucher of qualification for the payment of shares. For more on the mechanism, see: ZÁVODNÁ, M. *Město a koleje...*, pp. 129, 153.

4 % dividends by using financial reserves from the previous year and various other non-operational revenues.⁷²

Only in 1920 was there a double increase: 100 % in passenger transport and 200 % in freight transport. In spite of a nearly 5 million CZK increase in revenues, the operational coefficient reached a horrifying amount of 98.26 %.

Thanks in part to increasing the tariffs, the shareholders were secured a 5 % dividend and a 2 % superdividend in 1921; that is, 14 CZK per share. In this case, however, the increased revenue was secured solely through increases to tariffs. It was only one year later that it became clear how non-conceptual this was. As a result of enduring economic crises and related unemployment, passenger and freight transport demand was down, and the company was forced to respond to the stagnation in a different manner. Starting on November 16, 1922, the company had no other option than to lower fares to avoid losing passengers altogether. This move, however, had an effect on the company's revenue, and the operational coefficient in the current and following year (1923) exceeded 90 %. In contrast to 1922, however, the industrial exhibition in Moravská Ostrava, held from June through August 1923, drew large crowds, which, along with a gradual economic revival, played a positive role in the company's accounting. The results were predominantly reflected in the finances of the company in 1924, when, in contrast to the previous two loss-making years, the accounts showed revenues had increased by nearly 460,000 CZK and the operational coefficient decreased to just under 82 %.

It can be said that in the course of the examined period, the company was not in deficit despite all of the above difficulties; that is, its operations did not need to be subsidized by the municipality. Although between 1919 and 1923 the operational revenue was practically equal to the operational expenses, the company was able to pay a minimum 4 % dividend (that is, 8 CZK per share) and also invest, to a limited degree, in the further development of the company (for example, the building of railroad switches, trailers for industrial companies). This was made possible by using financial reserves and other diverse sources of revenue. But for the time being, the company needed to abandon large investments, such as building new tracks from Vítkovice to Hrabová or acquiring the line from Svinov to Klimkovice. Although the company proved not to be a white elephant, the first years of operating under the curatorship of the local authority was no walk through a rose garden.

72 AMO, f. SMMD, inv. no. 2, Bericht, p. 7.

Tab. 3: Dividend and invested capital (1918 – 1924)⁷³

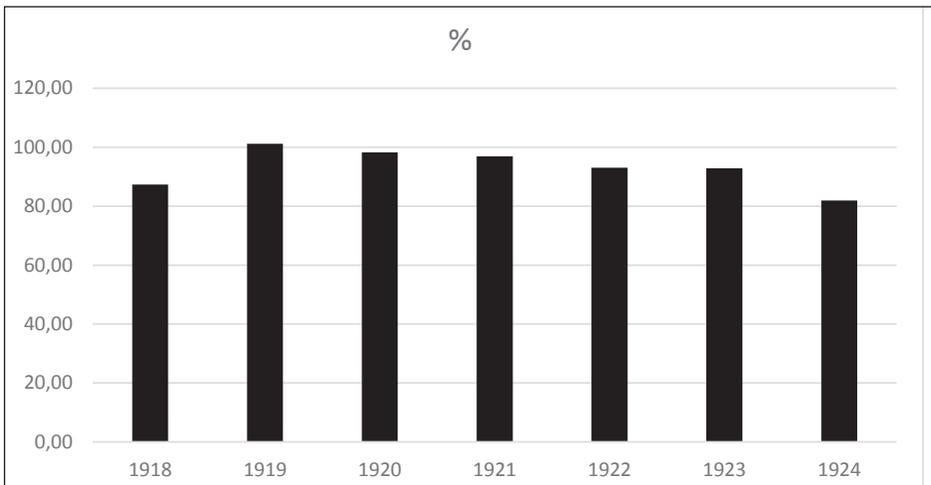
Year	dividend (%)	Currency (CZK)	Invested capital in. Mill CZK	number of stocks
1918	4	8**	2,9**	14 500
1919	4	8	2,9	
1920	5	8***	2,9	
1921	5+2*	14	5,5	27 500
1922	5	10	5,5	
1923	5	10	5,5	
1924	5	10	5,5	

* 5% dividend, 2% superdividend

** austrian-hungarian krone

*** from archival source

Sources: Bericht, Výroční zpráva společnosti za rok 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924.

Graph 1: The operational coefficient (in %)⁷⁴


Sources: Bericht, Výroční zpráva společnosti za rok 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924.

Conclusion

This study has described the interesting developments urban rail transport in the Czech Lands underwent. The first part offered a discussion of the specific situation in the Czech Lands from a broader perspective, showing that the development and operation of the street rail went hand-in-hand with the development of modern

⁷³ AMO, f. SMMD, inv. no. 2 – 6.

⁷⁴ AMO, f. SMMD, inv. no. 2 – 6.

infrastructure. It also highlighted the important role of local administrations in this process, which culminated in the municipalization of a number of companies even prior to WWI. The nostrification process, which was a key process in the formation of post-war Czechoslovakia, concerned only one transportation company: *Brünner Lokaleisenbahn Gesellschaft*. The second part of this study explored the issues and obstacles connected with this process, showing that the company was considering relocating its headquarters to Czechoslovakia as early as late 1918, even before the passage of the Nostrification Act, and that it had managed to prepare all the necessary steps by the time it was prompted to do so by the relevant Czechoslovakian department. The company then focused its attention on amending its statutes and increasing its revenues, as these were more greatly affected by the post-war organization.

Given its shaky finances at this juncture, the company sought a solvent strategic partner. The municipality became this strategic partner and the majority shareholder. This transition had consequences, for example, in terms of the makeup of the Board of Directors, which was no longer occupied by members of the banking sector but by representatives of the Moravská Ostrava Administration. It can also be stated that the purchase of shares was not arbitrary but the result of a pragmatic move by both interested parties.

The city took over this strategic company as part of its greater investment operations and with negotiations about the establishment of Greater Ostrava in mind. It is a bit of an overstatement to talk about delayed "municipalization" where the municipality gets to control part of the *Leistungsverwaltung* (service administration). The buying of shares and strengthening of the city's influence in strategic companies at the cost of running up the city's debt gradually became irreplaceable part of pre-election campaigns and a powerful weapon in the hands of socialist and leftist parties. The above standard agreements with *Vereinigte Aktien Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft* did little to help matters, even if the escalation of mutual relations mainly remained a matter of the second half of the 1920s.

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