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**WHEN THE STATE BUILDS.
THE ARCHITECTURAL AGENDA
OF THE K.K. MINISTERIUM FÜR
ÖFFENTLICHE ARBEITEN (1908–1918), THE
BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR HANDEL
UND VERKEHR AND THE MINISTERSTVO
VEŘEJNÝCH PRACÍ (1918–1938)**

Abstract

Based on the architectural production of the Imperial and Royal Ministry of Public Works, founded in 1908, and on its successor institutions in the Austrian and in the Czechoslovak First Republics, this article deals with the question of the representational value and the linguistic and expressive capacity of state architecture in the first half of the 20th century. Selected examples show the differentiated picture with which this state architecture presents itself to us, its stylistic plurality as a continuum across temporal and spatial boundaries, and the decisive influence of the building environment and the actors involved on form and architectural language.

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INTRODUCTION

In his famous novel *The Castle*, Franz Kafka outlines a system ruled by “mysterious” authorities who are difficult to access and incomprehensible. Kafka’s main character K. strives to enter the castle and is constantly confronted with uncertainties and difficulties in understanding the system defined behind its walls. The presence and materiality of the castle stands in stark contrast to the lack of understanding of its meaning and effects. Just as Kafka’s K. sets out to enter the palace in order to gain a sense of reality, three “mysterious” ministries in three states responsible (among other tasks) for state building matters¹ will be presented for the first time in architectural history as authoritative institutions that were interconnected in a complex frame of reference in time, space and state: the k.k. Ministerium für öffentliche Arbeiten, the *Bundesministerium für Handel und Verkehr* of the Austrian First Republic, and the Ministerstvo veřejných prací of the Czechoslovak First Republic.

¹ See e. g. the “Provisorische Geschäftseinteilung für die administrativen und technischen Bauangelegenheiten im Ministerium für öffentliche Arbeiten” [Provisional Division of Business for Administrative and Technical Construction Matters of the Imperial-Royal Ministry of Public Works], especially the tasks of the Department VIII responsible for building constructions; 1908 (Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv, Handel, Ministerium für öffentliche Arbeiten [hereafter cited as: AVA Handel MföA], Präsidiale 6: Zl. 730-I/3b, Austrian State Archives, Vienna [hereafter cited as: OeStA]). This document also includes the change of division of business of 1909 (AVA Handel MföA Präsidiale 20: Zl. 1443-3b1, OeStA).

What results and findings can we expect if we analyse state-produced architecture (in our case of the first half of the 20th century in Central Europe) not, as is usually the case in art history, from the side of outstanding architects or buildings that became significant for the development of style, for example, due to their innovative power, but from the side of the responsible administrative authorities? In other words, not as individual artistic achievements, but as the activity of several actors with different starting positions and interests in a common field of action?

First of all, we will not only be able to examine artistically or stylistically innovative things. Art history as well as the history of architecture still tend (despite all the attention now paid to “intermediate phenomena”)² to deal primarily with outstanding works. The wide range of general architectural production down to small, often seemingly insignificant building tasks for the general development of architecture (such as shelter huts for customs guards as simple wooden sheds) is rarely taken into account. But building ministries were precisely responsible for such buildings. They still present themselves as “mysterious” institutions, and we still do not know what exactly these ministries did and what architecture they created, because these authorities have never been placed at the centre of architectural historical analyses. We therefore do not have a systematic overview of the construction projects in question,³ no systematic knowledge about the tasks involved in the creation of state building infrastructure,⁴ the building types necessary for this, the styles used, the persons and institutions responsible for it, as well as the backgrounds and circumstances of state architecture. The analysis of architectural linguistic ability that has been done so far (such as Ákos Moravánszky’s studies on stylistic plurality in Central Europe or Anthony Alofsin’s “speaking buildings”)⁵ focus on stylistically and

2 An example of this is the now established awareness of the stylistic plurality between “tradition” and “modernity”, to which, in addition to numerous survey works and monographs on architects, the fundamental exhibitions of the DAM (Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt am Main) in particular should be mentioned here as examples: Vittorio Lampugnani and Romana Schneider (eds.), *Moderne Architektur in Deutschland 1900 bis 1950: Reform und Tradition* [Modern Architecture in Germany 1900 to 1950: Reform and Tradition] (Stuttgart: Gerd Hatje, 1992); see also Kai Krauskopf, Hans-Georg Lippert and Kerstin Zschke (eds.), *Neue Tradition. Konzepte einer antimodernen Moderne in Deutschland von 1920 bis 1960* [New Tradition. Concepts of an Anti-Modern Modernity in Germany from 1920 to 1960] (Dresden: Thelem, 2009).

3 With regard to the situation in the German Reich: Godehard Hoffmann, *Architektur für die Nation? Der Reichstag und die Staatsbauten des Deutschen Kaiserreichs 1871–1918* [Architecture for the Nation? The Reichstag and the State Buildings of the German Empire 1871–1918] (Cologne: DuMont, 2000), 13. The opposite is the case with the municipal building administrations, which have already received a great deal of research attention, as in the case of Red Vienna, see e. g. Eve Blau, *Rotes Wien. Architektur 1919–1934. Stadt – Raum – Politik* [Red Vienna. Architecture 1919–1934. City – Space – Politics] (Vienna: Ambra, 2014).

4 By infrastructure we mean not only technical-industrial facilities, but the comprehensive concept of (structural) necessities that a state needs in order to function and which it therefore endeavours to produce, as Günther exemplifies in its broad scope with reference to the Ruhr region (Roland Günther, “Die politische Ikonographie des Ruhrgebiets in der Epoche der Industrialisierung” [The Political Iconography of the Ruhr Area in the Era of Industrialization], in *Architektur als politische Kultur. philosophica practica*, eds. Hermann Hipp and Ernst Seidl (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1996), 213–224, especially 291–220.

5 Ákos Moravánszky, *Competing Visions. Aesthetic Invention and Social Imagination in Central European Architecture, 1867–1918* (Cambridge/Massachusetts-London: MIT Press, 1998); Anthony Alofsin, *When Buildings Speak: Architecture as Language in the Habsburg Empire and Its Aftermath, 1867–1933* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

also functionally outstanding buildings such as national theatres, parliaments or town halls. Their informative value is limited insofar as they only insufficiently illuminate the structural background, the bulk of the architectural creativity of the time against which innovative developments took place.

Therefore, the study of these institutions, which primarily pursued general state interests and only secondarily artistic ones, promises to open up new perspectives for the history of architecture because it focuses on the broad range of architectural production of a period and not so much on individual phenomena, however strongly they may have influenced future artistic developments. By giving special space to these works and architectural ideas, we can relate the results of the entire architectural production of a period to one another and thus create foundations for revealing and re-evaluating potential distortions caused by contemporary architectural discourse and its reception by later architectural historical research.

If one wants to examine the architectural production of building ministries, one must first of all ask the question of the building tasks that are perceived as necessary for a state. Then there is the question of the type of building measures, because, for example, a state administration that operates economically with the available resources can also create the necessary infrastructure by adapting existing building fabric. Or it may want to send a clear signal to citizens in the form of representative new buildings, and therefore has to dig deep into its pockets to make ideological messages visible and legible. There is also the question of whether ministries intervened actively and creatively in the field of architecture or whether they retreated to the artistically passive role of approval and regulatory authority. And finally, in Central Europe in particular, the question arises of the ruptures and continuities caused by World War I, when the disintegration of a state gave rise to a large number of new nation states, which, however, did not represent a *tabula rasa* in terms of the structures and people involved.

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THREE MINISTRIES, THEIR HISTORY AND TASKS

K. K. Ministerium für öffentliche Arbeiten (The imperial-royal Ministry of Public Works) is one such mysterious institution. Although this office is regularly mentioned by name in connection with various architectural-historical thematic complexes (in connection with individual buildings and building projects,⁶ the *Heimatschutz* [lit. homeland protection move-

6 E. g. with individual building projects in Graz: Antje Senarclens de Grancy, “*Moderner Stil*” und “*Heimisches Bauen*”. *Architekturreform in Graz um 1900* [“Modern Style” and “Domestic Building”. Architectural Reform in Graz around 1900] (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 2001); in Brno and Moravská Ostrava: Jan Galeta, “Urban Development Strategies in Brno and Moravská Ostrava,” in *A Spirit at Work. Architecture and Czech Politics 1918–1945*, ed. Vendula Hnídková (Prague: umprum, 2020), 314–374; in Vienna: Anna Stuhlpfarrer, “Der ehemalige Residenzbezirk in der Ersten Republik und im Austrofaschismus” [The Former Residential District in the First Republic and under Austrofascism], in *Die Wiener Hofburg seit 1918. Von der Residenz zum Museumsquartier* [The Vienna Hofburg since 1918. From the Residence to the Museum Quarter], ed. Maria Welzig (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2018), 26–115; Simone Bader, Katharina Hölzl et al., *Specialist School: the History of the Sculpture Building of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna* (Vienna: Schlebrügge, 2019).

ment],⁷ the German and Austrian Werkbund,⁸ social welfare and small housing, etc.), little attention has been paid to the institution itself and its work. Apart from administrative-historical studies,⁹ there has been no scientific study of architectural history in relation to this ministry. Yet it was responsible for all state construction measures from Bukovina in the east to Bohemia in the West and Dalmatia in the south. In the first Austrian Republic, it continued as nothing more than a sub-department of the Ministry of Trade and Transport. That is because, on the one hand, a large number of the buildings required for state operation (such as a parliament building) already existed and, on the other hand, the area of the new state had been reduced to such an extent that there was apparently no need for a separate Ministry of Buildings. In contrast, such a ministry was newly founded in the first Czechoslovak Republic, where buildings for ministries and other offices had to be newly created and a separate parliament building did not (yet) exist. This ministry received the name Ministerstvo veřejných prací (Ministry of Public Works). Thus, it had exactly the same name as in the times of the monarchy – only the prefix “imperial-royal” was omitted, of course.

The large number of employed architects, as can be seen for example from the entries in the *Architektenlexikon Wien 1770–1945*,¹⁰ the most comprehensive collection of information on architects working in Vienna to date, shows that these ministries must have been of great importance for the architectural business of the time. The wide spectrum of building tasks and the broad range of styles employed will be presented below as examples in an attempt to epistemically situate these phenomena on the basis of the people involved and the local-spatial contexts.

The Ministry of Public Works, founded in 1908, was responsible for all state construction projects in the Cisleithanian part of the Habsburg Monarchy, including road, water and bridge construction as well as structural engineering. The staff of this new authority was almost entirely taken over from the structural engineering department of the Ministry of the Interior, which until then had been responsible for state building tasks. In addition, the new

7 *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege*, no. 43 (1989) with contributions by Friedrich Achleitner, Theodor Brückler, Géza Hajós and Andreas Lehne.

8 Astrid Gmeiner and Gottfried Pirhofer, *Der österreichische Werkbund. Alternative zur klassischen Moderne in Architektur, Raum- und Produktgestaltung* [The Austrian Werkbund. Alternative to Classical Modernism in Architecture, Interior and Product Design] (Salzburg-Vienna: Residenz, 1985); Wilfried Posch, “Die Österreichische Werkbundbewegung 1907–28” [The Austrian Werkbund Movement 1907–28], in *Geistiges Leben im Österreich der Ersten Republik*, ed. Isabella Ackerl (Vienna-Munich: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik and Oldenbourg, 1986), 279–312.

9 Walter Goldinger, “Geschichte der Organisation des Handelsministeriums” [History of the Organization of the Ministry of Commerce], in *100 Jahre im Dienste der Wirtschaft*, vol. 1, Vienna 1961, 301–363; Walter Goldinger, “Die Zentralverwaltung in Cisleithanien – Die zivile gemeinsame Zentralverwaltung” [The Central Administration in Cisleithania – The civilian joint central administration], in: *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918 2: Verwaltung und Rechtswesen*, eds. Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2003), 100–189.

10 *Architektenlexikon Wien 1770–1945*, accessed March 3, 2023, <https://www.architektenlexikon.at/>.

ministry took over the agendas of the state building administration, the former Dikasterialgebäude-Direktion (the Dicasterial Building Directorate), from the Ministry of Finance. However, individual areas of responsibility remained with their previous ministries, such as railway construction with the Ministry of Railways or all building measures for the state monopoly enterprises of the salt works or tobacco factories with the Ministry of Finance. At the provincial level, local building authorities under the respective provincial governments, the *Statthaltereien*, were responsible for construction measures. Since it was therefore not possible to combine all building agendas in the new ministry, questions of departmental and administrative responsibility remained the subject of discussions until the end of the monarchy, which led to confusing overlaps of competences and slow business processes, so that the ministry was referred to in Reichsrat debates as the “building prevention ministry”.¹¹

Transformed into a state office of the First Republic of Austria in 1918, the formerly independent ministry was merged with other offices and ministries and finally incorporated into the Federal Ministry of Trade and Transport in 1923, which existed until the annexation to the Third Reich in 1938. The poor economic situation in the young state meant that hardly any larger new construction projects were carried out, especially since the central state infrastructure such as ministry buildings, parliament buildings, etc. had already been built during the monarchy. One of the few exceptions was the Landhaus in Eisenstadt, built between 1926 and 1929 according to a design by Rudolf Perthen as the seat of the provincial government and parliament of Burgenland, a federal province which was newly founded from formerly Hungarian territories in 1921. New construction measures mainly concerned local official buildings and housing, especially for civil servants and above all the police. As before the First World War, the Ministry’s building tasks also included the construction of courthouses, schools, universities, customs buildings, police stations, post and telegraph offices, and hygiene and health buildings. The types of construction work ranged from completely new constructions requiring appropriate designs to the complex issue of “reuse” (including adaptations, conversions and renovations without significant changes to the exterior, which on the one hand entails the issue of reinterpretation of existing buildings and on the other hand refers to the issue of sustainability and handling of resources), as well as the acquisition of real estate, inspection activities (e.g. on hygiene issues), expert opinions and building permits, and last but not least such diverse initiatives as the protection of historical monuments or the international exhibition business. For example, the Ministry was significantly involved in the organisation of the Austrian contribution to the *Expositions internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*, which took place in Paris in 1925, as well as in the Brussels World’s Fair of 1935 and the Paris Exposition of 1937.

11 Goldinger, “Geschichte der Organisation,” 340.

The Ministerstvo veřejných prací (the Ministry of Public Works), responsible for public construction in the First Czechoslovak Republic, was newly established on the basis of laws from 1908, and thus based on decisions that still dated from the time of the monarchy. As in the monarchy and in the Republic of Austria, there were departments for structural engineering (albeit subdivided differently than in the predecessor or in the Austrian institution into a building department for state offices and schools and one for building administration and civil servants' housing), for hydraulic engineering and for road and bridge construction, as well as for special buildings and building materials. And there were other departments devoted to, among other things, mechanical engineering, electrification, mining and nothing less than: aviation – in other words, departments that did not exist in this form in Austria.

STYLE AS A MEANS OF STATE REPRESENTATION: PERSONNEL AND COMPETENCIES

486 Focusing on the question of the perceptible appearance – style – the question arises, when the state appears as the client, whether a statement is not hidden behind the appearance of buildings, as insignificant as they may appear – especially if one takes into account discourses on the “iconography of the political” that have been thematised since Martin Warnke’s studies.¹² Was it about the self-representation of a state system, as the architecture of National Socialism so ostentatiously proposed? Or was it about making a state institution recognisable, as in the case of the classicist *Palais de Justice* in France? Alternatively, was it “only” about creating a functionally necessary infrastructure to satisfy the needs of the population, the economy, culture and sport, as would be the task of a performance administration (*Leistungsverwaltung*)? This question about the representational potential of state architecture inevitably brings with it the question of whether the building tasks at hand could achieve such aims. In view of the conversion of the former oat depot of the Breitensee barracks in Vienna into a police officer’s residence (**fig. 1**),¹³ which Robert Buchner and Julius Smolik carried out in 1928/1929 and which formally hardly stands out above the general design of contemporary building production, pragmatic utilitarian thinking and economic handling of limited resources seem rather to have prevailed.

The question of whether there was a stringent concept of state architecture also touches on the area of competencies, or who was responsible for what and

12 Martin Warnke (ed.), *Politische Architektur in Europa vom Mittelalter bis heute. Repräsentation und Gemeinschaft* [Political Architecture in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present. Representation and Community] (Cologne: DuMont, 1984); Hipp and Seidl, *Architektur als politische Kultur*; see also Klaus von Beyme, *Die Kunst der Macht und die Gegenmacht der Kunst. Studien zum Spannungsverhältnis von Kunst und Politik* [The Art of Power and the Counter-Power of Art. Studies on the Tension between Art and Politics] (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1998).

13 Architectural drawings signed by Robert Buchner and Julius Smolik from 1928/1929 (Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv Plan-, Karten- und Fotosammlung Plansammlung II [hereafter cited as: AVA PKF PS II]; A-II-c/94, OeStA).

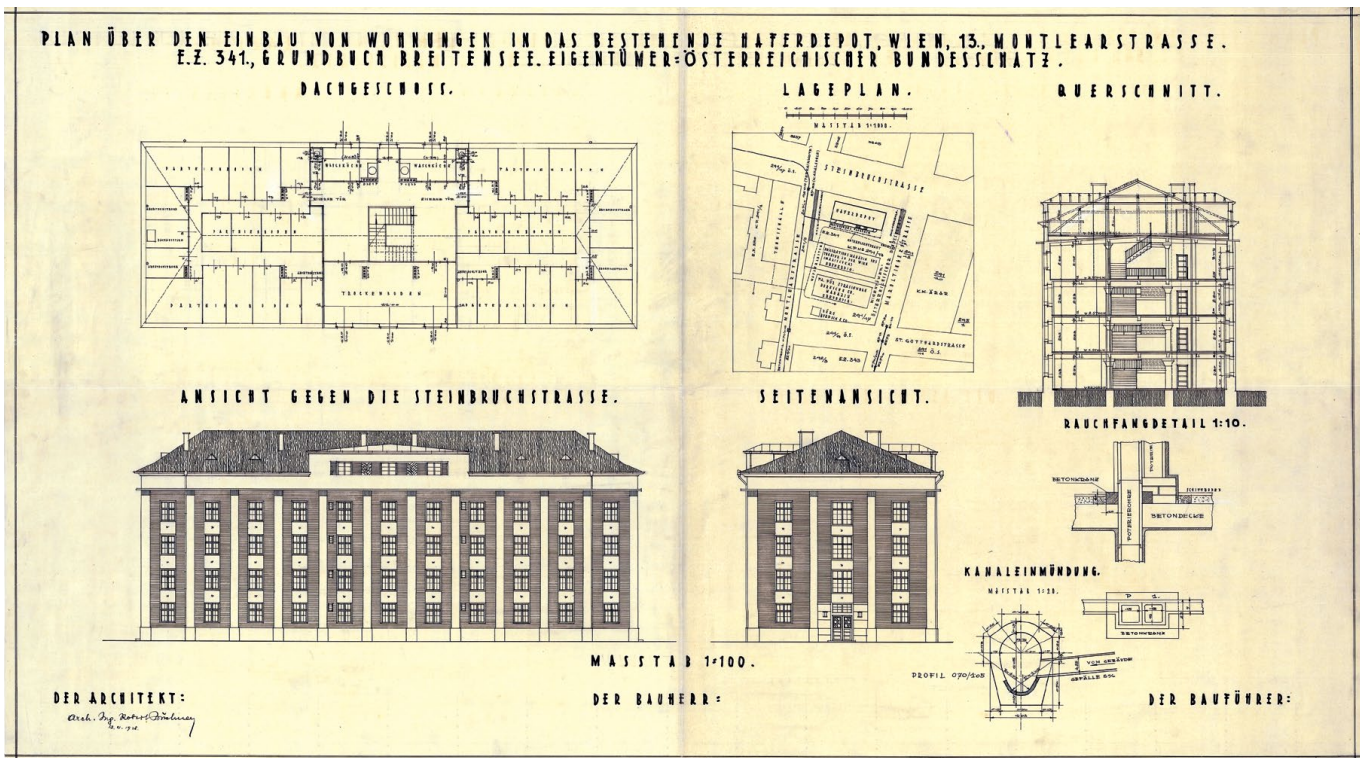


Fig. 1. Julius Smolik and Robert Buchner, Conversion of the Former Oat Depot of the Breitensee Barracks in Vienna into a Police Officer's Residence, 1928/1929, ink on paper, Austrian State Archives, Vienna.

to what degree. There were numerous designers for state buildings, both civil servant architects in ministries or state authorities and freelance architects who were commissioned through public tenders and competitions. While the former often only exercised their responsibility in the form of appraisals and approvals, sometimes also of counter-designs, but mostly only of reductions, especially with regard to costs, the latter were able to take up regional tendencies, for instance. In this thematic field of the relationship between centre and periphery, on the one hand the metropolis could certainly have a modelling effect on urban centres of the “second order”, but on the other hand style could also be understood and specifically used as an expression of national or local identities. The idea of a uniform concept of “state architecture” would then probably have to be replaced by individual units that could be described, for example, with the terms “ministry architecture” for architecture produced by a central authority, “province architecture” for buildings designed at the provincial level, or “municipal architecture” in the responsibility and decision-making sphere of urban communities.

THE IMPERIAL-ROYAL MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS: PLURALITY OF STYLE AND REFERENCES TO LOCALITIES

If one takes a brief overview of the wide range of stylistic forms that could occur in state buildings, both before and after the “caesura” of the First World War, it is not possible to identify a clear and semantically unambiguous line in the choice of style. Furthermore, it is clear how much individual personalities were decisive precisely in the choice of a stylistic stance. For example, Eduard



Fig. 2. Eduard Zotter and Karl Freymuth or Arthur Falkenau, Physical and Chemical Institute Building of the University of Vienna, between 1908 and 1915, ink and watercolour on paper, Austrian State Archives, Vienna.

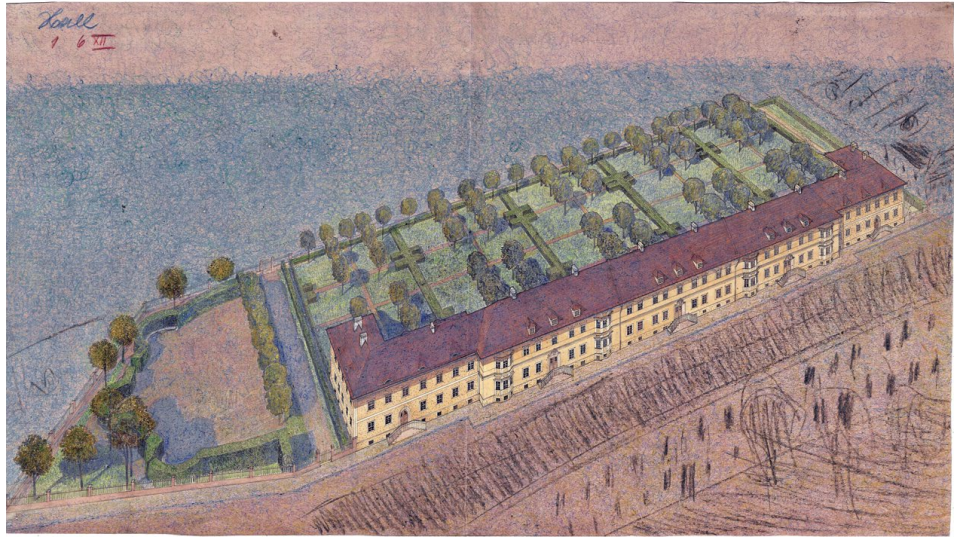
Zotter (1857–1938), *Oberbaurat* in the Ministry of Public Works and head of the so-called Atelier in Department VIII, which was responsible for structural engineering, built the Physical and Chemical Institute Building of the University of Vienna between 1908 and 1915. With regard to authorship, the surviving plans (fig. 2) are signed by him,¹⁴ but probably less in the function of the designer than as the responsible official. Rather, the plan bears another signature, that of the *Oberingenieur* (Chief Engineer) Karl Freymuth (1872–?), to whom we can attribute the design idea for the building.¹⁵ Stylistically, the building expresses the neo-baroque tendencies that were popular in the last years of the Habsburg monarchy as the so-called Maria Theresian style, especially for state buildings (for example, Ludwig Baumann’s Ministry of War in Vienna), albeit in a reduced version in terms of the wealth of forms. However, buildings that were created under the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Works did not all show the same aesthetic appearance, but could follow quite contrary styles. Thus, designs in a regional style were also created under the responsibility of the Ministry, such as the one for a workers’ settlement at the Hall salt works in Tyrol in 1916 (fig. 3), for which a “rural architectural style common in Tyrol” was to be used at the request of the Ministry.¹⁶ Now, one could of course argue that, especially in the architectural conception of the early 20th century, a building in the countryside had to have a different appearance than one in the

14 Architectural drawings signed by Eduard Zotter and Karl Freymuth, between 1908 and 1915 (AVA PKF PS II A-II-c/158, OeStA).

15 However, the design idea could also have come from Arthur Falkenau, at that time building adjunct of the Lower Austrian governor’s office, to whom an obituary in a daily newspaper attributes this building (*Neue Freie Presse*, December 8, 1927, 10; see also Richard Kurdiovsky, “Beyond the Ringstraße. Viennese University Buildings until the End of the Habsburg Monarchy,” in *Sites of Knowledge. The University of Vienna and its Buildings. A History 1365–2015*, eds. Julia Rüdiger and Dieter Schweizer (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau 2015), 227–255, here 242).

16 Submitter: Ministry of Finance, *Erbauung einer Arbeiterkolonie bei der Saline Hall, Verbauungsplan* [Construction of a Workers’ Colony at the Saline Hall, Development Plan], between December 1916 and January 1917 (AVA Handel MföA allgemeine Reihe Akten [hereafter cited as: allg A]: 579-VIIIc, OeStA: „in Tirol üblicher ländlicher Baustil“).

Fig. 3. Anonymous, Project for a Workers' Colony at the Salt Works in Hall in Tyrol, ca. 1916, ink and colour chalk on paper, Austrian State Archives, Vienna.



city. But it was precisely there that the Ministry also had to deal with the most innovative trends of the time, namely when one of the exemplars of Viennese Modernism, the extension of the Vienna Postal Savings Bank by Otto Wagner from 1910–1912, fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Public Works.¹⁷

The staff of the Ministry of Public Works included such striking architectural personalities as Ernst Dittrich (1868–1948),¹⁸ graduate of the Technical University (then Highschool) of Vienna. His career can be described as typical and, after all, it is precisely the careers of architects who begin at subordinate posts in provincial building directorates and end in leading positions in central ministries that provide explanations for stylistic continuities across provincial, but also national borders. Initially, Dittrich joined the building department of the Lower Austrian governor's office as a trainee builder in 1894, but the following year he was already at the disposal of the structural engineering department of the Ministry of the Interior to work on the construction of barracks in Vienna.¹⁹ By 1899 he had risen to the position of building *Adjunkt* and was finally taken on as *Ingenieur* directly by the Ministry of the Interior, which sent him to Feldkirch in 1902 for the pending building tasks of the district court and later the provincial finance directorate. With the founding of the Ministry of Public Works in 1908, he was taken on there as an *Oberingenieur* and rose to the rank of *Oberbaurat*. After 1918 he remained active as a civil servant architect for his former authority on building projects in Carinthia and Styria and as an expert in Burgenland. As *Oberingenieur*, he created a building of striking modernity with his design of the finance provincial directorate in Feldkirch, which was built between 1906/08 and 1915 (**fig. 4**). This building incorporated

¹⁷ Fascicle on the Postal Savings Bank (AVA Handel MföA allg A 1565, OeStA).

¹⁸ Gabriele Tschallener, "Ernst Dittrich (1868–1948)," in *Bau Handwerk Kunst. Beiträge zur Architekturgeschichte Vorarlbergs im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Institut für Kunstgeschichte der Universität Innsbruck (Innsbruck: Institut für Kunstgeschichte der Universität Innsbruck, 1994), 99–120.

¹⁹ Also for the following: Standesausweis [personnel file] of Ernst Dittrich (Archiv der Republik, Bundesministerium für Handel und Verkehr Präsidiale: Standesausweis Dittrich Ernst, OeStA).



Fig. 4. Ernst Dittrich, Finance Provincial Directorate in Feldkirch (Vorarlberg), 1906/1908–1915, Wikimedia Commons (Böhringer Friedrich), accessed March 14, 2024, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Finanzlandesdirektion,_Schillerstra%C3%9Fe_2_Feldkirch_5.JPG.

the latest developments of Viennese Modernism, but especially the work of Joseph Maria Olbrich at the Mathildenhöhe in Darmstadt. The achievements of modernism were thus not limited to the realm of private building activity, as Dittrich’s pharmacy house Weinzierl in Feldkirch from 1905 shows, but also expressed themselves in state-public buildings. Once again, therefore, we must concede a wide stylistic range to the architectural work of the Ministry of Public Works, which even took up styles that were under strong public criticism. The language capabilities and possibilities of state building in the first half of the 20th century were thus by no means uniform or even the same in several or even all places in this state.

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An astonishing example of the simultaneity of stylistic plurality between “modernity” and “tradition” in the Ministry’s architectural work are two courthouses, one in Riemergasse in the Inner City, i.e. the city centre of Vienna, and the other, the Margarethen District Court, in one of Vienna’s boroughs (**fig. 5, fig. 6**).²⁰ With the same construction period around 1910 and the same client, namely the Ministry of Public Works, both buildings were designed and built by the same architects, the civil servant architect Moritz Kramsall (1860–1938) and the freelance architect Alfred Keller (1875–1945), to fulfil very similar tasks. And yet, in the one, the latest motifs of modernism can be found (above all the panel cladding of the façades, visually fastened with bolts in the manner of Otto Wagner), while the other example still shows last memories of the so-called German Renaissance. With identical architects, similar building tasks, an identical construction period and the same client, very different

20 N. N. “Das neue Gerichtsgebäude, Wien, I., Riemergasse Nr. 7 von Baurat M. Kramsall” [The New Courthouse, Vienna, I., Riemergasse No. 7 by Baurat M. Kramsall], *Allgemeine Bauzeitung* no. 78 (1913), 113–116; N. N., “Amtsgebäude für das Bezirksgericht Margarethen. Architekt: Moritz Kramsall, k.k. Baurat in Wien” [Office Building for the District Court of Margarethen. Architect: Moritz Kramsall, Imperial and Royal Building Councillor in Vienna], *Der Bautechniker. Zentralorgan für das österreichische Bauwesen*, no. 31 (1911), 487–489.



Fig. 5. Moritz Kramasall and Alfred Keller, Courthouse in Riemergasse, Vienna, ca. 1910, in: *Allgemeine Bauzeitung*, no. 78 (1913), plate 72, Austrian National Library, Vienna.

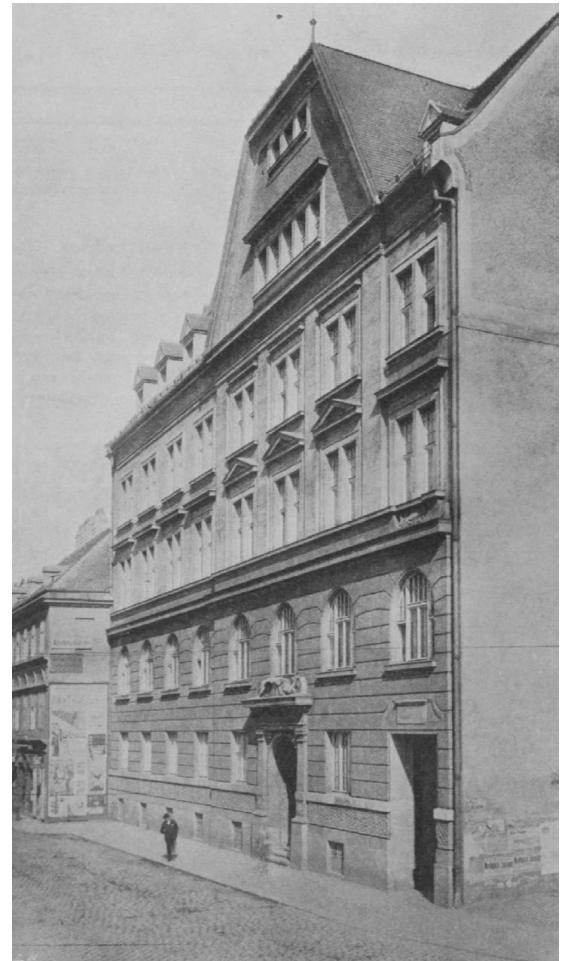


Fig. 6. Moritz Kramasall and Alfred Keller, Margarethen District Court, Vienna, ca. 1910, in: *Der Bautechniker*, no. 31 (1911), plate 21, Austrian National Library, Vienna.

results could thus be produced, which can best be explained by the specific building site: on one occasion the city centre and on the other an arbitrary outer district. The “modern” building in Riemergasse could establish formal relationships with buildings in the neighbourhood such as the Postal Savings Bank and thus contribute to a certain stylistic habitus of a city district. On the other hand, in the case of the Margarethen District Court, one can imagine that the intention was specifically to take into account the local audience that was to be addressed – and to count on more traditional tastes of the middle and lower classes in the urban residential districts.

THE AUSTRIAN MINISTRY OF TRADE IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD: IN THE SIGN OF CONTINUITY

As already pointed out by Moravánszky, we also encounter this “simultaneity of the other” during the interwar period in, for example, the work of Julius Smolik. Having worked in the civil service since 1904, first at the *Dikasterialgebäude-Direktion* and from 1908 at the Ministry of Public Works, Smolik rose to become head of the structural engineering department at the Federal Ministry of Trade and Transport in the 1920s and remained in a leading position under Austrofascism and the Nazi dictatorship. His stylistic spectrum ranges from a traditional architectural conception in the sense of *Heimatschutz* to the New Style with motifs such as cubic structures, flat roofs and ribbon windows. This stylistic spectrum is evidenced, for example, by his designs for an official building in Jennersdorf in Burgenland in the 1920s with

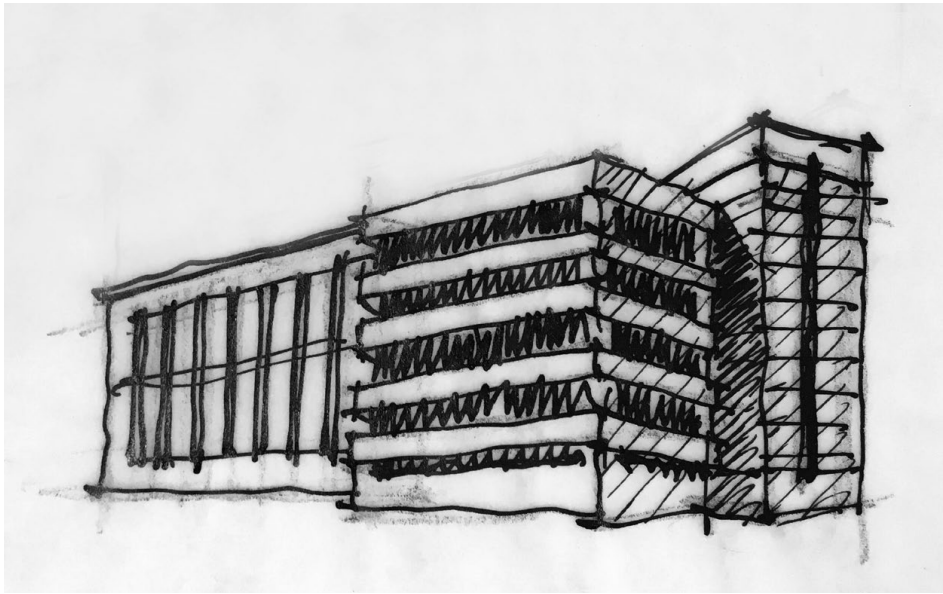


Fig. 7. Julius Smolik, Design for the Development of the Sensengasse-Spitalgasse grounds, 1930/1931, ink on paper, Austrian State Archives, Vienna.

arch motifs, a rough plaster façade and a hipped roof, as well as his “modern” designs for the development of the Sensengasse-Spitalgasse grounds in Vienna in 1930/1931 (fig. 7) or the more traditional attitude of today’s Upper Austrian Regional Library building in Linz from the same period.²¹

The phenomenon of stylistic pluralism in the years 1918–1938 is particularly evident in the buildings created for the Austrian Post Office, dominated by one name in particular: Leopold Hoheisel (1884–1973).²² After years in the studio of Leopold Bauer and in the class of Otto Wagner at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, the architect joined the Federal Buildings Administration before the First World War. In 1923, Hoheisel was appointed to the board of directors of the Postal and Telegraph Buildings Administration, and at his suggestion, this authority eventually dealt with the new construction of postal buildings in addition to its preservation tasks. Advancing technical developments as well as incomplete infrastructure led to a considerable need for new buildings, especially in rural regions, so that despite budget-related state construction measures that were reduced to a minimum, the 1928 building construction programme included a total of 35 post office buildings, eleven of which were new post and telegraph offices.²³

A look at some of the post offices designed by Hoheisel in the Austrian provinces shows that the stylistic range here owes less to a development in architectural language than to adaptation to the local environment with its regional architectural styles and construction techniques. While in Eggenburg,

21 Julius Smolik, architectural drawings for an office building in Jennersdorf, between 1920 and 1929 (AVA PKF PS II: A-V-c/17, OeStA); Julius Smolik, architectural drawings for the development of the Sensengasse-Spitalgasse area in Vienna, 1930/1931 (AVA PKF PS II: A-II-c/158, OeStA); Julius Smolik, architectural drawings for the Upper Austrian Regional Library building in Linz, around 1930 (AVA PKF PS II: A-IV-c/20, OeStA).

22 Auszeichnungsantärge [award applications], 1930 (Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv Handel Post Postsonderbünde [hereafter cited as: AVA Handel Post Psb], Generaldirektion für die Post- und Telegraphenverwaltung: GZ. 52.509/1930, OeStA).

23 Hochbauprogramm für 1928 [building construction program for the year 1928] (AVA Handel Post Psb, Generaldirektion für die Post- und Telegraphenverwaltung: GZ. 11.514/1928, OeStA).

Fig. 8. Leopold Hoheisel, Post and Telegraph Office, Murau, 1932, Wikimedia Commons, accessed on January 17, 2022, <https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Altepostmura.jpg>.



Fig. 9. Leopold Hoheisel, Telephon Exchange Office, Vienna, 1934, in: *Österreichische Kunst*, no. 11 (1935), 12.



a small town in Lower Austria, which is particularly characterised by its Renaissance architecture, the post office (1931) has a striking oriel resting on brackets, the post and telegraph office (1929/1930) located in the somewhat larger town of Villach in Carinthia conveys a much more modern character with its formal language typical of the late 1920s and reminiscent of municipal buildings. These stylistic opposites from one and the same hand are most obviously illustrated by the post office in Murau, Styria from 1932 and the telephone exchange in Vienna-Hietzing, which was built only two years later (**fig. 8**, **fig. 9**). The traditional country post office with its high rustic base,

shutters and oversized gable roof was highly praised in the contemporary press for its “docile” (*gefügsam*) integration into the surroundings.²⁴ This building contrasts sharply with the telephone exchange in Vienna’s 13th district, which was not conceived for use by the public. As a neighbouring building, it stands directly next to one of the icons of Viennese modernism, the Villa Beer by Josef Frank (1929/1931), which can also be seen in the background of the photo. Once again, as with the courthouse in Riemergasse, it looks as if the credo of the state authority that a new building was supposed to “fit excellently into the local surroundings”²⁵ was taken into account even if the latest stylistic developments were also addressed. For this building, Hoheisel opted for a cubic design in keeping with modernism, a strict window structure with a vertical window band, and a simple façade design without decoration except for the post office sign. A look across the country’s borders, specifically to Bavaria with its well-known structural engineering department of the *Oberpostdirektion* headed by Robert Vorhoelzer, shows that the Austrian ministry was following an international trend.²⁶

MINISTERSTVO VEŘEJNÝCH PRACÍ: ARCHITECTURAL EXPRESSION OF MODERNITY AND PERSONAL CHOICE

494 Similar phenomena, which fit entirely into the classical narrative of the stylistic development of European architectural history, can also be found in the First Czechoslovak Republic. However, the situation of the Ministerstvo veřejných prací was different from Austria in that fundamental state projects (such as the construction of ministry buildings or the development of plans for a parliament building)²⁷ had to be tackled from scratch. The key theme for the dominant narrative of Czechoslovakia was the modernity of the state, which redefined the national perspective. There was one particularly important issue: transport, with great importance attached to technically innovative areas such as air travel. On the initiative of the Ministry of Public Works, the State Airline of Czechoslovakia was founded in 1923, arguing as its rationale that a city without its own airport would in the future be in a similar position in terms of transport as a city without rail or road links would have been at the time.²⁸

The example of the two Prague airports underlines the assumption that the choice of style was closely linked to the personal taste of the commissioned

24 N. N., “Einweihung des neuen Postamtes in Murau” [Inauguration of the New Post Office in Murau], *Mur-taler Zeitung*, September 17, 1932, 1.

25 Leopold Hoheisel, “Das neue Fernsprechamt Hietzing” [The New Telephone Exchange Office Hietzing], *Österreichische Kunst. Monatszeitschrift für bildende und darstellende Kunst, Architektur und Kunsthandwerk*, no. 11 (1935), 13: “in die örtliche Umgebung vorzüglich einpasst.”

26 Florian Aicher and Uwe Drepper, *Robert Vorhoelzer – Ein Architektenleben. Die klassische Moderne der Post* [Robert Vorhoelzer – An Architect’s Life. The Classical Modernism of the Post] (Munich: Georg D. W. Callwey, 1990).

27 Jakub Bachtík, Lukáš Duchek and Jakub Jareš, *Chrám umění Rudolfinum* [Temple of Art Rudolfinum] (Prague: Česká filharmonie, Národní památkový ústav and Národní technické muzeum, 2020).

28 Jan Flora, “Hospodářský a urbanistický význam zřízení letišť pro města” [The Economic and Urban Significance of the Establishment of Airports for Cities], *Zprávy veřejné služby technické*, no. 15 (1933), 8–9.

architect since the Ministry of Public Works arranged architectural competitions or appointed freelance architects.²⁹ Josef Gočár (1880–1945) opted for the National Style for the airport in Prague Kbely in 1921 and explicitly used vernacular forms and materials for his buildings, even though wood was also chosen as a building material because it was easily available at the time. Its colourfulness in particular brought the design clearly into line with the ideas of the National Style propagated at the time, even if the technical infrastructure such as the hangars were strictly rational buildings without any ornamentation. In contrast, the second airport in Prague Ruzyně, built in 1937, was a spectacular example of functionalism.³⁰ Nor was the (modern) purpose of the buildings the only influence on this stylistic choice, because, for the designing architect Adolf Benš (1894–1982) functionalism was the only architectural option for any kind of building.

CONCLUSION

If we try to answer the questions posed at the beginning about the representational value, the linguistic and thus expressive capacity of state architecture, and whether, when the state appears as a client, a statement is automatically and immediately hidden behind the appearance of a building, we can see that the buildings presented were hardly able to provide a concise state self-representation in a homogeneous form. The stylistic range was simply too great for this, and also too varied in their architectural quality. Due to the diversity of forms, a state institution was hardly recognisable and readable in a morphologically continuous and uniform way. It was less the stylistic appearance, but rather the type of building task (official or government building, transport building such as a railway station or airport) and the associated use (or non-use) of certain architectural motifs such as symmetry, tectonics, size (up to monumentality), etc. that could convey the image of the superiority of the state. First and foremost, it was a matter of creating the functionally necessary infrastructure for the needs of the population, the economy, culture and sport. Furthermore, the reference to the specificities of location was just as crucial as personnel continuities across the historical caesura of World War I.

In any case, with regard to the question of continuities and ruptures in the historical change from one state system to another, it can be noted: the plurality of styles that we find in the period of the monarchy continues in the period of the republics. Whether the same reasons were decisive for this in the individual states (such as the retention of administrative structures and personnel) remains a desideratum of future research.

29 Gustav Hermann (ed.), *Ministerstvo veřejných prací. Přehled činnosti za první pětiletí republiky Československé* [Ministry of Public Works. Overview of the Activities for the First Five Years of the Czechoslovak Republic] (Prague: Ministerstvo veřejných prací, 1923).

30 Dalibor Píx et al., *Umělecké památky Prahy. Velká Praha, I. M–U* (Prague: academia, 2017), 354–357.

