

European Coasts of Bohemia.

Negotiating the Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal in a
Troubled Twentieth Century

Abstract

This thesis looks at the integration processes in Europe from the perspective of a single waterway project, the Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal (DOE). In doing so, it draws on the recent strand of scholarly literature considering the process of European integration as an outcome of transnational networking, system building and infrastructure development. Two core assumptions of such an approach, labeled “hidden integration” claim: (1) that the process of integration (and fragmentation) of infrastructures on the continent began back in the nineteenth century, and (2) the integration processes were driven by transnational expert organizations rather than diplomats representing nations states and their interests.

The DOE Canal project, though never completed, traces the history of efforts aimed at establishing an integrated inland navigation network in Europe. These proposals were promoted and performed with very different and often conflicting visions of Europe. The thesis identifies a set of four different integration frameworks used by transnational system builders to justify the need for integration: Mittel-Europeanization (Central Europeanization), Nazification, Sovietization and Europeanization. These frameworks represented not only the distinctive spatial delimitations of the proposed waterway network, but also specific sets of values and ideas, each represented by a single dominant international organization, the transnational system builder.

The canal, situated almost exclusively on Czech territory, was planned at the junction of the national and transnational network development. The interplay between these two levels of governance in different periods forms the core of this thesis.