

Keywords

Representation – Building of Parliament – competitions – public debate – Centre of Prague – Czechoslovakia – Central Europe

Resume

Jan Kober: Between Place, Representation and Possibilities: Searching of Urban Location and Architecture of the Czechoslovak Parliament Building. Thesis, Charles University in Prague, 242 pages.

The thesis researches the nearly forgotten story of the efforts to build the new parliament building. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Parliament of the Kingdom of Bohemia left its age-old seat at the Prague Castle for the newly-rebuild seat in the palace of the Prague Lesser Town. At the beginning of the 20th century, Prague became a quickly developing city, but, unlike the European capitals of that time, with few exceptions lacking the new monumental architecture of various public buildings. This led to the idea of the new larger and incomparably more representative parliamentary design (Antonín Balšánek), influenced by the pattern of Paris. The renewal of the independent state in 1918 as well as the rise of the number of deputies immediately led to the requests for the new building of the Parliament and to the emergence of the new projects of Václav Roštlapil, Max Urban, Antonín Balšánek and Bohuslav Fuchs. The political changes enabled also the old vision of the „Large Prague“, the unification of the historical Prague with the new suburbs as well as the creation of the State Regulatory Commission in the role of the urban regulatory body. This agency announced the architectural competition of the north-western region of the Large Prague, including also the placement and design of the new parliament building at the Letná Plain in the aim to relocate the newly bicameral Parliament from its old building (upper chamber) and from the Rudolfinum concert hall (lower chamber) into the single and representative building. But the influence of the competition of 1920 was limited and the political will to build the new parliament proved to be nearly non-existent in the following years. The Commission started another competition in 1928 as well as conflict with the Parliament itself, whose members felt to be demoted from the crucial decisions about their own building. This led to the compromise of the double competition jury (standard jury of the Commission and the separate jury of the Parliament). The 1928 competition represented the breakthrough of the new generation of the young Czech modernist architects (Josef Štěpánek, Jaromír Krejcar, Kamil Roškot) and the project of Štěpánek won the highest awarded prize in the both juries. But the Parliament elites, still discontented opened another new competition for the location of the parliament building outside Letná in the inner town of Prague only few months later in 1929. Despite of various problems, this competition led to the new efforts of the two winners of 1928, Kamil Roškot and Josef Štěpánek, who presented quite different but even more excellent projects. The quarrel over the location of the parliamentary building was, in fact, never reconciled nor solved. The years of Great Crisis as well as of the large military budgets of the 1930s never enabled the revival of the efforts for the new parliamentary building until the 1945.