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### **Prague Castle as a Stage for Propaganda (1948–1968)**

A dissertation project focuses on the construction changes (both temporary and permanent) at Prague Castle during the period since 1948 to 1968. The Czechoslovak presidents and the General Secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Czechoslovakia personally supervised this transformation and a lot of prominent artists, architects and designers as well as other experts and politicians participated in the reconstructions. Prague Castle therefore became in a way the most accurate visual representation of the official Socialist propaganda in the Czechoslovakia and its changes; it was closed for the public in the 1950s, it flourished in the 1960s and stagnated in the last two decades of Socialism.

In the beginning of the 1950s the area of the Prague Castle was almost inaccessible to visitors with two major exceptions: they could visit the Museum of the Presents for Klement Gottwald (the first communist president after the putsch in 1948) and the exhibition space in the old Riding Hall where the Czechoslovak Socialist Realism was articulated at the biennial exhibitions. After Gottwald's (and Stalin's) death in 1953 some changes occurred but it was not until the 1960s when the site was to be opened for everyone including the old aristocratic residencies and gardens transformed to political museums and decorated with contemporary sculptures.

In the 1960s the approach of the Presidential Office to the renovation of the Prague Castle was very complex and closely bound to the release of the new Czechoslovak "Socialist" Constitution in 1960 which was accompanied by an orchestrated propaganda (the Spartakiad, various political exhibitions etc.). In the Prague Castle Complex there were plans for a monumental Alley of Socialism (a walking path more or less, surrounded with statues depicting the development of Socialism in Czechoslovakia; was not implemented), the House of the Czechoslovak Children (it was really built – the building consisted of a renovated renaissance building and of a new pavilion visually very similar to the Czechoslovak pavilion at the Brussels EXPO; it is close to a Pioneer House but the context of the Prague Castle as a

visual symbol of the Party should have been much stronger than the Pioneer-Movement-Context, so it has been suppressed a bit by the presidential office), the Palace of Work (it was never built) etc. My main hypothesis lies in the argument, that the Office of the President struggled to transform the Prague Castle to the symbol of both the Party and the president that if it succeeded the people should not be able to imagine one without the other.

I address some broader themes that are very important for my research. The main topic is the way in which the official socialist art demonstrated, that it is focused on the people; it varied a lot throughout the time-frame of the dissertation and in the area of the Prague Castle it shows itself mostly in thy dynamic of opening or closing of the area to the public. It is also closely bind to the celebration of work which is a stable theme, crucial for all the changes. One of the other important themes is the exhibition design and its upmost importance for the state propaganda, which we could follow in the plans for the multiple museums and exhibitions in the area. Free time and a struggle of the Party to organize it and use it to educate the masses (kids, workers and tourists from abroad have been addressed separately in the Prague Castle area) was also strongly present there and lastly there is the usage of the national history generally and the history of the Castle specifically to call up the patriotism in the citizens. Very little of the plans for the transformation of the area was truly realized, but when it was, there are often great differences between the often deeply ideological assignment and the not so ideologically straightforward realization; this gap offers a great space for interpretation.