

Architecture of Buildings for Education



20th March 2025

Academic Conference Center
(AKC), Husova 4a, Prague 1

We cordially invite you to the international architecture history workshop jointly organized by the **Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences** and the **Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences**.

10:00 Registration

10:30 Greetings / Introduction

Tomáš Winter (director), Vendula Hnídková (project leader, both Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences)

10:45 Educational architecture in the Habsburg empire: Negotiating reform and political iconography in the 19th century

Gernot Biermeier (University of Innsbruck)

11:10–11:30 coffee break

11:30 Berlin school buildings of the 19th century as a symbol of Prussian school policy

Sonja Hnilica (Technical University Dresden)

11:55 The economic context of school construction in the last third of the 19th century

Jan Šimek (The National Pedagogical Museum and Library of J. A. Comenius)

12:20–13:20 lunch break

13:20 From illiteracy to heritage: The architectural legacy of schools in Austro-Hungarian Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878–1918)

Miroslav Malinovic (University of Banja Luka)

13:45 State schools in Austria and their surprising innovations (1900–1938)

Raphaela Hemetsberger (Austrian Academy of Sciences)

14:10–14:30 coffee break

14:30 State schools in the Lands of Bohemian Crown under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Works (1908–1918)

Jan Galeta (Czech Academy of Sciences)

14:55 The school buildings of the Komenky School Association in Vienna 1923–1935: Modern school construction as an expression of Czech national identity

Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber (University of Vienna)

15:20 Construction of schools for Czechoslovak minority in Czechoslovakia

Barbora Řepková (Czech Academy of Sciences)

16:00 Excursion to Francouzské školy (school building complex by Jan Gillar, 1931–1934)

The workshop is open to the public and is free of charge. To secure a place on the excursion, please inquire at repkova@udu.cas.cz before the 14th of March, as the number of participants is limited.

The workshop was conceived beside of the *"Invisible Agents" in Architecture (1908–38). Policies, Principles, and Projects in Central European Ministries of Public Works* research project conducted at the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the Czech Academy of Sciences with the support of the Austrian Science Fund.

Educational Architecture in the Habsburg Empire: Reform and Political Iconography in the 19th Century.

Gernot Biermeier (University of Innsbruck)

Educational reforms initiated under Maria Theresa laid the foundation for a more structured and centralized school system, which was significantly expanded under Franz Joseph I during the 19th century. This period witnessed the construction of numerous schools designed not only to meet modern standards of hygiene, accessibility, and functionality but also to serve as visual representations of political and cultural ideals.

This presentation examines the intersection of educational reform, nationalism, and political iconography in the architectural landscape of the Habsburg Empire. The 19th century was a period of profound transformation, characterized by increasing centralization, the rise of nationalism, and the systematic modernization of public education. School buildings were not merely functional spaces for instruction but also played a crucial role in articulating imperial ideology. Their architectural designs reflect how contemporary educational philosophies were closely aligned with the monarchy's broader political ambitions.

By focusing on key architectural projects and stylistic developments, this presentation explores how neo-Gothic and neo-Renaissance designs conveyed a dual message: reinforcing connections to European intellectual traditions while simultaneously asserting imperial authority. These stylistic choices balanced the pedagogical requirements of modern schooling with the need to project cultural and political dominance. Particularly in metropolitan centers, school architecture was strategically employed to reinforce imperial cohesion, solidify national identity, and visually assert the monarchy's presence in an increasingly diverse and contested political landscape.

Tracing the evolution of educational buildings throughout the Habsburg Empire, this presentation highlights their role as both instruments of governance and symbols of cultural representation. It argues that the architectural landscape of public education was a deliberate and powerful tool in shaping societal structures, reflecting the intersection of ideology, policy, and built environment.

Berlin school buildings of the 19th century as a symbol of Prussian school policy

Sonja Hnilica (Technical University Dresden)

The British architect Edward R. Robson in his widely read book *School Architecture* (1874) found that Prussia had taken the lead in education among the European nations. He praised the striking uniformity of the German schooling system and compared the community schools of Berlin to military barracks – in a positive sense. The German way of schooling, concluded Robson, could hardly fail to raise the masses of a nation. Indeed, an impressive comprehensive public education infrastructure was established throughout the country. From the 1860s onwards, the city planning officer Adolf Gerstenberg developed a rational type of school building for the rapidly growing city of Berlin in the

tradition of the Schinkel School. His successor Hermann Blankenstein intensified the building activities and built over 100 more schools by the turn of the century. The school buildings of the two Berlin city planning councillors were mass-produced, so to speak, but today the architecture appears to be of high quality and very robust. The public school building activities in Berlin in the second half of the 19th century have not yet been comprehensively acknowledged. I will explore the phenomenon, and in this context, the political agenda that has led to the major investments in the German public school system will also be addressed.

The economic context of school construction in the last third of the 19th century

Jan Šimek (The National Pedagogical Museum and Library of J. A. Comenius)

The development of the school network after 1869 had important economic implications. In the previous period, the costs of the construction of the school building were shared between several entities (the manorial lords, the patron of the school, and the municipality). Several laws passed after the middle of the 19th century transferred the obligation to finance the construction to the municipality alone. On the one hand, this simplified the process of school construction, on the other hand, it placed a significant financial burden on the municipalities.

This paper will attempt to show how much of a financial burden school construction placed on municipalities and what role the financial costs associated with construction played in the decision to build.

The main source will be statistical data on school construction in the Czech Kingdom from 1869 to the end of the 19th century (these statistical summaries include both the number of buildings and the financial cost of the buildings). The statistical overview will be supplemented by several specific examples of school buildings whose design was determined by financial considerations.

On the one hand, an example of a monumental school building in a city that wanted to represent itself with a school building and therefore took a generous approach to financing the construction. On the other hand, examples from rural areas where the construction of a school was a considerable burden on the municipal budget and the municipality therefore tried to save money or avoid the need to build altogether.

From Illiteracy to Heritage: The Architectural Legacy of Schools in Austro-Hungarian Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878–1918)

Miroslav Malinovic (University of Banja Luka)

After centuries of limited, Muslim religious-controlled education (1463–1878) in the territory of present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina—leaving large portions of the population illiterate and hindering overall development—the arrival of Austro-Hungarian rule

(1878–1918) marked a transformative period. A modern, inclusive educational system was introduced, accommodating individuals regardless of sex, age, nationality, or religious affiliation.

From an architectural perspective, this era witnessed the construction of numerous secular educational buildings, including public elementary schools, gymnasiums, and vocational institutions, alongside religious schools and religious-run schools open to public. These buildings were often strategically positioned within prominent urban areas or acted as catalysts for the development of new neighborhoods. Beyond their educational purpose, many of these structures assumed a vital social role, shaping the urban fabric and becoming cultural landmarks. Today, they are frequently recognized as national monuments and significant components of cultural heritage.

This paper explores the historical and social contexts of architecture serving educational purposes during Austro-Hungarian rule while focusing on its stylistic and structural characteristics. It presents a geographically diverse overview, featuring examples from cities such as Sarajevo, Mostar, and Banja Luka. The research highlights the schools' architectural features, their urban significance, and their broader impact on cityscapes, emphasizing their role in defining the social and architectural identity of Bosnia and Herzegovina during this pivotal period.

State schools in Austria and their surprising innovations (1900–1938)

Raphaela Hemetsberger (Austrian Academy of Sciences)

From 1908, as a newly created ministry, the Ministry of Public Works functioned as one of the most important state bodies for educational buildings in Austria until 1918. After the First World War, these construction tasks were assigned to the Ministry of Trade, Commerce, Industry and Civil Construction (1918–1938) in the First Republic. The state school buildings were planned, designed and realised together with the Ministry of Culture and Education, the Ministry of Finance and the respective governors or provincial administrations. The aim now is to find out how the architecture of the schools was determined. Which developments from the 19th century had a decisive influence? From 1920 onwards, reform pedagogy was also an important driving force for reforms and changes in educational architecture. The dissociation from the monarchy created new architectural paths.

In fact, a lot of thought had gone into this and architects, engineers and other institutions were increasingly trying to incorporate the theoretical approaches into practice. These innovations were intended to significantly raise the standards of school construction in order to provide better hygienic conditions for pupils and teachers.

State schools in the Lands of Bohemian Crown under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Works (1908–1918)

Jan Galeta (Czech Academy of Sciences)

During its short existence, the pre-war Austrian Ministry of Public Works was responsible for constructing and adapting buildings for several types of state secondary schools. Specifically, it was gymnasien, realgymnasien, gewerbeschulen and realschulen (better to stay in German terminology, as the translation is almost impracticable). My paper intends to present in a statistical abbreviation the extent of the Ministry's building activities in this field in the Crown Lands and to focus on two more specific topics. Firstly, the architecture of the school buildings, in which the Ministry was involved. Since it had its own architectural office and created projects, what did the Ministry's architects' production look like? And were there any differences in terms of architecture, if any, between the types of schools or compared to schools built by other entities? Secondly, there is the question of the position and role of the different actors in the planning and construction process – whether it was the Ministry itself, municipalities, higher administrative units, politicians, architects or even parents.

The school buildings of the Komenský School Association in Vienna 1923–1935: Modern school construction as an expression of Czech national identity

Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber (University of Vienna)

The contribution deals with the school buildings of the Czech minority in Vienna, which were built between 1923 and 1935. Due to the strong Czech immigration, Vienna was considered, next to Prague, the second largest Czech city in the Austro-Hungarian Empire around 1900. Nevertheless, the Czechs and their numerous associations, such as the Komenský School Association founded in 1872, received little support from the state at that time. Minorities were finally protected in the Peace Treaty of Saint Germain in 1919 and the bilateral Brno Treaty of 1920, which guaranteed equal rights in the areas of associations and education.

The visibility of the Komenský schools increased during a construction project (1923–1935), when modern schools were built in Vienna with the financial support of Czechoslovakia. They included kindergartens, elementary schools as well as secondary schools. Four of the five Komenský schools were designed by Wilhelm Baumgarten and Josef Hofbauer, graduates of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, who were considered school construction experts. Their functional reinforced concrete buildings avoid historicizing references or national symbolism. The multi-storey, mostly smooth perforated facades have large windows. The classrooms located on the street side are bright, the corridors are wide and have a high quality of stay. The inviting foyers and staircases are well lit. Design accents are created by the variety of materials and colors. All schools have kitchens and dining rooms as well as outdoor spaces. The large cinema halls or theatre rooms with separate entrances are unusual; the modern gymnasiums were located above them.

The five Komenský schools are a clear expression of a new sense of self-confidence of the Czech Minority. Since only a few schools were built in Vienna during the interwar period, the Komenský schools play an outstanding role in the development of modern, functional school architecture.

Construction of Schools for Czechoslovak Minority in Czechoslovakia

Barbora Řepková (Czech Academy of Sciences)

The accessibility of education in the national language within the Austro-Hungarian Empire was a highly politicised issue. While the right to it was legally guaranteed, many Czech-speaking communities in regions of the Bohemian lands where German was predominantly spoken encountered limitations in its practical attainability. The establishment of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918 thus presented an opportunity to rectify this situation, perceived as a historical injustice. Consequently, the responsibility for constructing and operating schools for locally determined language minorities was delegated to state-level institutions to circumvent potential local adversities. However paradoxical it may seem within the context of Czechoslovakia, in accordance with the indicated objective, the primary minority that benefited from these legislative changes and subsequent public investments were the Czech-speaking communities. This was not a marginal feat because the enacted legal measures, combined with the persistent demand for new minority school buildings, resulted in them becoming the most significant education-related building tasks undertaken by the new state. Therefore, this paper aims to present this geographically scattered yet robust sample of state-supported construction and to explore the questions it raises. What actors, policies, and processes were involved in ensuring the construction of these schools, and how did it affect their quantity, quality, or architectural form? Is their architecture a result of pragmatism and economising, or was it utilised to demonstrate the state's commitment to education or national pride? And on what basis can this even be assessed?