

“TO MAKE THE NAMES COMPLY  
WITH THE DEMANDS OF THE TIME”

The Change of Toponyms (Names of Settlements, Communities, Streets, Public Buildings, and Areas or Features of the Landscape) in the Bohemian Lands after 1945

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In the Bohemian lands, the alteration of toponyms was a process that took place in several stages, beginning with the end of World War I. It was completed after the ethnic German population had been expelled after 1945, and the communists had taken over power in 1948. The process of renaming settlements, streets and public venues was overseen in the late 1940s and the 1950s by several expert commissions, at first the Geographic Institute of the Armed Forces (Vojenský zeměpisný ústav) and the Topographical Commission of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Arts (Místopisné komise České akademie věd a umění), later belonging to the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (Československá akademie věd). Archivists, historians, geographers, hydrologists, and linguists all contributed to the work of the commissions. The aim of renaming was, in the first place, to assert historical and territorial claims. In contrast to cities, towns, and villages, when it came to renaming streets, squares and other public venues not only national, but also ideological considerations did come into play. Thus, the new names reflected political vagaries as well.

The symbolic repossession of the public space in the Bohemian lands by renaming places (in the broadest sense of the word), may be considered determined and successful. It was regarded by the Czech population at the time and it is regarded even now as just. It has, however, led to a considerable depletion of the historical wealth of place names and thus to a loss of historical memory.