

THE ORAVA DAM IN SLOVAKIA

The Influence of Changing Concepts of Environment on the Construction of Space

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The author starts with the observation that the majority of descriptions dealing with environmental history in state socialist countries present narratives of decline. Thus, pollution and extensive damage to the natural environment are viewed as typical of the system and as an important factor for state socialism having ultimately failed.

The history of the Orava dam demonstrates that the relationship between communist politics and nature was not as simple. It may be subdivided into three major periods: First accelerated modernisation, characterised by constant talk about improving life and by the idea that nature has to be defeated (1948 to the end of the 1950s), then a transitional period in which the use of nature for touristic purposes became a factor to be reckoned with (1960s and 1970s), and finally a period (starting with the late 1970s) in which the nature of a given region and the protection of the environment have gained a great deal of importance.

The fact that the upper part of the Orava river has been included in the Ramsar convention on the protection of humid landscapes proves that these efforts have enjoyed a considerable degree of success. Thus, at least on a local level, a new aspect has to be added to the environmental history of Central and Eastern Europe.