

“DO WE HAVE BUT THE WATER THAT FALLS FROM THE  
SKY?”

Continuities of Technocratic Thinking in Socialist Czechoslovakia Shown by the  
Example of the Danube-Oder-Elbe Channel Project

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When a society is to be modernized, among the prerequisites is a dependable supply of water for people, agriculture, and industry. As a consequence, modern technocratic schemes for future development have always dealt, among other things, with control and administration of water resources. In the case of Czechoslovakia, the plan to link three important rivers, thus forming a nationwide water system, became the symbol of these endeavors. The idea to construct a channel joining the rivers Danube, Oder (Czech: Odra), and Elbe (Czech: Labe), was first promoted at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and gained greater popularity in the 1930s. At the center of the whole story were the members of the bureaucracy regulating water supply and distribution. Adapting to changes in the economic, cultural and political

environment, they interpreted the channel scheme in a different way each time such a change occurred. They managed to keep it important even when socialist modernization was the order of the day. Only in the 1950s, when Stalinist productivism was the norm, was it temporarily shelved. Nor was it realized in the 1960s. But far from being abandoned, it remained part of the long-term planning that was to be realized as soon as the economic advantages of the channel would be proven. This serves to demonstrate that state socialism did not represent a turning point in the thinking about utilizing water resources.