

INTRODUCTION

Three years ago, on 22 April 2010 the Department of History and the Department of History of Art and Cultural Heritage, the University of Ostrava held the first international scientific conference of Ph.D. students of history and related sciences. It was preceded by the idea to organize an event for students in doctoral programs from all universities in this country but also from abroad so that the students could share their experiences and ideas from their own research and compare it with their colleagues from other universities.

The organization of the conference has always been completely in the hands of students who also initiated the idea. We have always tried to respect the principles of professional conferences of similar type and a lot of effort has been invested in the preparation. The participants from Czech universities are complemented by their colleagues from abroad, they present their papers and discuss them together in the English language. Ultimately, the professional participation has always resulted in publishing the articles in the conference proceedings.

Even this year, the team of organizers, traditionally consisting of Ph.D. students of history and art history, continued in this tradition and held the fourth conference, whose theme was *Where life once used to be, or The vanished places and sights*. Ten participants from the Czech Republic and three participants from Poland attended the conference, which was held at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ostrava. Such participation at the conference can be regarded as indication of a considerable interest in the topic, which covers the already vanished world of our everyday life.

The conference organizers meet at the beginning of October to come up with a new theme and it is always a significant event, which entails both uncertainty and fear. Will the theme be interesting enough? Will it secure abundant or poor attendance? How shall we formulate the theme, which although being narrowly defined, should provide a wide range of topics. And—what about timing, specialization, etc.? How shall we chose a title that does not discourage, a title that would not sound ordinary, uninteresting or that is not misleading or ambiguous, but at the same time it will be attractive for a wide range of postgraduate students of historical sub—disciplines? We hardly think about it, but nobody really knows, until the last moment, if anybody will register for the conference.

This time it was not different. Finally, we decided to give space to students, who reconstruct past places and phenomena that history recorded as an episode of something that people have forgotten, or something they are trying to forget. These students observe spaces, that used to play an entirely different role than they do today, phenomena that lost their force, memories that remained enchanted in written and visual materials, hidden from the sight of amateurs. While we, as organizers, have always somehow generally defined ideas of the theme, we are always surprised what a potential and a wide spectrum of views it eventually has. For this reason, we decided to arrange the contributions into coherent blocs to preserve the homogeneity of the conference. It is not easy to find a common category. Scientific research requires uncovering new emerging issues and new problems of its nature. Each of us tries

to go the opposite direction than just the categorical coherence and thematic similarities. Finally, we participate in scientific conferences to see how our colleagues approach a similar theme.

This publication, if the program based on the contributions of all participants permits, is trying to look at the problem of vanished places and phenomena. It is rather diverse and it can accommodate a whole range of problematic areas, which each of us is interested in. The individual contributions want to inform us about the possibilities that a research topic like this entails. We are interested in vanished cultural aspects, vanished sights, industrial facilities, religious traditions, buildings, gardens, railway lines and no doubt we could include here dozens of other examples that would always have one thing in common: They're no more what they once used to be.