



During the past three years a joint Czech/British team has been working to develop a planning strategy for Prague.

Walter Bor (left), an architect originally from Prague, describes the work of the joint team and his encouragement for a strategic plan since 1990.

A strategy for Prague

FROM TIME to time certain historic events in the lives of cities have a profound effect upon them and their citizens. In the case of London, it was the Great Fire of 1666, the Industrial Revolution and the Second World War. In recent decades it was the demise of the Port of London and the massive mixed use regeneration of this major part of East London, amounting to a whole new town within the city.

In the case of Prague, it was the mid-fourteenth century visionary plan for Prague by King Charles IV, the Counter-Reformation and establishment of the Austrian Empire after 1620, the 1918 revolution and the birth of the Czechoslovak Republic, the Communist putsch in 1948 and finally the Velvet Revolution. Fortunately, however, Prague's precious historic core has survived all these events almost intact.

Following the long-overdue regaining of its freedom after 50 years of Nazi/Communist dictatorships – which I frankly thought I would not live to see – Prague now has to cope with the difficult transition from a com-

mand to a market economy and its impact upon the inhabitants. This is a situation which needs a new kind of planning for Prague's future which would respond holistically to its many inter-related problems and opportunities with understanding and vision.

A full and sympathetic understanding was an essential precondition for formulating a development strategy for Prague's citizens who have had practically no say during the past five decades of authoritarian regimes which have also brought "planning" into disrepute.

The first task was therefore to restore people's confidence in the planning process; they had to be persuaded that this essential activity would be carried out not only for them but with them. A promising start has been made in this direction but there is still a long way to go towards full citizen participation.

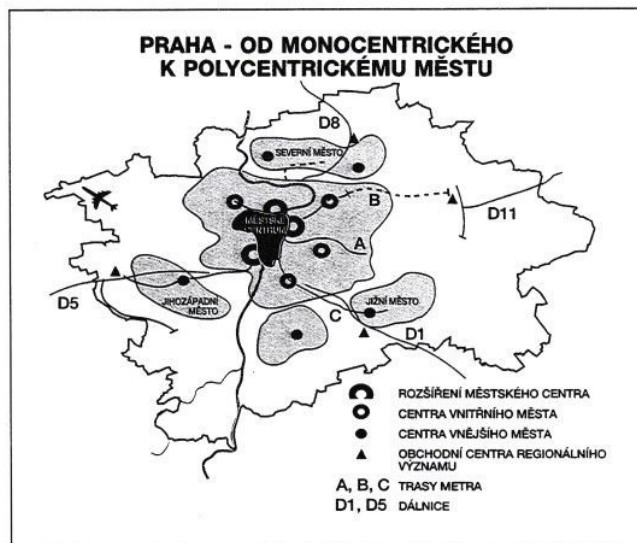
How did we get involved?

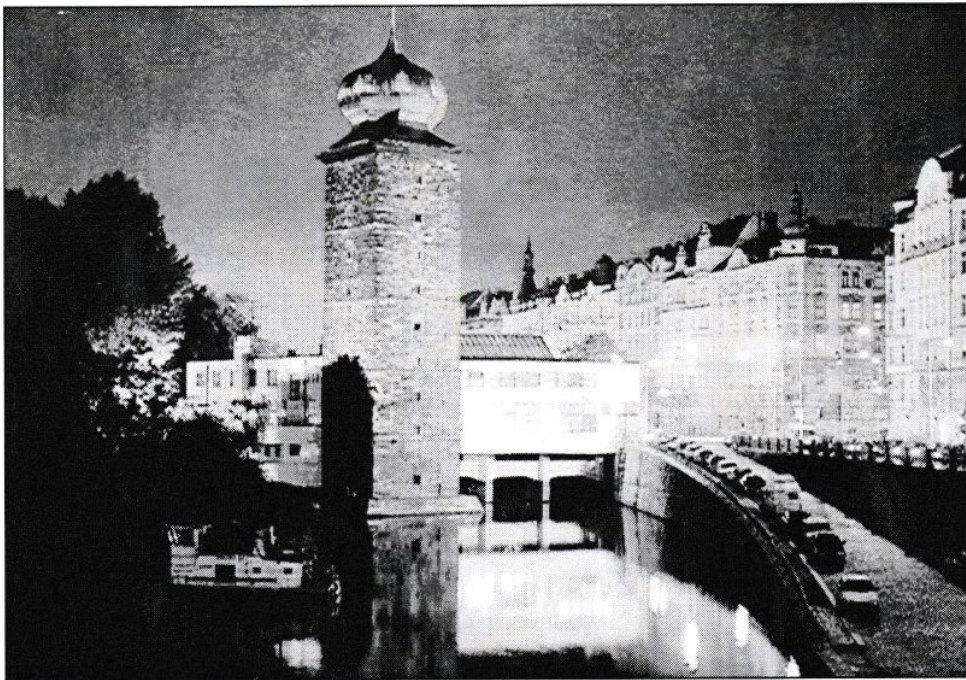
In June 1990 I was invited by the Chief Architect of Prague to help him with the planning

of the city. He saw his most urgent task in the updating the old land use development plan. I tried to persuade him during the following years with numerous reports and critiques, lectures and seminars, to start thinking about longer-term development strategies. These, I suggested, were urgently needed to guide

Prague through this difficult transitional period and provide the essential policy framework for a revised development plan.

However, the Chief Architect thought only in terms of site-specific land use zoning and colouring of maps. In any case, he countered, he was under great pressure to up-date the old devel-





Left: The Manes Building in Prague, designed by Professor Otakar Novotny

opment plan and he had neither the time nor the staff for any strategic planning.

While the Chief Architect's negative attitude to strategic planning was of course very disappointing, let us remember that Britain also had no strategic planning during the first two post-war decades. It was only in the mid 60s that the Minister's Planning Advisory Group proposed a new form of strategic planning which we called structure planning and which was subsequently enacted.

I was about to give up on strategic planning for Prague when some newly elected and enlightened city counsellors got to know about my efforts and recognised the urgent need for strategic planning.

The Chief Architect moved to an academic post, a new Prague Development Authority was established and a new director appointed. Within this new authority a Strategic Planning Section was created which has been led most successfully during the past three years by Dr Milan Turba.

At last the political will of the decision makers prevailed to embark upon the strategic planning process by the city for the city. In parallel with strategic planning the old development plan has been up-dated and the emerging strategic policies incorporated, as far as this was possible.

In 1995 Prague's Mayor Jan Koukal requested technical assistance from the British Know How Fund. A competition was held and the Llewelyn-Davies team was selected for the task. Joint work with the Czech team started in November 1995 and

stretched over two and a half years.

A partnership was formed between the Czech and British strategic planning teams and this partnership approach was then extended to other contributors to the planning process which took the form of a series of workshops and seminars in Prague.

In-depth discussions led to the consensus building between political representatives from the city and the local government, ministries, practitioners and academics from the public and private sectors as well as investors and developers. These contributors eventually amounted to 700 individuals.

The work in Prague was combined with periodic visits by the Czechs to UK authorities in different places to study various forms of strategic planning in practice. The draft report was produced by the Czech team, with the British teams' assistance. It was presented to the Prague City Council two months ago, when it was well received. The final report is due in the autumn of this year and will be followed at once by the first stage of the implementation process.

What is the plan about?

The strategic plan is first and foremost about the truly holistic approach we adopted. The strategic planning process started with the identification of Prague's strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This evaluation led to the construction of a policy framework of inter-related proposals for a wide range of aspects: eco-

nomic and social, environmental and spatial, administrative and managerial, institutional and legislative. Brought together, these policies will guide present-day Prague during this critical transitional period towards Prague in 2010 to 2020.

Prague has great strength as a city of culture and learning in the heart of Europe, with a uniquely beautiful and well-preserved historic core. However, this precious heritage is threatened by excessive commercialisation and the loss of much of the resident population. This over-concentration of business in the city centre is symptomatic of the strongly mono-centric structure of Prague.

The city is clearly in urgent need of internal decentralisation to achieve a poly-centric structure. This would ease commercial pressures on the centre, strengthen secondary centres and local identity. A tourism strategy also aims at relieving pressures on a small part of the historic core by guiding it to other historic parts in Prague as well as to a rich variety of interesting places readily reached from Prague.

Not nearly enough new affordable housing has been built while new housing policies were being developed. Also missing at present is a strategy for the city's substantial publicly owned assets. The city's administration and responsibilities are fragmented between too many authorities and the inherited legislation has not yet been adequately reformed. Furthermore, some massive and most deplorable development blunders have to be rectified as far as it is possible.

While Prague has a great opportunity to become the cultural centre of mid-Europe, the city has to remedy its environmental problems, such as its serious pollution for which the alarmingly proliferating use of private cars must take much of the blame.

The use of cars is therefore being progressively restricted and park/ride facilities provided. In this respect the traditional approach of demand/supply has to be replaced by demand management. For example, instead of just planning for the continuous growth of traffic, we should focus on how to reduce the very need to travel. Fortunately, Prague has a good and well-integrated public transport system of metro, trams and buses.

Even so, the weaning away of drivers from their cars still remains a key issue which is part of an environmental strategy with its major emphasis on the quality of the public realm.

Prague's most promising future lies in focusing on aspects in which the city excels: its unique historic heritage of world importance gives the city an irreplaceable individual identity with a thriving up-market cultural tourism.

Prague has been and remains a city of music. Amongst Prague's most positive characteristics are its citizens pragmatism, adaptability and alertness to new ideas and its skilled work force and talented professionals and artists.

A comprehensive policy framework will respond to these and many other positive as well as negative characteristics to guide Prague towards a promising and more substantial future.