



Original article

Photographic publications of the Ostrava-Karviná mines in the Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

Photographic publications played a key role in promoting coal mining in the Ostrava-Karviná region (OKR) and across the entire Czechoslovakian industry. Throughout the 20th century, these publications reflected the wider socio-political, economic and cultural contexts and served both documentary, ideological and economic purposes. Early photographic works often depicted mining as a symbol of industrial progress, reinforcing regional identity and economic ambitions. Over time, photography in this area evolved from simple illustrative material to a systematically structured medium used especially during the socialist period for ideological messages. After 1989 the transition to a market economy led to a decline in state-controlled publications on mining. In their place, free photographic work often focused on documenting the post-industrial transformation of the region, depicting themes of environmental change, industrial decline and cultural memory. This was a significant shift, where visual narratives no longer served the propaganda, but critically engaged with the history, heritage and socio-economic impact of mining. The aim of this article was to present the basic outlines of the hitherto unprocessed topic and, above all, to map all photographic publications related to the Ostrava-Karviná district in the Czech Republic. The research methodology was based on analysis, comparison and description of sources – of photographic publications. The results of the research was a basic overview of the published titles in the industrial region under study, which contributes to the understanding of contemporary thinking on the promotion of industry, and is nowadays an important reference to the industrial heritage in Central Europe.

KEY WORDS: photographic publications; Ostrava-Karviná mines; mining photography; visual propaganda; photographic archives; regional identity

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1. Introduction

Photographic publications represent one of the most important and effective means of visual communication. Its main content – photography – has managed to serve a variety of political, social and economic needs in a wide range of genres on the subject matter of coal mining throughout the 20th century. This text focuses on photographic promotional non-periodicals taken within the Ostrava-Karviná region (OKR), one of the most important areas of heavy industry in the Czech Republic. The topic of photographic publications has received

increasing attention in recent years. This is evidenced by extensive books compiling such publications across the world, from titles published in the mid-19th century to the present day. The most extensive book on this topic so far was published in the Czech Republic in 2018, namely HEITING (2018). In a global context, the books by Martin Parr are among the most important (PARR & BADGER, 2004, 2006, 2014). The book by Łukasz Gorczyca and Adam Mazur focused on photographic publications in a Central European context (GORCZYCA & MAZUR, 2019). Still, photographic publications or reflections on photography in the field of mining have been only

marginally developed in the Czech Republic. An introduction to the issue is outlined in the text *Hornictví v českých zemích ve fotografii a v dalších médiích* in **DURCZAK** (2023).

When analyzing the photographic publications of the Ostrava-Karviná mines and the related materials (individual photographs, postcards), a multi-layered methodological framework was chosen, combining compositional analysis, iconographic interpretation, thematic reading and contextualization of the photographic message. Each of these approaches was taken into account depending on

the type of publication, the time of its creation and the authorship of the photographs. The key indicators chosen for the methodology of photographic analysis are the time of creation, place of creation, aesthetic values, informational value and the thematic spectrum of the photographs. The author chose the method of qualitative research (research of archival materials and literature, work with primary image material, summarization of subjects for formal analysis – official books, postcards, and published photographs in print media). The locations of mines presented in photographic publications are shown in Fig. 1.

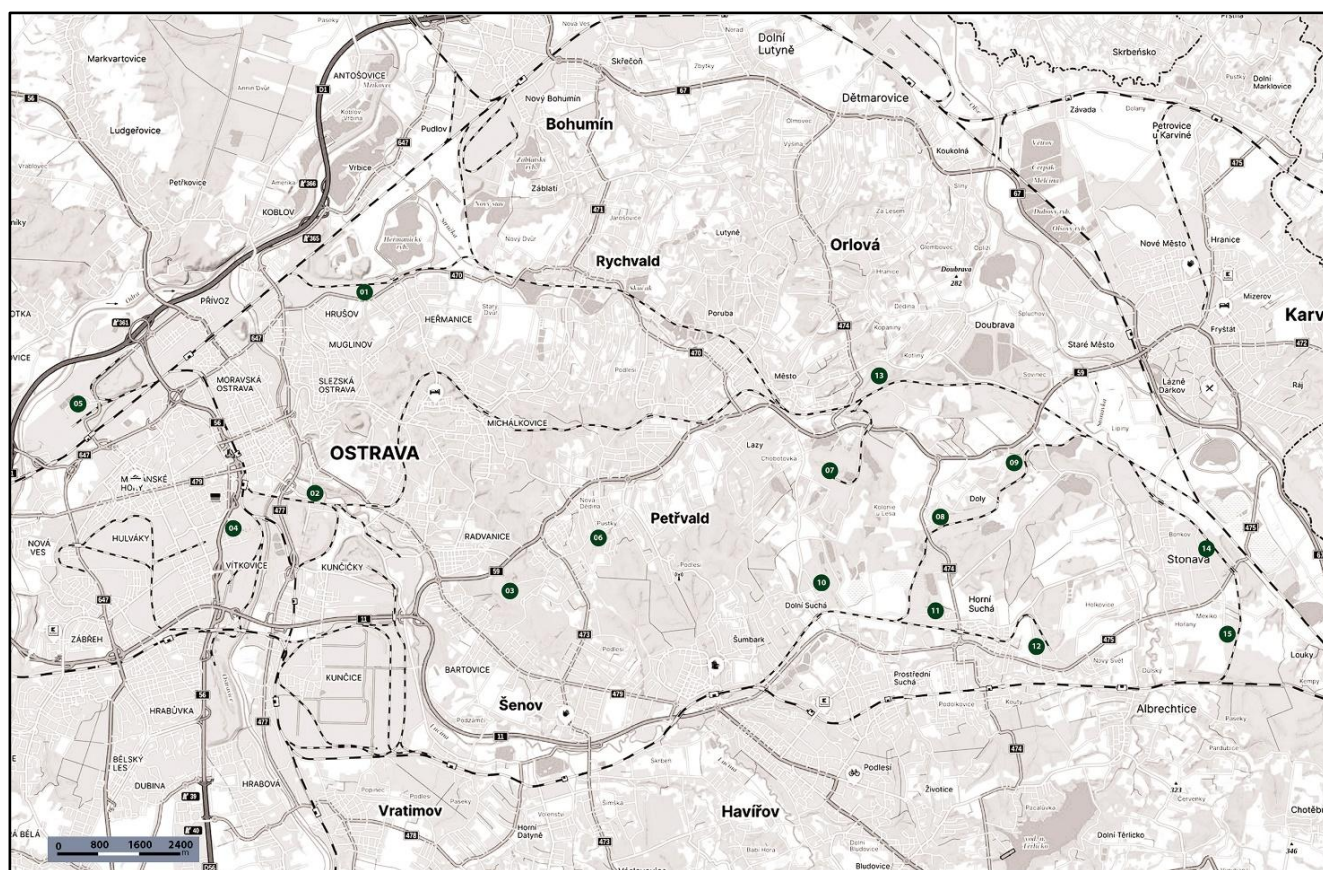


Fig. 1. Map with marked mines that have been featured in photographic publications

01 – Mine Heřmanice (Viktorie/Generalissimus Stalin II/Velkodůl Stalin/Rudý říjen II), Ostrava, 49.8622217N, 18.3168397E; **02** – Mine Zárubek (Jáma V/Hermenegild), Ostrava, 49.8265050N, 18.3015233E; **03** – Mine Ludvík, Ostrava, 49.8092144N, 18.3562317E; **04** – Mine Hlubina, Ostrava, 49.8213614N, 18.2782206E; **05** – Mine Jan Šverma (Ignát), Ostrava, 49.8431467N, 18.2361847E; **06** – Mine Pokrok (Habsburk/Fučík I), Petřvald, 49.8181886N, 18.3783189E; **07** – Mine Lazy (Nová jáma/Antonín Zápotocký), Orlová, 49.8293181N, 18.4443536E; **08** – Mine Barbora (Austria/Pilsudski/1. máj), Karviná, 49.8226711N, 18.4740533E; **09** – Mine Gabriela (UNRRA 1/Mír 1), Karviná, 49.8322311N, 18.4943242E; **10** – Mine Dukla (Císař František Josef/Suchá), Havířov, 49.8112011N, 18.4409431E; **11** – Mine František (President Gottwald 4), Horní Suchá, 49.8051169N, 18.4739503E; **12** – Mine 9. květen, Stonava, 49.8008661N, 18.5013931E; **13** – Mine Doubrava, 49.8477600N, 18.4575622E; **14** – Mine ČSM Sever, Stonava, 49.8175253N, 18.5485014E; **15** – Mine ČSM Jih, Stonava, 49.8019678N, 18.5548583E.

Throughout history, there have been changes of the names of individual mines. In brackets the names in use are given. At the same time, there have been merging of different mining operations, often resulting in to form a single large mine; the original names disappeared and the plants were numbered instead.

2. Photographic publications of the Ostrava-Karviná mines

In connection with the publication of photographic collections from the mining environment in the OKR in the form of a book, one of the first photographic publications of the Ostrava region ever, *A Guide to Moravian Ostrava and the Surrounding Area* (*Průvodce po Moravské Ostravě a okolí*, FADRUS & PODROUŽEK, 1902), is worth mentioning. Here, the largest space

in the full-page photographs is devoted to local mining (8 of the 15 photographs depict mining themes). The collection is dominated by overall shots of mining operations in the Ostrava and Karviná regions. Surprisingly, in the context of other contemporary and later published images, there is also a picture from the interior of a mining building or a group portrait of seventy miners (Fig. 2). Since then, the topic of mining has never received such extensive attention in regional guidebooks and their photographs.

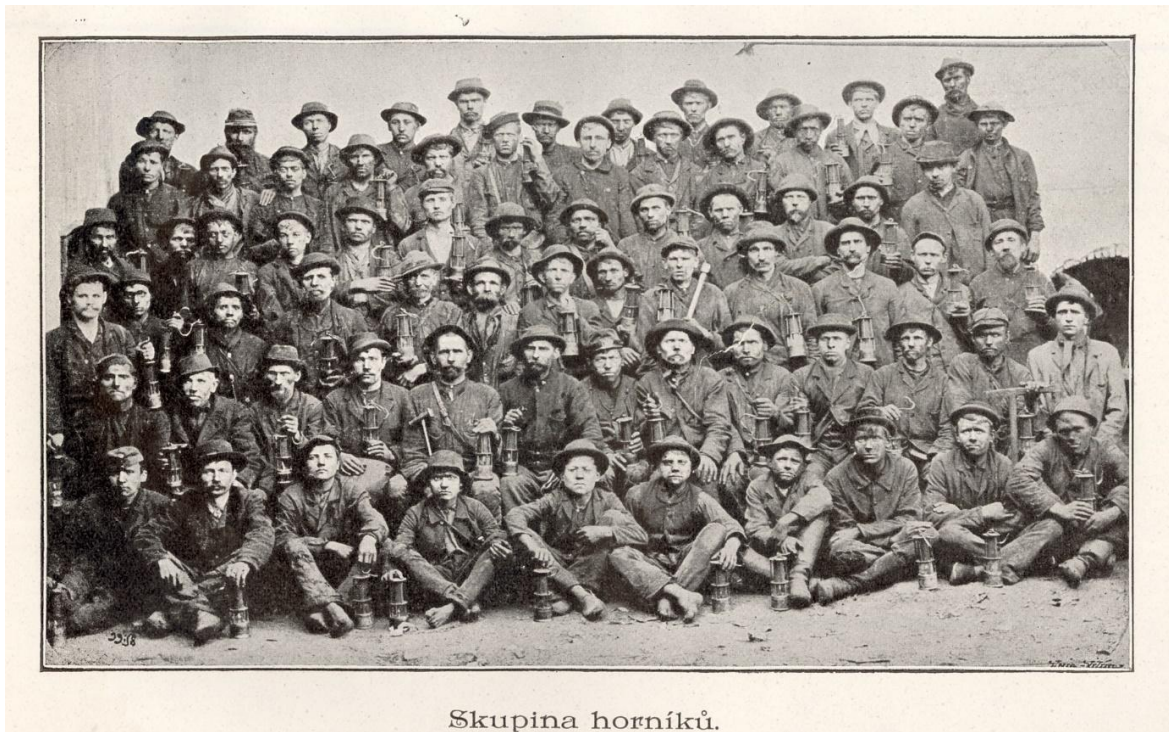


Fig. 2. A photograph from the publication *A Guide to Moravian Ostrava and the Surrounding Area*, 1902

At the same time, the idea persisted that the representative image of the city must be associated with mining and metallurgy. The first photographic album about Ostrava published in print, *Moravian Ostrava* (*Moravská Ostrava*, HŮLEK, 1925) from the 1920s with photographs by Karel Hůlek, contained a total of 13 industrial motifs out of 30 photographs, only two of them being about mining. For the very first time, mining is also interpreted here with a picture taken 600 metres deep in the mine, and not just with surface objects.

For a long time, photography in mine tunnels entailed considerable technical and craft difficulties. It was also for this reason that the atmosphere inside the regional mines in the mid-1920s was presented by Gustav Kafka's pen drawings in an album of 32 pictures entitled *From the Coal mines of Ostrava* (*Z uhelných dolů Ostravských*, KAFKA, 1925).

Historically, the most extensive publication on the local mining area was *Stone and Coal Mines in the Ostrava-Karviná Region* (*Kamenouhelné doly ostravsko-karvinského revíru*, 1928–1932) published successively in 1928–1932. The four-volume work, with more than 2,500 pages and a large number of photographic illustrations, which used text, graphs, diagrams, maps, and photographs, reflected the historical development, geological and mining, technical or working conditions of the local deep mining, while simultaneously dealing with its social circumstances, including housing, health care or insurance. In addition to views of mining operations, the photographs in this series of books offered depictions of mining residential colonies (or miners' colonies, miners' housing, pit villages, or company towns, depending on the region) were planned residential areas built to house miners and their

families near industrial or mining sites. These colonies typically featured uniform housing, basic infrastructure, and communal amenities such as schools, shops, and recreational facilities. They were usually situated close to the mining pits or plants to reduce commuting time and maintain labour discipline.

The coal mining environment in the local quarry has become an inseparable part of the content of local history photographic books of Northern Moravia and Silesia. It was only in the 1950s that true photographic publications of a local history and promotional nature, in which photography ceased to be a mere illustration and became a unique carrier of the content of the entire work, began to appear in Czechoslovakia. The first book of this kind – *Ostrava*

Region in Photographs (Ostravsko ve fotografií) – was devoted to the entire Ostrava region and was published in 1958 (ZÁVADA, 1958). The more politically sober and essentially authorial theme of deep coal mining occupied a more prominent place in the still extremely popular photographic book *Colourful Ostrava (Ostrava barevná, KRASL & KUBÍČEK, 1962; Fig. 3)* by František Krasl, where the introductory part of the picture section entitled “Coal” makes up a full third of the book's content between the other two chapters” Steel” and “City”. Such a thematic narrowly profiled book clearly testified to the importance of industry in Ostrava. *Colourful Ostrava* was the first photographic book devoted separately to the city of Ostrava and one of the first full-colour photographic books in Czechoslovakia.



Fig. 3. Photographs from the publication *Colourful Ostrava*, 1962

From the beginning of the 1950s, photographic local history books about the whole of Czechoslovakia were also published to a greater extent. The images here were thematically varied – from art-historical monuments, natural subjects, monuments of large cities to more vivid documentary and reportage shots. Each subject was represented by a typical city or region. In contrast to such local pictorial histories, representation of the Ostrava and Karviná regions and the motifs used to portray them, were determined by the main position of this area as the base of the Czechoslovak heavy industry. Traditionally,

Ostrava, Karviná, Havířov or the Ostrava Region or later the North Moravian Region were represented by photographs of mines, iron works or machine industry. A similar situation was also typical for pictorial periodicals. Already in the period of the First Republic, photographic magazines such as *Colourful Week (Pestrý týden)* or *The World in Pictures (Svět v obrazech)* were accompanied by visually successful examples of photojournalism or individual photographs of the Ostrava and Karviná mines.

In the 1970s and 1980s there was an increase in the number of published regional local history

books, but their quality was very variable. Heavy industry and its key sector, mining, continued to be an integral part of their content. Photographic books of the entire Ostrava or North Moravia region were intended to present not only the material essence of mining enterprises, but above all to show the importance of work in the life of the miners of Ostrava and Karviná.

Pictorial books with larger photographic collections focused exclusively on the Ostrava-Karviná mining industry were produced only since the 1960s. Their initiator and publisher was the Ostrava-Karviná Mines company (OKM). Over the entire history of the OKM, a total of three photographic books were devoted to their comprehensive image, which were also produced within a single decade. They served to fulfil political and labour goals, for which the management of the enterprise was content to compile a photographic collection according to the ideologically expected content scheme using superficial documentary and often poor-quality images. In terms of creativity, neither the craft nor the content of the photographs was welcome; on the contrary, the images had to be simple in order to make their interpretation unambiguous. The absence of a professional editorial base resulted in books that lacked quality photograph selection and systematic editing. The authorial contribution of the photographer was suppressed, and the books' image set was usually compiled from collected photographs by several authors. The key motif was the figure of the heroic miner, his impeccable work ethic and his well-deserved rest and facilities in the form of modern housing. This was the spirit in which the above-mentioned trio of publications, that is *Ostrava-Karviná Mines* (*Ostravsko-karvinské doly*, 1966), *Coal and People* (*Uhlí a lidé*, DOPITA, 1974; Fig. 4) and *Ostrava-Karviná Mining District* (*Ostravsko-karvinský revír*, 1977) were written. Even the politically, socially and culturally more liberal 1960s failed to influence the first of these books from 1966 in a more distinctive and artistic way. Published in the same year, the photographic book of the related Czechoslovak enterprise titled *The North Bohemian Brown Coal Region in Photographs* (*Severočeský hnědouhelný revír ve fotografii*, BRYCHTA, 1966) was much better in this respect. Here, a single photographer, O. Novák, was able to interpret the topic of opencast brown coal mining in many of his photographs directly and with a strong use of the dark atmosphere of early evening shots, close-up views or visually sophisticated landscape scenes.



Fig. 4. Photographs from the publication *Coal and People*, 1974

Less extensive photographic publications were then published in the OKR environment by the promotional departments of individual mining plants, including local non-mining organisations. In this respect, it is noteworthy that some mines had a relatively large production of this type of promotional print, meanwhile other mines did not issue a single photographic publication. Approximately fifty such stereotypically conceived ideological promotional publications with a touch of the typical normalisation ethos were produced between the early 1960s and the end of the 1980s. (The exact number of photographic publications issued cannot be determined. The publications were published in closed editions and were not usually sent to public libraries. The author of this article has drawn on the collection of the Diamo Archive (a collection taken over from the OKM archive), which he considers to be as complete as possible. In addition to the three more comprehensive photographic books that took into consideration the entire OKM enterprise (1966, 1974, 1977), the publications were usually devoted to a specific mine, but photographic publications were also published about other OKM subsidiaries – the Ostrava-Karviná Coking Plant, OKR Housing Estate Administration, OKR Transport). The structure of these publications was generally fixed. The text part included the historical development of the mine, its economic statistics, socialist competition or a list of political orders. The pictorial part was

devoted to portraits and arranged shots of the most successful workers, views of the plant, and also depicted company schools, recreation centres, and other company social benefits. The most frequent occasion for such a publication was the anniversary of the founding of a mine. As a rule, books produced by the OKM had very limited circulation information; for instance, the year of publication was rarely mentioned. All OKM photographic books were published for special purposes and were therefore not intended for retail sale and served exclusively as a gift item to strengthen the company's economic and political position. Another role of the OKM's publications was to maintain and strengthen the work commitment of existing miners, to recruit new labour and to attract young apprentices to the mining trade. The title of the publications was often based on the name of the mine, but sometimes even rather absurd pseudo-romantic titles such as *Charles in Wonderland* or *ČSM Mine Morning* (*Karel v říšidivů* or *Jitro dolu ČSM* in Czech) appeared. Such titles, including established schemes, depicting for example photographic views of flowers and mining towers situated in their background, represented an attempt to poeticize and optimize the difficult working environment.

A much more progressive pictorial publication drawing on the environment of the Ostrava-Karviná mines was *The Singing of Coal* (*Zpěv uhlí*, KRASL & MALÝ, 1986; Fig. 5) with photographs by František Krasl, who in this case continued the distinctive view of his *Colourful Ostrava* (*Ostrava barevná*), a quarter of a century younger. From the whole spectrum of mining subjects, the book was practically limited to images in the subsurface sector of the mine. The reason for this was probably to preserve anonymity (the photographs in the book actually have no captions), as the publication was intended to represent all underground mines in Czechoslovakia. Considering Krasl's activities in the Ostrava region, it is likely that he took most of the photographs in the OKM environment. In his photographs from the depths of the earth, Krasl made excellent use of the natural light of the environment as both the source and pictorial element – the miners' lanterns, lights of mining locomotives or even cigarettes. Dramatic shots in mine corridors, however, in the context of the time, could evoke an overly gloomy atmosphere, which was quite different from the shallow but more optimistic images of other artists. Based on contemporary photographic ideas, this approach had been criticised by the publicist

Ladislav Křivánek much earlier, in relation to Krasl's first large-scale exhibition in 1960. "*Let us hope that these dark areas will no longer tempt Krasl, having verified his possibilities here. For there is a danger hidden in them that could result in unhealthy naturalism; some images, such as The Miner with a Cigarette, already point in this direction.*" (KŘIVÁNEK, 1961). From the point of view of its content, Krasl created one of the most expressive publications of the official direction during the entire period of the Czechoslovak totalitarian years. What is really problematic about the book is its unintentionally distorted colour scheme, where the aforementioned symphony of colours, in this case, is not a symbolic consonance, but a complete disharmony and departure from the real colours. Many of the shots have an undue green tinge and the dark mine spaces are in some cases in appropriately lightened by a kind of false glow. Krasl himself felt the resulting book was tragic and considered it the worst book reproduction of his colour photographs.

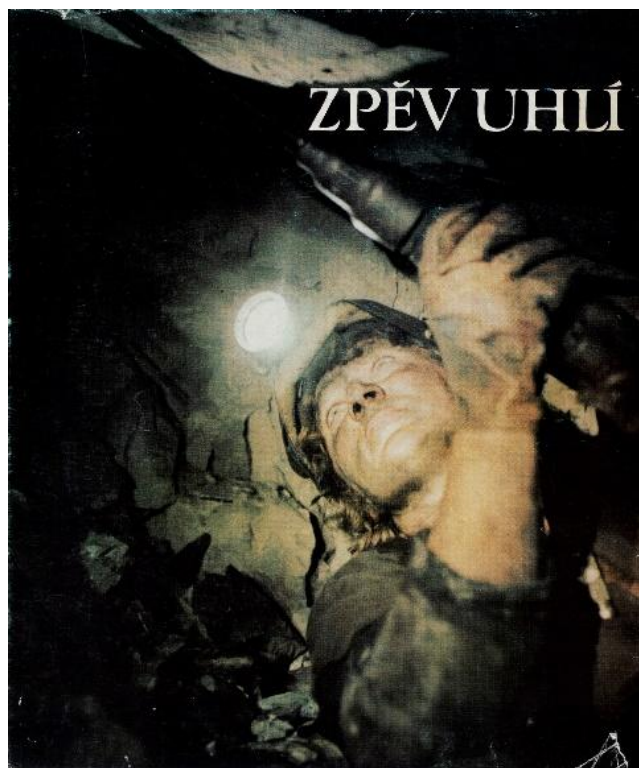


Fig. 5. The cover of the publication *The Singing of Coal*, 1986

With the change of political, economic and social conditions after 1989, the editorial activity in its current spirit logically disappeared. While the number of specialist and popular scientific publications on the OKR increased significantly, the creation of new photographic publications virtually stopped. (Among

the photographic publications about the OKR, only *In the Footsteps of OKD/ Po stopách OKD*, (SÍBRT, 2012) or Ostravsko-Karvinsko (SIKULA, 2006) can be mentioned). However, the motif of coal mining and its transformation in the post-communist period continued to persist in more broadly themed regional photographic books.

One of the youngest photographic publications from the OKR environment is *Scattered Memory. The Postmining Landscape of the Karviná Region* (*Roztroušená paměť. Pohornická krajina Karvinska*, SIOSTRZONEK, 2020). It attempts to present the preserved technical mining monuments and cultural heritage, as well as the impact of coal mining in the present-day Karviná 2-Doly area and its surroundings in a distinctive manner. It focuses on the original town of Karviná, i.e. the centre of life, culture and mining activity from the mid-19th century until the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, when the buildings were gradually demolished. Each of the trio of photographers involved – Ondřej Durczak, Arkadiusz Gola and Lukáš Horký – were individually photographing here over a period of months to years to record the torsos of the last industrial and civil buildings, the devastation of the landscape and human settlements. The publication became one of the sub-projects of the POHO 2030 transformation programme seeking a new role for the post-industrial landscape of Karviná.

The last photographic book so far and simultaneously the most extensive publication of its kind in the OKR is a book by the author of this article titled *Down to the Mines! A Photographic Album of the Industrial and Cultural Heritage of Coal Mining in the Ostrava-Karviná Region* (*Vzhůru do dolů! Fotografické album průmyslového a kulturního dědictví uhelného hornictví ostravsko-karvinského revíru*, DURCZAK, 2023). Through more than 450 photographs, the book commemorates selected characteristic phenomena of OKR deep mining. The principal motif in the book is the surface structures of the mines – individual mines, but also coke ovens, slag heaps, mining cable cars and colonies, company recreation centres, cultural houses, mining artworks. These themes are presented by archival photographs and postcards dating from the beginning of the 20th century (The source of the archival photographs is mainly the Ostrava Museum and the Diamo Archive, where the collections of the former OKM company are concentrated) but also by the author's photographs taken between 2011 and 2023. In the case of these

new views, the author has most often chosen a descriptive documentary approach in order to depict the technical beauty of the photographed technical monuments in an unbiased way, and to compare how they have changed over many decades. The most significant shift from the previous photographic books, however, is the change in perspective on local mining. Almost all of the photographs show the defunct mines that have been turned into technical monuments or have been and are being devastated and are therefore in danger of disappearing. For the first time, the negative aspects of mining, such as deaths in the mines and the demolition of mining towers, are also dealt with in the book. Both the archival and recently taken photographs in the book thus become a memento of mining glory. In the year of the publication of *Down to the Mines!*, a paperback photographic publication *Fajront. Mining History in Family Albums* (*Fajront. Hornická historie v rodinných albech*, 2023) was also published, which was not meant to be sold, drawing on collected and unpublished photographs of miners. Covers of photographic publications are shown in Figures 6-8.

Apart from all photographic publications, individual photographs from the mining environment were published as photographic postcards in the period from the end of the 19th century until the 1960s. This kind of printed material is generally understood to be a souvenir of a place visited or a greeting giving the addressee a glimpse of a distant location. In the case of Ostrava and Karviná, the pictures of mines, slag heaps or mining cable cars served to illustrate the identity of the region and, at the same time, as a subject-specific addition to the mosaic of common urban architectural motifs. It was these landscape monuments in the form of mining towers, as purpose-built structures of an aesthetic nature, that became the most frequent postcard motif. The presence of a ubiquitous industry was taken for granted by the inhabitants of Ostrava and Karviná. For foreign visitors, by contrast, it represented a fascinating and almost illusory world. The postcard could be perceived as a means of preserving the experience of the industrial region. The photographers' names were only mentioned on the back of the postcards from the 1950s onwards. Zdeněk Menec (1914–1998), who worked for the Orbis publishing house, was the most frequently represented author in the postcards of Ostrava.



Fig. 6 A. Covers of photographic publications of OKR Mines (marked on the map Fig. 1, numbers in brackets)
1 – Důl Rudý Říjen Ostrava, 1962; **2** – Důl Rudý Říjen Ostrava-Heřmanice, undated; **3** – Staň se horníkem Dolu Stalin v Ostravě-Heřmanicích, undated; **4** – Důl Rudý Říjen Ostrava-Heřmanice, 1972; **5** – Staň se horníkem Dolu Zárubek, 1963; **6** – Historie Dolu Ludvík, 1988; **7** – Důl Hlubina, [1978]; **8** – Důl Hlubina, [1985]; **9** – Důl Jan Šverma Ostrava, [1975]; **10** – Historie Dolu Julius Fučík, [1968]; **11** – Důl Antonín Zápotocký, 1980; **12** – Důl Antonín Zápotocký, Orlová, undated; **13** – Důl Antonín Zápotocký, undated



Fig. 6 B. Covers of photographic publications of OKR Mines (marked on the map Fig. 1, numbers in brackets)
14 – ...a kdo je víc? [book of 1. máj Minein Karviná], 1969; **15** – [book of 1. máj Mine in Karviná], 1971; **16** – Důl 1. máj Karviná, 1978; **17** – Důl 1. máj Karviná, undated; **18** – Karel v říši divů [publikace Dolu 1. máj Karviná], undated; **19** – Důl 1. máj, undated; **20** – Důl Dukla, n. p. Havířov, [1971]; **21** – [book of Dukla Mine in Havířov], 1979; **22** – [book of President Gottwald Mine in Horní Suchá], 1969; **23** – Mládežnická brigáda [book of President Gottwald Mine in Horní Suchá], 1981; **24** – 75 let Dolu President Gottwald, 1985; **25** – Důl Prezident Gottwald Horní Suchá, undated



Fig. 6 C. Covers of photographic publications of OKR Mines (marked on the map Fig. 1, numbers in brackets)
26 – Důl 9. květen, k. p. Stonava, [1982]; **27** – Důl 9. květen, [1985]; **28** – Důl 9. květen, [1990]; **29** – Důl Doubrava. 165 let, 1987; **30** – Důl Doubrava, undated; **31** – Mládí Dolu ČSM, 1979; **32** – Jitro Dolu ČSM, 1983; **33** – Důl ČSM. 25, 1983; **34** – Důl ČSM. 30, [1988]

Besides the Ostrava-Karviná mines, the largest heavy industry enterprises in the respective region included the metallurgical and engineering enterprises Vítkovice Ironworks (founded in 1828), Nová hut' (founded in 1952) and Třinec Ironworks (founded in 1839). These naturally had their own promotional departments and developed advertising as well. Of these, Ostrava's Vítkovice Ironworks had the most widespread promotion, publishing printed matter and promotional items of various kinds using modern technologies from the end of the 19th century. Many

of the photographic prints issued even during the Czechoslovak totalitarian years were very imaginative in content and design. Among the entire production of this company, *Human Labour in Ironworks* (*Lidská práce v železárnách*, FEDERER, 1938) can be mentioned, together with *Vítkovice* (ŠTREIT, 2008), which are among our best photographic collections from the industrial environment of the 20th century. The topic of photographic prints of the Vítkovice Ironworks is covered in the book *Fotografické publikace Vítkovických železáren* (DURCZAK, 2018).



Fig. 7. Covers of photographic books of other OKR enterprises

35 – *Ostravskokarvinské koksovny*, [1975]; 36 – *Volají vás Ostravskokarvinské koksovny*, undated; 37 – *OKR Doprava 25 let. 1952–1977*, [1977]; 38 – *30 let k. p. Výstavba ostravskokarvinských dolů*, 1981; 39 – *20 let Úpraven uhlí. Důl 9. květen, K. P., Stonava*, [1984]; 40 – *Ostroj Opava*, [1988]; 41 – *OKR – Správa sídlišť*, undated

3. Mining as the subject of free photographic works of authors from the Ostrava and Karviná region

Outside the official sphere, many authors photographed mining themes as an inseparable part of the atmosphere of the industrial cities of Ostrava, Karviná, Havířov and their surroundings. In the Ostrava and Karviná region, in the field of social documentary and reportage photography, these were, for example, Viktor Kolář, Sr. (1898–1971), Gustav Aulehla (1931–2021), Květoslav Kubala (1928–2011) or Milan Pitlach (1943–2021). Viktor Kolář (born 1941), the most prominent figure in regional photography, also photographed miners, Ostrava inhabitants and their everyday and working environment as part of his independent work from the 1960s onwards. He excellently captured the fate of the inhabitants of Ostrava living among the chimneys, furnaces and mining towers. The chain dressing rooms, mining

cable cars, slag heaps, sludge tanks, beer halls, miners' days and colonies, together with the bizarre figures of the local people (strange-looking, wearing odd clothing, carrying unusual objects) formed a bitterly disillusioning, but all the more authentic view in the author's unmistakably surreal and anecdotal presentation in opposition to the official propaganda. Since the 1960s, he has published individual images in his photographic exhibitions, monographs and magazines. The local landscape, with a focus on sludge tanks, slag heaps and other traces of mining, was photographed by Rudolf Janda (1907–2000), Bohuslav Růžička (1923–1993), Miloš Polášek (1939–2017), Fedor Gabčan (born 1940), Petr Sikula (born 1941), Vojtěch Bartek (1942–2013) and Antonín Válek (1942–2019). In addition to its visual appeal, the landscape destroyed by mining was perceived by these photographers as an ecological problem, which they were already pointing out through their photographs in the 1970s. For some of these artists, post-

industrial landscapes were a means of further artistic stylisation. For instance, Petr Sikula incorporated the female nude into the foreground of his photographs, while Bohuslav Růžička found abstract patterns in the soil of slag heaps and slag sludge tanks.

From the end of the 1950s onwards, the aforementioned North Moravian photographer František Krasl (1912–1998) walked the line between authorial work and commissioned photography. He applied his artistic photographic ambitions even in non-

photogenic mine tunnels hundreds of metres underground. There, in the dim artificial light of mining lamps, he used long exposure times and achieved artistic and dramatic expression through motion blur and luminography. He was also very good at photography in urban environments, where he skilfully incorporated mining scenery in the form of towers, slag heaps, mining cable cars or coke ovens into the image of urbanism.



Fig. 8. Covers of photographic books about OKR

42 – *Ostravsko-karvinské doly*, 1966; 43 – *Uhlí a lidé*, 1974; 44 – *Ostravsko-karvinský revír*, [1977]; 45 – *Ostravsko-karvinský revír od A do Z*, 1979; 46 – *Tvoje budoucnost je v OKR*, undated; 47 – *Ostravskokarvinský revír Ostrava*, undated; 48 – *Roztroušená paměť. Pohornická krajina Karvinska*, 2020; 49 – *Vzhůru do dolů!*, 2023

4. Mining in photography in Czech lands

Much more artistically valuable photographs of coal mining were taken in our country outside the Ostrava-Karviná district. (Among the photographic publications devoted to mining in the European context, the very inventive Dutch photographic publication JESSE, [1953] can be referred to. In terms of distinctive authorship, the German pioneers of conceptual photography, Bernd and Hilla Becher, contributed to the subject matter by photographing not only various architectural industrial monuments but also mine towers, e.g. BECHER, 2010. In the region of Upper Silesia, i.e. in the majority of the Upper Silesian coal basin, the Polish photographer Arkadiusz Gola (born 1972) has been photographing for several decades. He published one of his collections on mining in the book GOLA, 2016.). Imaginative photographs were also taken in the official political promotion of the mines. One of the first systematic documentations of mining activities in Czech lands was a series of photographs by Jaroslav Kmódras. Between 1910 and 1912, he created a cycle accurately documenting the activities of the Mayrau mine in Vinařice near Kladno (see PICEK, 1994). František Josef Rež (1888–1969) also took photographs in the Kladno mines. The industrial photographer Vladimír Hipman (1908–1976) took carefully composed, technically perfect and artistically valuable photographs of mining in our country from the mid-1930s as well. The North Bohemian Brown Coal Mines operated in the Most region, and shortly after the war and their nationalisation a photographic brochure entitled *Nationalized Brown Coal Mines in Northern Bohemia (Znárodněné severočeské hnědoudolné doly*, 1946) was published, accompanied by photographs by Hipman. The book *The North Bohemian Brown Coal Region in Photographs* (BRYCHTA, 1966), published during the period of the totalitarian regime, was also of high artistic value. But this is far from being true of the promotional publication published several years later by the same company, *Severočeský hnědouhelný revír (Severočeský hnědouhelný revír*, 1973), which was a typical example of the significant aesthetic and content decline of books in the times of the so-termed normalisation. In the post-1989 period, a space was created for reflection on the changes in the mining industry of the past decades. The rich archival material was used, for example, by the authors of the book *Photographs and Postcards of Brown Coal Underground Mines in the Ústí nad Labem Region (Fotografie a pohlednice*

hnědouhelných hlubinných dolů Ústeckého kraje, ZÍCHA, 2005).

Other valuable photographic collections were created as part of the independent work of some Czech photographers. One of the strongest in terms of art and content is the series *Severní krajina* by our most important 20th century photographer Josef Sudek (1896–1976). The mining-ravaged places of Northwest Bohemia in Sudek's romantic pictorial manuscript were not published in book form until long after the author's death under the title *A Sad Landscape: Northwestern Bohemia, 1957–1962 (Smutná krajina: severozápadní Čechy 1957–1962, SUDEK*, 1999). The book as a project was supposed to be published in the 1960s, but due to its bleakness, in the end, it was not carried out.

The post-Soviet political and economic situation as well as the modern thinking and photographic work in the coal mining industry became a prerequisite for new topics to emerge together with modern forms of their processing. From the prevailing ideological promotion of mining activities of the state-controlled economy, collections on the negative effects of mining newly shifted towards publishing individual photographers' distinctive projects. One of the main ones was the devastation of the landscape, which is best demonstrated pictorially in the artistic documentation of opencast brown coal mining.

The most historically significant and completely original photographic work in the field of Czech mining was created in 1990–1994 by Josef Koudelka (born 1938), our leading documentary photographer of world-class quality. With admirable documentary and artistic creativity, he recorded the brown coal mining landscape of the Podkrušnohoří region, supposedly the most devastated area in Europe. Koudelka's specific approach provided a unique and evocative view symbolizing not only ecological destruction, but also bringing deeper subtexts of meaning. Although he used his talents as a reporter and documentary photographer to record material objects in the landscape, his photographs tend to be primarily social. They juxtapose the backdrops of destroyed urbanism of towns and villages with fragments of mining. In addition to the impressive visual aspect, the collection has an eloquent socio-logical and environmental significance. In 1994 Koudelka's work was published in the book *Podkrušnohoří, A Black Triangle: Photographs 1990–1994 (Černý trojúhelník, Podkrušnohoří: Fotografie 1990–1994, KOUDELKA*, 1994).

A more humanities-oriented documentary series in the area of the North Bohemian mines was created from the 1990s by the photographer Ibra Ibrahimovič (1967–2024). (see [IBRAHIMOVIČ, 1997](#)). The gradual phasing out of underground mining meant a motivation for some authors to capture the last moments of miners' activities in photographs. In 1994, photographers Dana Kyndrová (born 1955), Zdeněk Lhoták (born 1949), Michal Hladík (born 1962), Ján Rečo (born 1948) and Petr Rošický (born 1959) took specific documentary and portrait photographs as part of the creative workshop "Miners", thus capturing the last years of mining at the Mayrau mine in Kladno. (see the catalogue *Horníci: fotografická dílna Kladno*, 1994). The initiator of this project was the Kladno photographer Jiří Hanke (born 1944), who himself documented the life of the mining town of Kladno for decades.

5. Conclusions

This article focuses on photographic books dedicated to the Ostrava-Karviná mining district (Ostrava-Karviná region, OKR). Mining motifs from this district first appeared as part of printed photographic albums, complementing views of urban architecture and landscapes. This concept persisted throughout the first half of the 20th century. At that time, such publications served as illustrated guides to the city, as well as souvenirs and printed materials reinforcing the importance of the industrial region.

Separate books devoted exclusively to the OKR with more extensive photographic collections did not appear until the 1960s. None of these publications managed to fully exploit the potential of the artistically progressive and socially liberal period of the Czechoslovak 1960s. From the following decade onwards, stereotypically conceived ideological propaganda publications with a touch of the typical normalisation ethos began to appear. The photographs were deliberately superficial in order to provide an unambiguous interpretation – a presentation of difficult yet important and well-paid work, and at the same time the favourable conditions of mine workers. More extensive publications devoted to the entire local coal mining area were published, as well as less comprehensive catalogues of individual mining plants. These publications were based on established photographic schemes and represented an effort to poeticise and idealise the difficult working environment.

As a matter of fact, the above mentioned characteristics were not unique to local publications, but were also generally common to promotional publications of other industrial plants in Czechoslovakia. Until 1989, these publications were produced exclusively in limited editions – they were not sold – but served as (often unwanted) gifts to important political and business partners, as recruitment manuals and catalogues for new workers. However, the main purpose of such books was to fulfil the ideological requirements of the Communist Party. The frequency of production (the number of different titles and their print runs) and the political responsibility of such publications was high. As the mines were part of heavy industry, which was a key economic sector in Czechoslovakia at the time, they must have been properly promoted.

Among the many artistically uninteresting and idealized photographs, there was one exception in the region. The most prominent regional author who successfully combined the official and artistic aspects of photography was František Krasl. He used the light, motion blur and unusual compositions in an artistic and even experimental way. Nevertheless, in the context of the time, his dramatic photographs taken in mine tunnels could evoke an overly gloomy atmosphere, which was completely different from the shallow but more optimistic images of other authors.

Postcards were also a very important visual medium in this context. Images of mines, slag heaps and cable cars served to illustrate the identity of the region and at the same time as a thematically specific addition to the mosaic of common urban architectural motifs. It was precisely these landscape monuments in the form of mining towers, as functional structures of an aesthetic nature, that became the most common postcard motif. The ubiquitous industry was a matter of course for the inhabitants of the Ostrava and Karviná areas. For foreign visitors, by contrast, it represented a fascinating and almost illusory world. Postcards could be a means of preserving experiences from the industrial region.

After 1989, there was room for a non-idealized reflection on the changes in the mining industry over the past decades. The most significant shift from previous photographic books was the change in perspective on local mining. For the first time, books also published the negative aspects of mining, such as deaths in mines, the demolition of mining towers and the negative impact of mining

on the landscape. One of the latest publications on local coal mining is the book *Scattered Memory. The Postmining Landscape of the Karviná Region* (SIOSTRZONEK, 2020), which attempts to present the preserved technical mining monuments and cultural heritage in a unique way, as well as the impact of coal mining in today's Karviná 2-Doly area and its surroundings. The publication has become one of the sub-projects of the POHO 2030 transformation programme, which seeks a new role for the post-industrial landscape of Karviná. The latest photographic book and also the most extensive publication of its kind in the OKR is the book by the author of this article entitled *Down to the Mines! (Vzhůru do dolů!)*, DURCZAK, 2023), drawing on many previously unpublished photographs – both archival and the author's own.

The gradual decline of underground mining in the 1990s motivated some Czech authors to photographically capture the last moments of the miners' work. Unfortunately, there was no photographer in the OKR who could systematically and thoroughly document these new topics.

Some individual (solitary) photographs from the OKR mining environment, taken mainly as part of the free work of regional photographers, still have a higher artistic value than the actual photographic collections and books. It is because many authors photographed mining themes as part of their free work, as an integral part of the atmosphere of the industrial cities of the OKR. The most important regional photographer is Viktor Kolář (1941), who photographs mining motifs as part of his subjective documentary work. The landscape destroyed by mining was perceived by some photographers as an ecological problem, which they pointed out through their photographs as early as the 1970s. For example, photographers often incorporated mining scenery in the form of towers, slag heaps, cable cars, and coking plants into images of urbanism, thus pointing to the immediate proximity of urban life and heavy industry. Although such photographs were published before 1989, they were understood by the official authorities as purely artistic, not official or promotional.

Despite the considerable visual potential of the mines of the Ostrava-Karviná district, full of unmistakable atmosphere, building landmarks and miners, unfortunately, it has not been possible to capture this subject matter systematically and in high quality photographically throughout history. In this respect, the significance of some of the

photographic collections taken in other mines in the Czech lands (especially the opencast ones) has not been achieved, and certainly not of European or world-class quality. At the regional level, the Ostrava-Karviná Mines company was far surpassed by the Vítkovické Ironworks in terms of the importance and quality of its promotion through photographs.

As suggested above, most of the photographic publications discussed in this article have foregone any artistic and often even craftsmanship value. Despite this, it can be stated that research in the field of photographic publications of the Ostrava-Karviná region is of importance. Photographic materials can convey not only the appearance of individual mines and their related premises, but also show how underground mining was viewed during the 20th century. The publications reflect the changes in political, social, economic and cultural aspects quite well.

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