

## ASPECTS OF “THE THAW” IN THE SLOVAK MOUNTAINS Cableways and their station buildings in the 1960s

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By the early 1970s, a process set in motion between 1963 and 1967 had reached its culmination: the creation of the first integrated series of chairlifts and gondola lifts in the Slovak mountains. The resulting network of cableways stands as a tangible expression of what we now call the “thaw” – an era whose ambitions took shape even amid the rigours of the mountain environment. A defining feature of these cableways was their ground-based station buildings. Over time, a series of distinctive structures emerged – rare in the mountains until then – each advancing on the last through original design. Most were conceived in a late modern architectural style that complemented the contemporary technological component of the cableways. That technology was developed on the drawing boards of the country’s sole manufacturer of cableways and ski tows, Transporta, a company from the Czech town of Chrudim. The series of cableways conceived in the 1960s was never surpassed in scale during the socialist era in Slovakia. The accompanying development of station buildings likewise had no precedent in earlier decades and was not repeated later. The 1960s were therefore, overall, an exceptionally productive period for Slovak cableways. Yet closer study of contemporary sources reveals that this progress unfolded under difficult conditions. The paradox of an era that, after a long hiatus, set out to promote tourism and, with it, cable transport, lay in the gradual decline of cableway production at Transporta. Within a relatively short time, a chapter was both written and closed – one that, through cableways and their distinctive station buildings, laid the foundations for the future development of ski and mountain resorts. The next stage was marked by different technology and the absence of station buildings, which in Slovakia remain linked primarily with the years immediately before and after the Prague Spring.

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*“We usually call the period immediately following winter ‘predjarie’ [‘the thaw’]. Winter troubles us with harsh conditions, unpleasant frost, and general discomfort. Predjarie, by contrast, brings hope and optimism. We most often associate the sixth decade of the twentieth century with the Prague Spring of 1968. That, however, was the culmination of longer-lasting processes that we may, by analogy, call a ‘thaw’ [...].”<sup>1</sup>*

The editors’ words on the back cover of the collective monograph *Předjaří: Československo 1963–1967* aptly describe a slice of history resulting, at the beginning of the 1970s, in the first coherent series of chairlifts and gondola cableways<sup>2</sup> in the Slovak mountains. In other words, the 1960s saw the emergence of the foundational framework of Slovak cable transport facilities. As the architect Anton Rokošný (1925–1980) wrote in 1968:

*“For many years, we gave insufficient attention to the construction of recreational and tourist facilities and the services closely connected to them; worse still, we treated them with indifference [...]. Today and especially in the future this is the most effective and most profitable investment for reviving the national economy and raising the standard of living of the people of this country.”<sup>3</sup>*

As Jiří Petráš and Libor Svoboda note, in the 1960s “*things really happened that had been unthinkable in the preceding decade, and even in later years, things people could not have imagined even in their wildest fantasy*”. Life in then-Czechoslovakia, partly under the influence of the international situation, calmed down at least outwardly. Households began to acquire appliances that simplified work and provided entertainment. Road traffic increased as well. From a contemporary perspective, it did so to such an extent that newspapers introduced a regular column on traffic accidents. The exceptionality of the time was realised in many respects even by contemporaries, “*who had a vivid memory of the previous decade, and also by those who remembered the Second World War and the years of German occupation*”.<sup>4</sup>

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1 PETRÁŠ and SVOBODA, eds. *Předjaří: Československo 1963–1967*. Prague; České Budějovice, 2016. We understand the symbolic term “the thaw”, denoting the period of the 1960s before the onset of the so-called Prague Spring, in the context defined by the historians M. Londák, S. Sikora, and E. Londáková in 2002. See LONDÁK; SIKORA and LONDÁKOVÁ. *Predjarie: politický, ekonomický a kultúrny vývoj na Slovensku v rokoch 1960 – 1967*. Bratislava 2002.

2 The term “cableway” (*lanová dráha*), for our purposes, is defined by Act No 513/2009 on rail systems and amending certain acts, Section 2(1) of which provides: “*Rail systems include track railways, trolleybus lines, and cableways.*” In slang and everyday usage the shortened form “lanovka” is often used in Slovak.

3 ROKOŠNÝ. *Architektúra v horských oblastiach*. In *Projekt*, 1968, 6-7, p. 136.

4 PETRÁŠ and SVOBODA, eds., *Předjaří*, p. 7.

In Czechoslovak construction, the 1960s were years that saw the introduction of various progressive technologies, such as the assembly of panel-built blocks of flats (at that time not yet perceived negatively) and lift-slab construction.<sup>5</sup> From an architectural point of view, the 1960s also resulted in the Czechoslovak entry at Expo 1967, with the “Montreal Chalet” – a restaurant pavilion whose replica stood for many years on Bratislava’s Kamzík Hill and was known as Koliba Expo.<sup>6</sup> The architecture of late modernism was the order of the day. In Slovakia, i.e. in then-Czechoslovakia, this was reflected in structures such as Bratislava’s SNP Bridge and the television tower on Kamzík, the Balnea Centre in Piešťany, the SNP Memorial and Museum in Banská Bystrica, the famed “Complex of Dreams” at Štrbské Pleso, the spa colonnade at Bardejovské Kúpele, Prague’s Institute of Macromolecular Chemistry, and the Ještěd television transmitter above Liberec.<sup>7</sup>

Slovakia’s panorama was also shaped by smaller-scale structures. The series of cableways installed from the early 1960s systematically gave rise to a distinctive category of structures: cableway station buildings. A succession of structures with an extraordinary appearance emerged, tending to improve with each new iteration. Together with the modern technological components of the cableways, elegant installations were created that reliably served their function for decades. Dozens of companies, organisations, and individuals in various regions of Slovakia were involved in the rise of these structures. Running like a symbolic red thread through the whole era was the work of the company Transporta, n.p. Chrudim.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the look of a station building is essentially shaped by the technological element of the cableway or ski tow. The story of the development of Slovak cableways and their station buildings in the 1960s is therefore best

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5 On then-progressive “shell and core” technologies, see, for example, BISTÁK et al. *Progresívne konštrukčno-výrobné systémy stavieb neskorrej moderny na Slovensku a ich odkaz pre súčasnosť*. In *Czech Journal of Civil Engineering*, 2023, 2, pp. 37-46.

6 The chalet was designed by Stanislav Talaš (1932–2004) and Vojtech Vilhan (1925–1988). See for example KRAMPL. *Koliba pre Montréal (sic!)*. In *Projekt*, 1965, 10, p. 230. In Bratislava, the restaurant stood not far from the upper station of the *Železná studnička – Kamzík* cableway, built at the same time and part of the series of cableways examined in our study. See KOPICOVÁ. *Lanovkou až do koliby?* In *Večerník*, 1970, 225, p. 3. It is interesting that the accompanying report on the upper station building of the *Nitra – Zobor* cableway, another in our series, states that “*the biological septic tank has not yet been installed, as its placement will be conditioned by other structures (the Montreal Chalet and possibly another) that will serve the recreational area of Zobor [...]*”, suggesting that a replica of the building may originally have been intended to be placed (also) here. State Archive in Nitra (ŠANR), *Stavoprojekt v Nitre*, file 1469, unprocessed.

7 On Czechoslovak late-modern architecture, see, for example ŠEVČÍK and BENEŠ. *Architektura 60. let – „zlatá šedesátá léta“ v české architektuře 20. století*. Prague, 2009; URLICH et al. *Šedesátá léta v architektuře očima pamětníků*. Prague, 2006.

8 In the pages that follow we will use the shortened name Transporta.

presented from the perspective of Transporta as a unifying element whose role in the construction of cableways in the period in question was irreplaceable.

After providing a necessary introduction to domestic tourism, our study outlines the development of cable transport at Transporta from the end of the Second World War, with digressions to significant projects that influenced the architectural, structural and technical design of cableway station buildings. Drawing on the architecturally significant stations of the Martinské hole chairlift as an example, the study then illustrates the specific rises and falls of this sector in the 1960s. To understand the dynamic development that cable transport underwent in this period, we must necessarily go beyond the time frame we have set ourselves. It was in the 1960s that the foundations were laid for what, from a global perspective, was a delayed, “*never-to-be-named golden era*” of socialist tourism in the second half of the 1970s and in the 1980s, as the historian Pavel Mücke notes.<sup>9</sup>

### **Cable transport as part of tourism**

The development of tourism and skiing in the former Czechoslovakia required the construction of appropriate technical facilities, i.e. in the parlance of the time the growth of the “material-technical base”. These include “passenger mountain transport installations” (OHDZ), i.e. cableways and ski tows. The construction of these installations here began, in practice, only after 1945.<sup>10</sup> After the Communist Party took power in February 1948, and especially after 1949, commercial tourism, particularly with an international focus, went into decline. The sector began to revive around 1955, but fundamental changes did not occur until 1963.<sup>11</sup> A whole range of professional and political actors considered it a disadvantage that the competent bodies had advisory or coordinating functions,

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9 MÜCKE. Proměny politiky cestování a cestovního ruchu v Československu 1945 až 1989: politické a národohospodářské aspekty. In *Turistická odysea: krajinou soudobých dějin cestování a cestovního ruchu v Československu v letech 1945 až 1989*. Prague 2018, p. 142.

10 Before the Second World War, only three cableways were built on the territory of Slovakia: the funicular from Starý Smokovec to Hrebienok, which began operating in 1908, and the well-known two-section aerial cableway Tatranská Lomnica – Skalnaté pleso – Lomnický štít, put into service in stages in 1937 and 1941. The station buildings were designed by Dušan Jurkovič (1868–1947), a doyen of Slovak architecture. On Jurkovič’s stations, see, for example, DULLA. Stavba, ktorá leží najvyššie. In *Životné prostredie*, 2003, 5, pp. 249-253. As Mücke points out, while Slovak tourism suffered after the war as a result of direct wartime events, at a legislative and organisational level the sector was much more advanced than in the Czech lands. MÜCKE, Proměny politiky cestování a cestovního ruchu, p. 72.

11 Ibid, p. 71. One “victim” of the post-February slump was a project for the first chairlift in Slovakia, Jasná – Chopok – Srdiečko, which, amid numerous obstacles, was not completed in 1958. On this topic, see BISTÁK; ŠIŠKOVÁ and MAKÝŠ. Architektúra v službách prvej slovenskej sedačkovej lanovky. In *Eurostav*, 2023, 6, pp. 46-49.

but lacked executive authority. The impulse for change came in 1963 from the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Antonín Novotný (1904–1975), who, in an unscheduled speech at the September meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, called for improvements in travel and tourism in Czechoslovakia. The timing was not accidental. Under the pressure of the failing Third Five-Year Plan, Antonín Novotný was seeking ways to avert an economic crisis that, in the end, struck Czechoslovakia anyway.<sup>12</sup>

On the basis of proposals prepared later, a set of measures was adopted that was unparalleled in scope and complexity. Besides a further phase of liberalising international tourism, a Government Committee for Tourism was established at government level. In Slovakia, a Slovak National Council (SNR) Committee for Tourism was created. Measures included the creation of tourism bodies at lower levels of management, where tourism commissions were set up.<sup>13</sup> Some processes continued even after the invasion by the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968. Thus, for example, a five-day working week and free weekends were enacted and introduced from September 1968. This transformation was another significant step towards building the “leisure-time society”, as Mücke called it.<sup>14</sup>

This social shift ultimately had a direct impact on cable transport as well. On 28 September 1967, representatives of 35 organisations met in Liptovský Mikuláš and signed an agreement to establish an “special-interest association”. This organisation, named the *Special-Interest Association of Owners and Operators of Passenger Cableways and Ski Tows in Slovakia* (Záujmové združenie majiteľov a prevádzkovateľov osobných lanoviek a lyžiarskych vlekov na Slovensku), was established in accordance with Section 85 of Government Regulation No 100 of 12 December 1966 on the planned management of the national economy.<sup>15</sup> The association’s first chair was Ivan Sutóris (1926–2023).<sup>16</sup> In January 1973, the organisation’s name was changed to *Cableways and Ski Tows, Special-Interest Association in Slovakia* (Lanovky a vleky, záujmové združenie na Slovensku)

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12 MÜCKE, Proměny politiky cestování a cestovního ruchu, p. 84.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid, p. 91.

15 SUTÓRIS. Dvadsať rokov práce záujmového združenia Lanovky a vleky na Slovensku. In *Spravodaj Lanovky a vleky*, 1987, 3, pp. 4-8; Slovak National Archive (SNA), Administration of Production Enterprises of the Slovak Organisation of the Czechoslovak Union of Physical Education, 1966–1989, 47, extract from Government Regulation No 100 of 12 December 1966 on the planned management of the national economy.

16 The other members of the first presidium were Ladislav Pazdera (vice-chair), Karol Medveď (secretary), Vladimír Bureš, Eugen Blau, Jaroslav Žuffa, Ludovít Šrank, Emil Novák (members), and Milan Toman and Ján Schwarcz (alternates). FERENČÍK. Z histórie združenia. In *Spravodaj Lanovky a vleky*, 1987, 3, p. 19.

and, after temporarily operating out of Bratislava, it moved back to Liptovský Mikuláš.<sup>17</sup> In its early activities, the association focused mainly on the building of a membership base, negotiations with manufacturing and investor enterprises, the technical development of “passenger mountain transport installations”, cooperation with the bodies of the government technical oversight organisation Štátny odborný technický dozor, improvements in the standard of cableway and ski tow operation, assessments of standards for the design and operation of these installations, and various transport studies.<sup>18</sup>

Ivan Sutóris used to recall the circumstances of the association’s founding at significant anniversaries of its establishment. For example, on the 40th anniversary, he noted:

*“At the beginning of 1964, tourism bodies were created in the former ČSSR [...]. As chance would have it, the skiing enthusiast Ivan Sutóris and Viktor Ježko, who did not ski but, as an investment officer at the former enterprise Turista, also built ski tows, found their way into the secretariat of the SNR Committee for Tourism. Many years of work in the Slovak Tourist Union, a good knowledge of Slovakia, and an affinity for skiing quickly led tourism officials to recognise that in the winter season the basis of tourism was skiing and that Slovakia had favourable conditions for its development. And so the first inventory of cableways and ski tows in Slovakia was drawn up [...]. At a time when neighbouring Austria proudly promoted itself as a land of skiing with more than 1,000 ski tows and cableways, Slovakia had only 11 cableways and 38 ski tows.”<sup>19</sup>*

The SNR Committee for Tourism began preparing a solution to the problem.

*“We held talks with Austria at its Ministry of Transport, where we obtained our first valuable information. The Austrian Ministry of Transport served as the central body of state administration and issued guidelines [...]; cable transport, however, was only a marginal issue. The development and coordination of cable transport was overseen by the Austrian Cable Transport Association. Information about its remit and activities*

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17 FERENČÍK, Z histórie združenia, p. 19. The association still exists today under the name *LAVEX, Cableways and Ski Tows, Special-Interest Association in Slovakia* (LAVEX, lanovky a vleky, záujmové združenie na Slovensku), based in Liptovský Mikuláš. From 1974 to 2019, it published its own periodical, first under the title *Spravodaj Lanovky a vleky* and later *Lavex info*, which is a key source for understanding the development of Slovak and, to an extent, Czechoslovak cable transport. This publication is one of the important secondary sources for our study.

18 SUTÓRIS, Dvadsať rokov práce, p. 4.

19 SUTÓRIS. 40 rokov Záujmového združenia lanovky a vleky na Slovensku. In *Lavex info*, 2007, 2, p. 5.

*led to an unequivocal decision to create a similar organisation in Slovakia as soon as possible [...]. It can be stated with a certain pride that the special-interest association Lanovky a vleky na Slovensku was the first of its kind in the tourism sector in Slovakia.*<sup>20</sup>

The pioneering construction of cableways, which began in the 1960s and ended in the 1970s, resulted in three gondola and fourteen chair cableways with station buildings. These were: gondola cableways (year of commissioning in brackets): Hrabovo – Malinô Brdo (1967) and Tatranská Lomnica – Štart – Skalnaté pleso (1973).<sup>21</sup> Chairlifts were built, or their technology was manufactured, for the following sites: Demänovská jaskyňa slobody (1965), Liptovská Dúbrava – Dechtárka (1965),<sup>22</sup> Otopné – Dereše (construction not completed), Banská Bystrica – Srnková (construction not completed), Banská Bystrica – Urpín (construction not completed), Štrbské Pleso – ski jumps (1969), Štrbské Pleso – Solisko (1970), Dedinky – Geravy (1970), Nitra – Zobor (1970), Turecká – Krížna (1971), Železná studnička – Kamzík (1972), Podstráne – Martinské hole (1974), Remata – Lazy (1978), and Vrátna – Grúň (1980). A set of cableways came into being that exceeded the number of all cableways previously existing in Slovakia.<sup>23</sup>

Fig. 1a-i: Gallery of stations of selected cableways in Slovakia from the 1960s, showing their condition in 2007–2024: lower station of the Otopné – Brhliská cableway; upper station of the Dedinky – Geravy cableway; upper station of the Nitra – Zobor cableway; upper station of the Banská Bystrica – Srnková cableway; lower station of the Štrbské Pleso – ski jumps cableway; lower station of the Turecká – Krížna cableway; lower station of the Tatranská Lomnica – Skalnaté pleso cableway; lower station of the Remata – Lazy cableway; lower station of the Vrátna – Grúň cableway.



20 Ibid.

21 The Tatranská Lomnica – Štart – Skalnaté pleso gondola cableway consisted of two independent sections with a shared intermediate station building at Štart.

22 The Liptovská Dúbrava – Dechtárka cableway served only for the internal transport of employees of the then mines.

23 In the Czech part of the common state, Transporta built 2 gondola and 10 chair cableways at this time.



Photographs: Andrej Bisták

### A Slovak cableway-and-architectural epic

In the 1960s, the immediate form of cable transport in the Slovak mountains, and thus of all the cableways listed, was determined by the Chrudim-based company Transporta.<sup>24</sup> This resulted in a coherent series of cableways with identical or very similar technological parts.<sup>25</sup> At the time, Transporta offered single-seater (later also two-seater) chairlifts and four-seater gondola cableways. These installations were the result of in-house development in the second half of the 1950s and

24 Transporta, n. p. Chrudim, came into being on 7 March 1946 as a result of the nationalisation of the František Wiesner engineering works and foundry with effect as of 27 October 1945. The Wiesner firm, founded in 1855, had already attracted attention in the world of cable transport in the 1930s by building the Czechoslovak cableways Janské Lázně – Černá hora and Liberec – Ještěd, and especially the aforementioned first passenger aerial cableway in Slovakia from Tatranská Lomnica to Lomnický štít (in two sections), which at the time achieved several world firsts. Between 1927 and 1941, the company built four aerial cableways by drawing on its own in-house capacities, placing Czechoslovakia among the leading European manufacturers and users of cableways. See ŠEVCECH. List do Chrudimi. In *Spravodaj Lanovky a vleky*, 1983, 3, p. 17; TEPLÁ. *Inventář Transporta n. p. Chrudim 1945–1965*. Chrudim; Hradec Králové 1979. In October 1999 bankruptcy was declared over Transporta's assets. Today, various companies occupy the company's buildings and production halls.

25 By “technological parts”, we mean the mechanics of the cableway, i.e. the steel structures of the stations and the line (line supports). Besides its technological parts, every cableway has a structural part (at a minimum the concrete foundations, but in the period under study this involved complete buildings) and an electrical part (the drive and control).

early 1960s. The chairlifts were second-generation,<sup>26</sup> as opposed to the gondola cableways, whose development did not go beyond a single generation. Investors wishing to build a cableway had nowhere else to turn, as Transporta was the sole manufacturer in then-Czechoslovakia.

Fig. 2: Front cover of a Transporta promotional brochure with a view of the new plant.



*Národní podnik Transporta Chrudim.* Prague: Pressfoto, CTK for Transporta n.p. Chrudim, n.d. Photography: Rudolf Vařejka

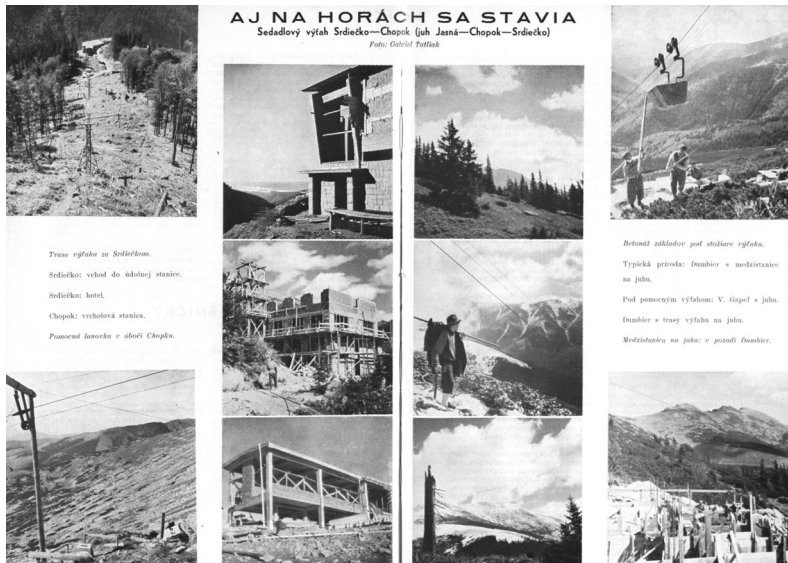
Technical development at Transporta was the responsibility of the cableway design and construction department. Its leading figure from the late 1940s was Václav Nevrlý (1914–1960). After the Second World War, he and František Kvíd (1912–1986) went on a three-year placement at the renowned German cableway company Bleichert. On their return, in collaboration with the civil engineer Jindřich Schmalz (1913–1968), and with the support of the factory committee at Transporta, they were able to “reverse the course of history” and preserve, under new conditions, Transporta’s cable transport division, which the factory’s original owner, František Wiesner (1893–1970), had planned to wind down even before the Second World War.<sup>27</sup>

26 In 1940 a chairlift began operating to Pustevny in the Czech Beskids, manufactured by Wiesner as the first chairlift in Europe. If we accept continuity between the Wiesner firm and the Transporta national enterprise, we could say there were three generations of Transporta chairlifts with their own design. On the Pustevny cableway, see NEVRLÝ. První lyžařský výtah u nás. In *Technický obzor*, 1940, 15 and 16, pp. 227-229 and 246-250.

27 SMUTNÝ. Lanová dráha na Sněžku. In *Vlastivědné listy Pardubického kraje*, 2024, 3,

In the period immediately after the Second World War, Alojz Lutonský (1905–1997)<sup>28</sup> and his colleagues succeeded in pushing through the construction of a cableway to Chopok (2,024 m a.s.l.), the third-highest peak of the Low Tatras. Four interlinked chairlifts were gradually built, with five station buildings along the route Jasná – Luková – Chopok – Kosodrevina – Srdiečko, connecting the regions of Liptov and Horehronie. From a technical standpoint, they used the most advanced chairlift system of the day, with detachable two-seater chairs manufactured by Transporta under licence from the Swiss firm Ludwig von Roll'schen Eisenwerke of Bern. The system was colloquially known here as the “Roll system”. The Chopok line was the first chairlift in Slovakia.<sup>29</sup>

Fig. 3: A 1952 photo-report across a double-page spread in the magazine *Krásy Slovenska* documenting construction of the southern sections of the Chopok cableway.



ĎATLIAK. Aj na horách sa stavia. In *Krásy Slovenska*, 1952, 9-10, pp. 232-233.

In the 1950s Transporta abandoned licensed production and began focusing on chairlifts of its own design.<sup>30</sup> These were single-seat chairlifts with lattice supports

pp. 19-24.

28 Alojz Lutonský, the doyen of Slovak cable transport and tourism. See, for example, PATÚŠ. *Kto bol kto v lanovej doprave na Slovensku*. Banská Bystrica 2017, p. 45.

29 For the chairlift stations on Chopok, see BISTÁK; ŠIŠKOVÁ and MAKÝŠ, *Architektúra v službách*.

30 HLOUŠEK. *Jednolanové oběžné sedačkové dráhy podniku Transporta Chrudim*. In *Chrudim-*

that closely resembled the supports of the previous licensed lines. Even in this period the characteristic canopy appears on the chairs, as on the “Roll system” lifts. This canopy, in various forms, would be used on Transporta’s chairlifts until the end of their production.<sup>31</sup> In 1954, the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Antonín Zápotocký, awarded Nevrlý a second-class honorary prize for outstanding work in the design and construction of large cableways, cable cranes, and other working equipment. At the same time, he was awarded the honorary title Laureate of the State Prize (*Laureát štátnej ceny*), as reported in an article accompanied by a large portrait photograph.<sup>32</sup> During this period Nevrlý contributed not only to specialist periodicals but also, for example, to the popular science magazine *Věda a technika mládeži*, where he informed the general public about cable transport safety and reported on projects in preparation.<sup>33</sup>

Fig. 4: The Klet’ cableway and its lower station in spring 2025



Photograph: Andrej Bisták

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*ské vlastivědné listy*, 2021, 3, p. 15.

- 31 The purpose of the canopy, which in the 1960s became a striking design feature of the updated cableway construction, was, as we might expect, to protect passengers from rain, but also, and more importantly, from the lubricant that would drip from the haul cable when it rained. Collective. *Zdvihací a dopravní zařízení v ČSSR, SSSR a NDR: Současný stav a perspektivy rozvoje*. Prague 1961, p. 91.
- 32 To exemplify Nevrlý’s successful work in the field of cable transport, the article mentions the freight cableway Sirk – Lubeník in eastern Slovakia. KLOBOUČNÍK. Laureát státní ceny. In *Transportér*, 1954, 10, p. 1.
- 33 For example, NEVRLÝ. Nedůvěřujete lanovce? In *Věda a technika mládeži*, 1954, 13, pp. 390-391; NEVRLÝ. Jaké postavíme lanovky? In *Věda a technika mládeži*, 1959, 5, pp. 136-137.

At the end of the 1950s, development of a new generation of chairlifts was reaching its final stage at Transporta.<sup>34</sup> The prototype, at first glance markedly different from previous production, was developed as the Krasetín – Klet' line in what is now the Czech Republic, and entered service on 1 July 1961.<sup>35</sup> Both stations were housed in masonry buildings, in this case rendered relatively sparingly, more reminiscent of industrial structures. The company magazine *Transportér*, in an issue dated 9 June 1962, published a photograph of the cableway and an accompanying text in an unabashedly optimistic tone. The caption reads: “*It runs like new... so say the operators of the Klet' cableway, from where our picture comes.*” The short article continues:

*“After almost a year in service, the operator of the cableway is completely satisfied with Transporta’s product, so all of us, from design, construction, production, and assembly, can be proud of our work. In cableways, both freight and passenger, which are our traditional products, much work still lies ahead of us, and we are convinced it will be just as successful as with the Klet' chairlift.”*<sup>36</sup>

In addition to chairlifts, in the second half of the 1950s Transporta developed its own circulating gondola system, with a prototype brought into operation in 1959 in what was then Yugoslav Sarajevo as the Sarajevo – Trebević line.<sup>37</sup> The development work was led by Nevrlý, who very probably was also still heading development of the aforementioned new generation of chairlifts. At that time, however, an event occurred that, in hindsight, casts an unpleasant shadow over the optimistic article about the Klet' line. Václav Nevrlý died tragically in January 1960. As Vlastislav Smutný writes, drawing on the recollections of František Šup (1928–2015), a cableway designer at Transporta, “*right at the*

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34 “[...] *it is necessary to praise the efforts to keep improving our products so that we remain at the forefront on a global scale [...]*” *Levnější a lepší lanovky*. In *Transportér*, 1959, 5. On the development of cableway transport at Transporta in this period, see also BUREŠ. *Osobní lanové dráhy a vleky v ČSSR a jejich další vývoj*. In *Doprava*, 1961, 5, pp. 164-166.

35 A particularly striking visual change compared with earlier lines was the use of slender tubular supports instead of the previous lattice type. This solution was made possible by advances in welding technology, necessary for joining tubes of different diameters. Transporta emphasised both the static and aesthetic advantages of tubular supports, as well as their easier maintenance. See *Jak vyrábět levněji*. In *Transportér*, 1962, 46-47. The cableway remains in service today, essentially in its original form.

36 *Lanovka Klet' po jednom roce provozu*. In *Transportér*, 1962, 23.

37 Besides cableways, at this time Transporta developed three types of ski tow, which became part of almost every Czechoslovak skiing resort. The tows (like the cableways) were also exported abroad, for example to Lebanon. See RYBÁK. *Nový výrobek*. In *Transportér*, 1961, 9; BUREŠ. *V Libanonu a v Tatrách nové výrobky reprezentují Transportu*. In *Transportér*, 1965, 6.

*beginning of 1960, a tragic event occurred that had a profound impact on the work of the cableway design and projection department. Looking back now, we might say that it affected the entire cableway division at Transporta, and thus in effect all of Czechoslovakia.*”<sup>38</sup>

After the sudden death of Nevrlý, there was speculation about the difficult working conditions in the cable transport department and about limited support from Transporta’s management. Šup saw the situation as follows:

*“Nevrlý was a recognised expert in the field of cableways not only here at home, but worldwide. He regularly took part in congresses of the international cableway organisation OITAF [Organizzazione Internazionale Trasporti a Funne], which brought together leading specialists in the field. I think that the somewhat ill-fated construction of the Sarajevo line also played a part in this end [...]. He then resolved the situation according to how he felt... A pity, a great pity, as the future showed that the new circulating (gondola) cableway system was decidedly viable.”*<sup>39</sup>

That events could have taken a different course was illustrated by Šup with several examples of gondola cableways designed and built after the death of Nevrlý:

*“This was confirmed by the lines at Malinô Brdo, Tatranská Lomnica, Janské Lázně, and Harz [the Thale line] in Germany. Others were already being prepared: Sir el Dinieh in Lebanon, Iranoscuting in Iran, Damascus – Qasioun in Syria. Their implementation, however, was slowed due to the unfavourable political situation in these countries, and ended with the winding down of the cableway division at Transporta.”*<sup>40</sup>

Nevrlý’s successor as head of the cable transport division was Vladimír Bureš (1925–1999).<sup>41</sup>

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38 SMUTNÝ. Z pamětí projektanta lanovek (3. část). In *Chrudimské vlastivědné listy*, 2022, 1, p. 13.

39 Ibid, p. 14.

40 Ibid.

41 The dates of birth and death of Bureš are based on information provided to Vlastislav Smutný by Bureš’s Transporta colleague Jindřich Urban. He was Bureš’s classmate at the industrial school in Pardubice. The school’s almanac, however, states that Urban completed the regular four-year course in 1944, whereas Bureš completed a two-year “abiturient” course. These courses were intended for secondary-school graduates who, during the Second World War, could not continue to university because universities in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were closed. On this basis, we may assume that Bureš was probably born as early as 1923. We thank Vlastislav Smutný for the information.

Fig. 5: The inside back cover of the magazine *Projekt* presents the Skalnaté pleso gondola as a “cutaway”: a photograph of the so-called cable bridge in front of the Skalnaté pleso station and a sketch of the station building as an addition to Dušan Jurkovič’s original station. The new station was designed by the architect Jozef Švidroň (1907–1998).<sup>42</sup>



In *Projekt*, 1973, 6, 3rd page of the cover.

Signs of complications can be traced in the pages of *Transportér* as early as 1965. Only a few years after a far-reaching upgrade of the lines, accompanied by reports stressing the cableway manufacturing tradition in Chrudim, the staff of the investment projects sales department (OIC) published an extensive article. It describes considerable difficulties not only in manufacturing, but also in the construction of cableways and tows in Czechoslovakia:

*“If we want to continue producing cableways, and for now there is no other path, since it is said [!] that we have a monopoly on them, it is not possible to look idly upon the unfavourable situation in design; it must be resolved without delay. It is surely unthinkable that the operation of the design centre should be jeopardised by one or two employees going on a long business trip abroad, or that the completion of certain projects*

42 On the architect Jozef Švidroň, see, for example, BIŠŤAN and ŠLACHTA. Jozef Švidroň. In *Projekt*, 1988, 4, pp. 36–38.

*should be jeopardised by the temporary departure of one structural engineer from the steel structures department! [...]*<sup>43</sup>

Another part of the article, in different words, speaks of a potential winding-down of the entire production division, strong words especially when we consider them in the context of professional criticism of the technical level of cableways from the early 1970s, of which more later. The authors then draw logical conclusions:

*“And they [cableways] inevitably have to fade into the background if they continue to be sidelined. The technical level will also inevitably lag behind world standards, because we are moving forwards with new elements only with great difficulty and slowness, simply because there is no time to study new things.”*<sup>44</sup>

The dispiriting words about employees overburdened by day-to-day operations sound even heavier in a further context:

*“The fact remains that there is interest in cableways at present, both at home and abroad, and so the company should be able to adapt quickly to demand and create conditions for our cableway designers to complete design work to a good standard and, above all, on time. [...]*<sup>45</sup>

When the staff then close their article with the words that “[...] *we can only wish and firmly believe that the responsible employees will perhaps reflect on our thoughts and that the whole problem will certainly be resolved well and, most importantly, quickly*”,<sup>46</sup> this was in all likelihood still a sincere wish in the hopeful era before the Prague Spring, which, as we shall see, did not come to pass.

Let’s now move to the mountains, where, at the time the OIC article was published, construction of further lines with station buildings was under way. A telling case study of this process is the construction of the Jáchymov – Klínovec chairlift in the Czech Ore Mountains.<sup>47</sup> In a detailed article, the reporters at *Transportér* reflect on the almost completed project from several angles: “[...] *the station building should have been at least a metre longer; the costs would have hardly increased and several other problems would have been avoided.*”<sup>48</sup>

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43 OIC Collective. Slovo má OIC – jak dál v lanovkách? In *Transportér*, 1965, 9.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 It was a single-seat chairlift operated from 1965 to 2014. The technology used was identical to that of the Krasetín – Kleť lift.

48 1.200 metrů nad mořskou hladinou. In *Transportér*, 1965, 36.

The article openly states, albeit in typically complex sentence structures, that Transporta's designers contributed to the architectural look of the front façade of the lower station building:

*“We ourselves were surprised that our designers wanted part of the structure at the lower station to be visible from outside [...] this has not improved the appearance [...] if the structure were entirely inside [the building], it would look better, be larger, and there would be more space in it. In addition, for safety reasons, a suitably high fence will be added in front of the station. All this only so that it is visible that there is some structure inside. As if Transporta's good name depended on that alone.”<sup>49</sup>*

The structure in question carried the tension weight of the haul cable, which hung freely above the ground by the façade.<sup>50</sup>

Fig. 6: The lower station of the Jáchymov – Klínovec cableway with its prominent tension weight, August 2006



Photograph: Andrej Bisták

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49 Ibid.

50 Given the way the terrain around the station is configured, the weight hung at a height of several metres. A fence therefore had to be erected around its ground-plan projection. The requirement for part of the structure to be visible may have arisen in response to the station buildings of the previously mentioned first modern Krasetín – Klet' cableway. With the exception of views through a few small windows, these buildings concealed the entire steel structure of the stations.

A critical reflection on the lower station of the Klínovec cableway provides direct evidence of the circumstances that contributed to the building’s final appearance. Here the station building took shape in dialogue between the architect and the designer of the mechanical equipment. The unusual element of the concrete weight, difficult to imagine on another type of structure and, from today’s perspective, lending the building a touch of “mountain high-tech”, later appeared on the façades of several other Transporta chairlift stations. In the meantime, however, its steel supporting structure had been updated at Transporta, becoming more slender and thus more in concert with the building’s visual aspect.<sup>51</sup>

Fig. 7: From a bilingual Transporta promotional brochure on cableways



Source: private archive of Roman Gric

The years 1965–1967 saw comprehensive upgrades to cableways. In addition to partial structural and design changes to the chairlifts being produced up to that time, Transporta prepared a new-concept detachable two-seater chairlift.

51 In Slovakia these included the lower stations of the Remata – Lazy and Vrátna – Grůň cableways.

Transporta was drawing on its licensed production of detachable “Roll system” chairlifts from the first post-war decade, this time with an in-house design. The prototype was to be built at Jasná on the Otupné – Dereše (Brhliská) route. With hindsight, the unsuccessful story of its construction seems emblematic of the early 1970s, a time when there was frequent discussion of stagnation in cableway development at Transporta, as well as of the problems of the construction sector of the day. For example, the journalist Vladimír Adamec, in connection with the commissioning of the remarkable Turecká – Krížna chairlift in 1971, noted that “[...] *the national enterprise Transporta Chrudim has stagnated at its original technical level for almost two decades now. And yet the demands on transport speed are rising worldwide, including here at home. [...]*”.<sup>52</sup>

It should be noted that, in the 1970s, cableways were still being put into service that had been designed at Transporta in the second half of the 1960s, i.e. at the time OIC staff at Transporta published their critical piece. In his article *Doprava po lane neatraktívna?* Jaroslav Ročák also touches on the building component of cableways:

*“[...] the lower and upper station [of a cableway] requires costly and time-consuming building work (separate masonry buildings). And that is one of the sticking points. For construction companies building water-works, motorways, new industrial plants, and housing, it is neither so lucrative nor so binding to build little machine-room structures in difficult mountain conditions that are not capital intensive. It is no wonder then that, in this country, several years (3 to 5!) pass from the start of construction to handover for operation, whereas, for example, the most progressive system of cableways and tows of the Pomagalski type from France [...] is built in only 7 to 9 months! Since the machine room does not require a separate building, investment costs are also significantly lower[...].”<sup>53</sup>*

At first glance, the situation may appear straightforward. Setting aside the fact that masonry station buildings were not a manufacturer’s requirement, at least in the case of return stations,<sup>54</sup> Transporta staff were already flagging construction-

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52 ADAMEC. Nový sedačkový výťah Turecká – Krížna. In *Technické noviny*, 1972, 3, p. 4. On the lagging technical level of Transporta cableways and tows at the beginning of the 1970s, see also, for example, ADAMEC. Problémy okolo osobných horských dopravných zariadení. In *Technické noviny*, 1974, 43, p. 6; ADAMEC. Opäť o osobných horských dopravných zariadeniach. In *Technické noviny*, 1975, 3, p. 3. On the Krížna cableway, see BISTÁK. Od výstavby lanovky na Krížnu uplynulo už 50 rokov. In *Lavex info*, 2018, 2, pp. 4-5.

53 ROČÁK. Doprava po lane neatraktívna? In *Technické noviny*, 1974, 8, p. 9.

54 Open upper stations in Slovakia included the Štrbské Pleso – ski jumps, Štrbské Pleso – Solisko, and Remata – Lazy chairlifts, and in what is now the Czech Republic the two-section

phase problems in the second half of the 1960s. The pages of *Transportér* carried reports of construction firms missing deadlines. For example, in connection with the construction of the chairlift to the Demänovská Cave of Liberty, *Transportér* wrote:

*“Transporta has in effect already done its part. The supports are up, the stations are ready, and the haul rope lies loose on the sheaves. But none of this has yet been built in. The construction contractor is struggling with a shortage of workers, which it is trying to solve by recruiting casual labour. Their work ethic, however, does not match the importance of the project. There’s more talking and drinking here than concreting and building. [...] The project should have been finished long ago [...]”*<sup>55</sup>

*Transportér* commented in similar terms on the construction of the gondola lift to Malinô Brdo in 1966:

*“The first tests were supposed to take place [...] at the beginning of November. Owing to the builders, however, this did not happen. The builders (and this is perhaps the case on every site) once again failed to meet the scheduled handover dates for the individual structures [...] delays on the builders’ side are so stretched that not even the greatest efforts by the assembly teams can save the deadlines here.”*<sup>56</sup>

What had seemed clear-cut is beginning to look more complicated. A likelier cause emerges: the ponderous, directive-based economy of the socialist state, for which small-scale projects were not a priority, with the result that all coordination between the building and technology contractors was made difficult.

In fact, Ročák hinted at this reason in his article. To recap part of his argument:

*“For construction companies building waterworks, motorways, new industrial plants, and housing, it is neither so lucrative nor so binding to build little machine-room structures in difficult mountain conditions that are not capital intensive.”*<sup>57</sup>

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Železná Ruda – Hofmanky – Pancíř line (which also had an open lower station, with a building only at the mid-station). An example of an open lower station was the Czech Zadov – Churáňov cableway. The lines at Štrbské Pleso and Pancíř were already in service when Ročák’s article was published.

55 Lanovkou do hlubin země. In *Transportér*, 1964, 39. On the Demänovská cableway from Transporta’s perspective, see also: “Hlemýžd” se blíží k cíli. In *Transportér*, 1965, 6. The Liptov district weekly also reported critically on the build: BARTKO. Cestovný ruch kontra výstavba. In *Nový Liptov*, 1965, 16, p. 3.

56 Malino Brdo klouže. In *Transportér*, 1966, 45.

57 ROČÁK, Doprava po lane neatraktivna?

Whether he was generalising the causes of the unsuccessful construction of the Otupné – Brhliská chairlift, which we will return to, or simply describing, in a broader context, the perverse effects of the socialist economy is now hard to establish. Ročák undoubtedly grasped the real depth of the problem, as follows from his conclusion:

*“It cannot be said, in principle, that those few technicians and development workers from Transporta Chrudim with whom I spoke at the recent Cableway and Ski Tow Days in Jasná pod Chopkom would not be willing, by every means, to help speed up the manufacture and assembly of hundreds of cableways and ski tows per year; but... they are only keen ‘enthusiasts’, and to date no amount of enthusiasm on its own has broken through the ramparts of bureaucracy or conservatism.”<sup>58</sup>*

*“Proof of the enduring zeal for cableways”*, as Vladimír Ševcech termed it, came in a letter from former Transporta employees – cableway men – addressed to the editorial board of *Spravodaj Lanovky a vleky*. As Ševcech notes in his article *List do Chrudimi*, the chronicle printed in issue 4 of the 1981 volume revived their own memories of the Tatranská Lomnica – Skalnaté pleso – Lomnický štít route. Former Transporta cableway staff also spoke in June 1983 at a technical seminar in Liberec, where, among other things, they argued that the decision to halt cableway production at Transporta had slowed the development of domestic cable transport.<sup>59</sup>

Ševcech shed more light on the issue in 1995 when he discussed the three-year construction of the Dedinky – Geravy cableway in Slovenský raj (1967–1970). With a quarter-century’s hindsight, he explains not only the causes of the complications during the Geravy build, but also the reasons which, in the socialist era, led Transporta to move away from cable transport,<sup>60</sup> pull back from building station structures, and, ultimately, to the start of cableway and ski-tow

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58 Ibid.

59 ŠEVCECH. *List do Chrudimi*. The seminar presentation related to the project for the new Liberec – Ještěd cableway, built in 1972–1975. This was a prototype solution developed at Transporta in the second half of the 1960s. HLOUŠEK. Osobní visuté dvoulanové kabínové dráhy s kyvným provozem a jejich význam v současné době. In *Minulost, přítomnost a budoucnost lanových drah: Liberec, červen 1983*. Ústí nad Labem, 1983, pp. 74-90.

60 At the end of 1975, this failure to keep up with world trends culminated in the decision to abolish Transporta’s cable transport division and to modify its production programme. In practice, however, deliveries were phased out gradually between 1970 and 1980. See, for example, JARCOVSKÝ. Zúžení výrobního programu. In *Transportér*, 1975, 26; Současný stav realizace druhé etapy zužování výrobního programu. In *Transportér*, 1978, 27; JIREŠ. K výrobnímu programu našeho závodu. In *Transportér*, 1980, 16.

production of a wholly new concept at Tatranský podnik miestneho priemyslu (TPMP) in Kežmarok in 1975.<sup>61</sup> Ševcech writes:

*“The scale of the project [the Geravy cableway] was not well served by the disproportionately long time taken to deliver the cableway technology package (there are even longer cases than this), and by the constant postponement of the readiness of the building structures for installation of the mechanical equipment. In several cases, installation of the production (sic!) equipment did not take place at all. Buildings ‘bloated’ with capital expenditure often consumed up to 80% of the funds assigned – perhaps precisely because they were passively allocated. This caused a complete lack of interest on the part of the management of the manufacturing enterprise [Transporta] in the development of the cableway sector. Despite the enthusiasm and personal sacrifices of some employees, stagnation ensued and, with it, the logical consequence: a decline in the technical standard of cableway production at Transporta [...]”.*<sup>62</sup>

The great cableway drive of the 1960s also had a darker chapter, which Ševcech hinted at: three of the Slovak chairlifts that Transporta manufactured and delivered in that decade never carried a single passenger. Strikingly, two of them were ordered for sites in Banská Bystrica that were barely two kilometres apart as the crow flies. The chairlifts to Urpín and to the ski jump at Srnková were both started, but work was halted after a time.<sup>63</sup> The Srnková line was the more advanced: both stations, including the buildings, were nearing completion, and the line supports were in place. The architectural focal point of the half-enclosed upper-station building was an eye-catching cantilevered steel roof carried on two raking steel stanchions. The weekly *Štart* recorded the construction of this cableway in 1969, publishing a short report with a photograph of supports being installed by helicopter.<sup>64</sup>

Work on the Urpín cableway was stopped when the shell of the upper-station building had been completed and the foundation pads for the supports and the lower-station steel structure had been cast. Here, the lower-station complex

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61 Cableways and ski tows were then manufactured under a licence from the renowned French firm Pomagalski S.A. Fontaine-Grenoble (often referred to simply as Poma) as the Tatrapoma brand. SUTÓRIS. Desať rokov licenčnej výroby lanoviek a vlekov. In *Spravodaj Lanovky a vleky*, 1986, 3-4, pp. 3-8.

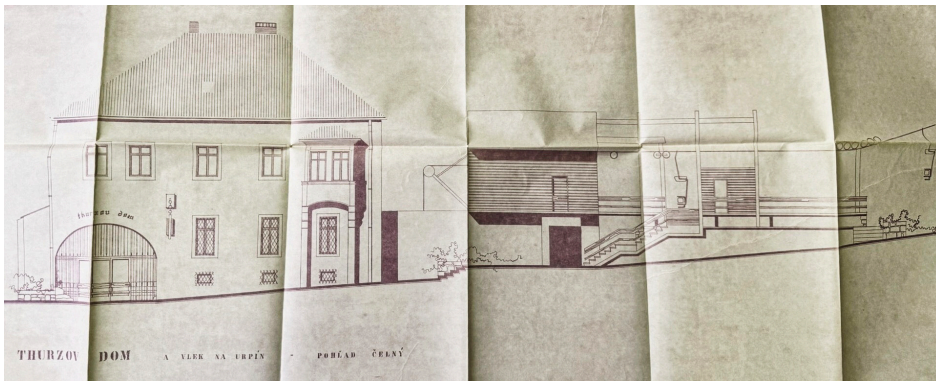
62 ŠEVCECH. Strieborné jubileum lanovky Dedinky – Geravy. In *Lavex info*, 1995, 4, p. 25.

63 For a summary of the unfinished Banská Bystrica lines, see BISTÁK. Banská Bystrica – mesto nedokončených lanoviek. In *Lavex info*, 2017, 2, pp. 31-32.

64 J.V. Modernizujú mostík v Srnkovej. In *Štart*, 1969, 29, p. 13.

could have become a real showpiece. An unusual project for the day was to be implemented that envisaged the adaptation and extension of the Renaissance Thurzó House. The designers of the project, dated 1973, were the architects M. Balog and J. Feriancová. The tensioning equipment for the lower station was to be installed outdoors next to Thurzó House. The project for the lower-station site, which bore the slightly erroneous title *Complex of Thurzó House and the tow (sic!) to Urpín, Banská Bystrica*, never went ahead, and the unused historic structure stood derelict for decades to come.<sup>65</sup> Construction of the cableway, begun in 1968, was officially halted in 1976.<sup>66</sup>

Fig. 8: Frontal view of Thurzó House and the lower station of the Urpín cableway (right), from the original project documentation



ŠABB, District National Committee in Banská Bystrica, Department of Trade and Tourism, 1960–1990, Box 46.

Just as Banská Bystrica was drawing a line under its 1960s cableway chapter, a long-running problem in the Low Tatras was also nearing resolution. The failed construction of the already-mentioned Otupné – Brhliská chairlift had another knock-on effect: it laid bare the full complexity of the demands placed on station buildings. By a decision of the investor, the unfinished lower station at Otupné

65 State Archive in Banská Bystrica (ŠABB), District National Committee in Banská Bystrica, Department of Trade and Tourism, 1960–1990, Boxes 42 and 46. From today’s perspective, the lower-station project can be seen as an attempt to save Thurzó House (at Pod Urpínom 13), which is now a national cultural monument. It was an unconventional proposal to link a protected monument with a cableway – a solution that would run counter to present-day heritage principles.

66 The grounds for this decision survive in a copy of a letter dated 10 November 1976. ŠABB, District National Committee in Banská Bystrica, Department of Trade and Tourism, 1960–1990, Box 22, copy of letter ref. výst./76 Ing. Kr.

had to be adapted for new gondola-lift technology.<sup>67</sup> The original lower station had been designed and, in 1968, started to be built specifically for a double chairlift using Transporta technology.<sup>68</sup> Although the chairlift technology had again been manufactured and delivered by Transporta, in 1978 the investor instead ordered a four-seater Tatrapoma gondola lift made under licence by TPMP Kežmarok. In this way, the investor solved the problem of construction works that had damaged the already delivered chairlift technology.<sup>69</sup> Thus, as a result of the exceptionally slow pace of building, Jasná ultimately acquired a modern gondola lift. The location of the already constructed lower station, its dimensions, and the foundations for the timber roof structure did not, however, meet the requirements of the new technology.

The solution lay in extending the station building by the length of the steel structure of the new gondola lift and placing that steel structure on a separate station track.<sup>70</sup> The upper station had not been started under the original project; its design followed a decade later, as is evident from both the layout and the architecture. The gondola lift was brought into service on 25 February 1984.<sup>71</sup> The upper station at Brhliská would, for a long time, be the last cableway station building constructed in Slovakia. The very fact that it was designed and built, and the way completion dates were repeatedly pushed back for this line<sup>72</sup> and

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67 The investor was Javorina, a company operating tourism facilities (Javorina PZCR) that has been established on 1 April 1969 and operated out of Liptovský Mikuláš. For more on Javorina, see *20 rokov podniku cestovného ruchu Javorina 1969–1989*. Liptovský Mikuláš 1989. The gondola lift operated from 1984 to 2009.

68 At the time the line was usually referred to as Otopné – Dereše. SNA, Administration of Production Enterprises of the Slovak Organisation of the Czechoslovak Union of Physical Education, 1966–1989, Box 47, proposal to address the further construction of the Otopné – Dereše chairlift.

69 A summary is provided in Javorina’s yearbook: “*On the basis of an arbitration decision issued in Banská Bystrica in 1974, completion was ordered in 1977. The technology stored at several sites and depots on the outskirts of Liptovský Mikuláš is exposed to the weather because it cannot be stored under cover, and is in poor condition. Construction work has remained unfinished for years [...] if we also take into account the now obsolete technical and moral condition of the equipment, the idea naturally arises not to install the delivered structure, but to replace it, given the technical parameters, with a cableway imported from abroad. If we add to this the desire to have safe mountain transport equipment [...] and bearing in mind Czechoslovakia’s potential bid for the 1984 Winter Olympics [...], the option of not installing the existing technology appears to be optimal from every point of view.*” State Archive in Žilina, based in Bytča (ŠAZA), Javorina, š.p., Liptovský Mikuláš, 1973–1993, Boxes 4–5.

70 DUCHNITZKÝ. Tatrapoma TC-4 – prvá licenčná štvormiestna kabínková lanovka. In *Spravodaj Lanovky a vleky*, 1984, 2, p. 4.

71 Ibid.

72 Javorina’s 1982 yearbook states: “[...] *commissioning of the Otopné KL [gondola lift] was envisaged for 1 December 1982. Construction works have not been completed.*” ŠAZA, Javorina š.p., Liptovský Mikuláš, 1973–1993, Box 6.

others produced at TPMP Kežmarok after 1975, is further proof that Transporta Chrudim was not solely to blame for the problems that arose in the programme of 1960s cableways.<sup>73</sup>

### **Slovak cableway stations: Podstráne – Martinské hole**

Having sketched the everyday realities of cable transport in the 1960s, this part of the study looks at specific chairlift station buildings. Recall that virtually every line built at that time had its stations, or at least one of them, designed as buildings. Each was unique to its line and was not repeated elsewhere. The designers also varied: they were usually architects from the regionally competent Stavoprojekt design institute or its branches. The result of this working method was a distinctive phenomenon: chairlifts and gondola lifts from Transporta that were technologically identical differed markedly in the architectural design of their station buildings. As prominent mountain “solitaires”, these buildings increasingly became symbols of their cableways and often featured on postcards and other promotional materials.

The cableway technology determined the internal layout of a station building. Transporta-made chairlifts had a different technical concept from gondola lifts, which required more space within the station and a broader range of site functions. Compared with chairlift stations, gondola-lift stations were plainly larger in scale.<sup>74</sup> Given the prevalence of chairlifts at the time, we have chosen the stations of the former Podstráne – Martinské hole chairlift in the Malá Fatra range as an example. These stations, with their distinctive architecture, represented the pinnacle of design for this type of building.

The Martinské hole chairlift served the immediate recreational hinterland of the city of Martin. It was unique in Slovakia in that it functioned as the primary

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73 By way of comparison: the Bachledova dolina – Malá Poľana chairlift was constructed in 1984–1986. Similarly, the Ráztoka – Pustevny chairlift in today’s Czech Republic was built in 1983–1986. In both cases, these were TPMP Kežmarok lines without station buildings. Though build times were shorter than for Transporta’s last cableway stations in the 1970s, compared with the 1960s projects with station buildings, the difference was minimal. On this subject, see: 30 lanoviek na Slovensku. In *Spravodaj Lanovky a vleky*, 1987, 3, pp. 25-26; ZVERKOVÁ. Brána do Zamaguria. In *Technické noviny*, 1986, 51, p. 16; KREJČÍ. Lanovka Ráztoka – Pustevny. In *Spravodaj Lanovky a vleky*, 1990, 2, pp. 11-12.

74 The dominant element of a cableway station is generally the machine-room hall. One side is open to allow the cableway technology to enter and leave along the line. Since, in machine-room technology, length and height usually predominate over the third dimension – width, the volumetric solution of the machine room as a rectangular block is essentially a given. The final composition of volumes and the architectural look of the station building are therefore shaped primarily by the ancillary operational spaces. On this subject, see BISTÁK. Staničné budovy lanových dráh. In *Eurostav*, 2021, 5, pp. 68-70.

means of transport for visitors to the Martinské hole tourist and ski centre. Rather than a mountain transport installation in the usual sense, it acted like an extension of Martin’s municipal public transport. The terrain along the line did not allow a flanking ski run to be built, so skiers used several pistes within the ski centre itself.<sup>75</sup> Numerous accommodation facilities and car parks stood near the lower station, and the municipal bus terminus was within walking distance.

Fig. 9: Lower station of the Martinské hole cableway in 1990



Photograph: Roman Gric

The idea of building a cableway to Martinské hole arose before 1957, as documented by a letter of 15 June 1957 from the Local Planning Commission of the Martin Local National Committee to the Commission for Tourism at the Board of Commissioners in Bratislava.<sup>76</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the SNR Tourism Committee held on 16 February 1967 note:

*“In 1967, construction is planned to start on several passenger chairlifts. To verify the state of technical, planning, and financial preparedness, we invited the direct investors, the national manufacturing and supply enter-*

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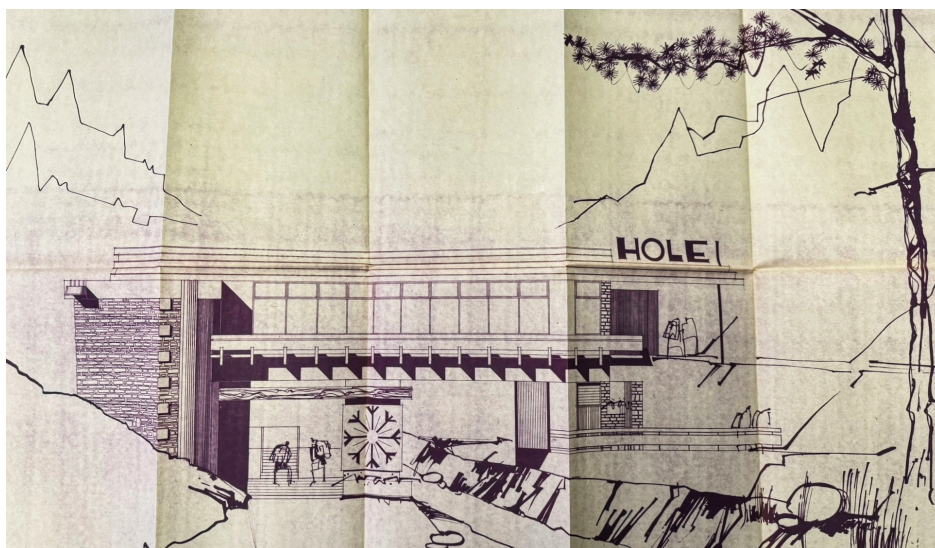
75 Development of the Martinské hole centre was spearheaded by Pavol Jaroš, Milan Novotný, and Maximilián Kamenár. See SUTÓRIS. Osobnosti, ktoré stáli pri zrode i činnosti združenia. In *Lavex info*, 2007, 3, p. 8.

76 SNA, Board of Commissioners – Office of the Presidium of the Board of Commissioners, 1945–1960, Box 388.

*prise Transporta, Chrudim, who gave the following information on technical preparedness [...]”.*

The Martinské hole chairlift was item two on the agenda. According to the minutes, construction work was to begin in March 1967, delivery of the technology was scheduled for January–February 1969, and the line was to start operation on 1 December 1969.<sup>77</sup>

Fig. 10: View of the façade of the lower station from the original design documentation



ŠABB, Central Slovak Regional National Committee in Banská Bystrica II, Transport Department, 1971–1990, Box 11.

Construction of the Martinské hole cableway did in fact begin, with a slight delay, on 27 July 1967. As it later turned out, the project was atypical for its era not only in terms of the cableway technology used, but also in how it overshot the planned construction period. Following manufacture, the cableway equipment was stored for roughly three years before installation and, in this case too, subsequently had to be overhauled.<sup>78</sup> In January 1969, a meeting recorded

77 State Archive in Bratislava (ŠABA), West Slovak Regional National Committee in Bratislava, Trade Department, 1960–1969, Box 64, minutes of a meeting held on 16 February 1967 at the SNR Tourism Committee, attended by representatives of organisations and direct investors.

78 ŠABB, District National Committee in Banská Bystrica, Department of Trade and Tourism, 1960–1990, Box 22, report on an inspection into the construction and operation of the chairlift

that excavations for the footings of 11 supports [out of a total of 36] had been completed, that a transformer substation had been built, and that the site for the upper station had been graded. Construction readiness for the support footings was required by June 1969, and for the remainder of the build by September 1969. The target date for putting the cableway into service in December 1969 was unchanged.<sup>79</sup> In reality, the placing of supports on their foundations, which in exceptionally difficult mountain terrain was done by helicopter, was not completed until June 1973.<sup>80</sup> Final approval of the civil works, carried out by Pozemné stavby Žilina, took place on 20 December 1973. Transporta handed over the cableway technology itself to the investor on 13 February 1974. Final approval of the entire work followed on 14 February 1974.<sup>81</sup> Operation began on 16 February 1974, but was beset by technical problems until 1976.<sup>82</sup>

Selecting a cableway route typically involves a wide range of considerations. For Martinské hole, the chosen system was a single-cable circulating passenger system with fixed single chairs. The fact that Transporta was the only possible supplier effectively determined the basic parameters of the cableway – its maximum length and vertical rise. The parameters of the chosen route approached the upper limit of the system’s technical capabilities. It was probably for this reason that the lower station was sited at the entrance to the valley Malá dolina, directly above the bed of the Malý potok stream. The building occupies a narrow space enclosed by steep slopes, so that the station effectively dammed the valley.<sup>83</sup>

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at the Martinské hole site carried out on 3 March 1976. The article: *Zadáno pro technický úsek*, published in *Transportér* 19/1971, indicates that the manufactured cableway equipment was delivered to the site by 21 October 1971, and remained there for at least a year and a half before installation.

79 SNA, Administration of Production Enterprises of the Slovak Organisation of the Czechoslovak Union of Physical Education, 1966–1989, Box 47, minutes of a meeting held on 30 January 1969 in Bratislava, attended by investors’ representatives.

80 BOUDNÍK and DOSOUDIL. *Využitie vrtuľníkov v národnom hospodárstve*. Bratislava, 1974.

81 State Archive in Žilina, based in Bytča, Martin Archive (ŠAZA–MT), District National Committee in Martin, 1945–1990, File Dopr. 139/74, record of the final approval of the single-cable circulating passenger chairlift with fixed grips, drawn up in Martin on 14 February 1974.

82 ŠAZA, Javorina š.p., Liptovský Mikuláš, 1973–1993, Box 5.

83 *The blocking of Malá dolina by the station became a matter of dispute during construction: “[...] because, without the consent of Štátne lesy [State Forests], as the land user in the said valley, the lower station of the chairlift to Martinské hole was built, thereby completely closing off the valley and making forestry operations impossible (...) this was caused by the poor siting of the lower station of the chairlift [...]”*. ŠAZA–MT, Municipal National Committee in Martin, 1945–1990, uncatalogued, letter *Chairlift to Martinské hole – dispute over the siting of the lower station due to restricted access to Malá dolina for forestry operations – dispute resolution request*, dated 4 January 1974. On 19 September 1974, it was agreed that a new

The upper station lay 2,040 metres away and 670 metres higher, on level ground on the Martinské hole plateau at an elevation of 1,245 metres above sea level.

Transporta provided the design, manufacture, and installation of the technological component. The architectural design of both station buildings was entrusted to the architect Anton Stolárik (1931–1992)<sup>84</sup> and his colleagues at Stavoprojekt Žilina.<sup>85</sup> The lower station in the Podstráne district is more reminiscent of a dam than of a station. As noted above, it closed off Malá dolina both symbolically and physically, with the Malý potok stream running directly through the site. The architect responded to the confined conditions by setting the station on piers spanning the stream bed. The mass of the building – which served as the return and tensioning station – was pierced at ground level by two large openings: one carrying the stream, the other containing the access staircase.

The façade of the Podstráne station was articulated by massive reinforced-concrete cantilevers, reminiscent of louvres, which supported an external gallery. In a reduced form, these also appeared on the opposite side of the building, at the boarding and alighting area. These zones were separated from the surrounding terrain by a sloping reinforced-concrete wall that, in a figurative sense, extended the building's pitched roof to the final point of the station – the platform edge at Support 1. The wall, stepping down in height, was divided into several bays by massive reinforced-concrete columns. The bays themselves were infilled with timber baulks. The frontage of the building was partly faced in stone and partly rendered, with timber used as a complementary material. Refined detailing could also be seen on the side elevations, where the windows were set in “playful” splayed reveals. From the snack bar, whose wall was glazed to the full storey height, visitors could look out over the valley beyond. The “station-as-dam” atmosphere was completed by a power line spanning the station building in a long, uninterrupted sweep.<sup>86</sup>

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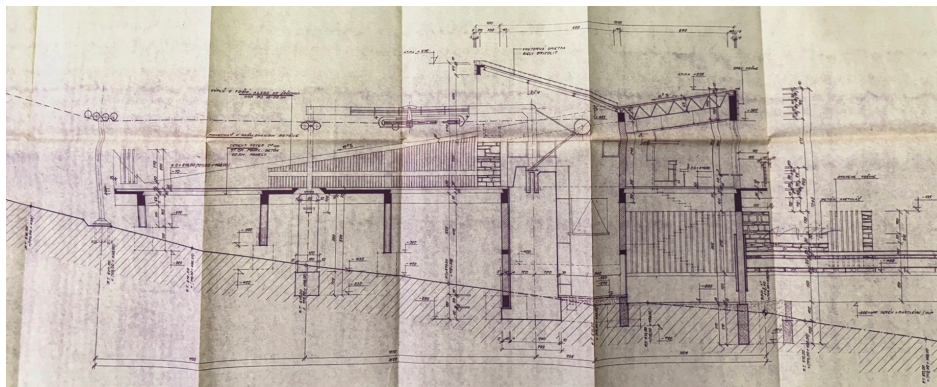
section of access road would be built. Ibid., minutes of a commission meeting, drawn up at the Construction Department of the District National Committee in Martin on 19 September 1974.

84 Anton Stolárik, an architect with Stavoprojekt Žilina, was the architect or co-architect of projects including the House of Farewell in Žilina, the Makyta Works Club in Púchov, the Koliesko Hotel in Jasná, and the Turzovka housing estate. See: Architekt Anton Stolárik. In *Projekt*, 1981, 5, pp. 58-59.

85 The surviving design documentation also suggests the possible involvement of Martin Oríšek, who is named in the drawings for the lower station as lead designer, with Anton Stolárik listed as responsible designer. For the upper station, Anton Stolárik is signed as both lead and responsible designer. ŠABB, Central Slovak Regional National Committee in Banská Bystrica II, Transport Department, 1971–1990, Box 11. For more on the Stavoprojekt Žilina design institute see, for example, MÓRICOVÁ. Od pravítka po počítač. In *Projekt*, 1979, 9, pp. 44-45.

86 Running parallel to the cableway route up to the upper station, this line supplied electricity

Fig. 11: From the original design documentation: section through the lower-station building with its prominent tensioning shaft



ŠABB, Central Slovak Regional National Committee in Banská Bystrica II, Transport Department, 1971–1990, Box 11.

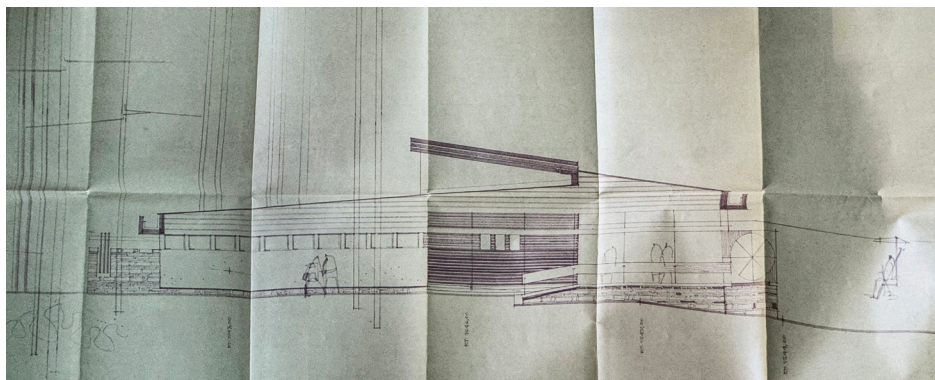
The upper station at Martinské hole was designed in a similar architectural style, though with a completely different layout. As the drive station, it had to accommodate the cableway drive, control room, backup power supply, electrical switch room, workshop, and associated facilities. In addition to these essential operational rooms, the building included an office, sanitary facilities for staff and the public, and a generously proportioned waiting room. The defining feature from the lower station – the rhythmic sequence of louvred elements – was repeated here on both principal façades: the entrance façade facing Martinské hole and the arrival side from Podstráne. On these elevations, the cantilevered louvres appeared to support the deep gutter channel, creating a pronounced vertical rhythm in the main view. The reinforced-concrete louvres were the

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to the Krížava television transmitter above Martinské hole. However, it caused additional complications, resolved only during construction, as recorded in an entry dated 12 July 1972: “In designing the lower station, several auxiliary cross-sections through the structure and terrain were prepared to verify the required clearance between the above-mentioned power line and the station building. Yet, yet despite careful checks, it proved impossible in practice to maintain a sufficient distance. In a letter of 27 June 1972, Stavoprojekt applied to Slovenské energetické závody [Slovak Power Stations][...] for an exemption for the construction of the cableway’s lower station.” ŠAZA-MT, Municipal National Committee in Martin, 1945–1990, uncatalogued, copy of minutes drawn up on 12 July 1972 at the OIV TEES Martin office, agenda: *Diversion of HV Line 147 Tp Martin, Krížava television transmitter, at the lower station of the chairlift*. The line above the lower station was subsequently diverted, as authorised by the District National Committee in Martin, Construction Department, Ref. Výst. 1930/72/Kj., dated 28 December 1972. Ibid.

principal element giving architectural expression to both structures. The side elevations shared similar features, again with windows set in splayed reveals.

Fig. 12: From the original design documentation: view of the upper-station building



ŠAZA-MT, Municipal National Committee in Martin, 1945–1990, uncatalogued.

The station-building design documentation included provision for artistic treatment in accordance with implementation regulations known as “Title V”.<sup>87</sup> The planned work was to be an “*emblem of cableway (sic!) lines*” by the artist Oto Opršal (1926–1980).<sup>88</sup> Although the design envisaged emblems at both stations, the commission of February 1974 required only “*a proposal for the artistic treatment of the lower station of the chairlift to Martinské hole*”. The commission further defined the work as “*an emblem of Martinské hole on an area of 375 × 375 cm*”, set a maximum price of 75,000 Czechoslovak crowns, and stipulated a completion deadline of June 1974.<sup>89</sup> At a meeting of the plenary of the Artistic Commission for Works in Architecture on 10 April 1975, however,

87 Title V, one part of a construction budget consisting of Titles I–IX, was defined by Decree No 107/1966 of the State Commission for Technology of 13 December 1966 on construction documentation. This decree implemented Resolution of the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic No 355 of 28 July 1965. The system under Title V was discontinued after 1989. See MLYNČEKOVÁ. *Percento pre umenie*. In ZAIČEK, ed. *Bratislavské moderné fontány*. Bratislava 2020, pp. 84–108.

88 Oto Opršal, painter, graphic artist, applied and industrial designer, and scenographer, was born and died in Martin. MAŤOVČÍK. *Slovenský biografický slovník (od roku 833 do roku 1990) – IV. zväzok M–Q*. Martin 1990, p. 341.

89 SNA, Fund of Fine Arts, 1949–2005, Box 957, File 13/74 *Artistic treatment of the Martinské hole chairlift*, copy of a letter from the national enterprise Turčianske strojárne, n.p. Martin, ref. 17/VI/Bá/121, of 12 February 1974 concerning *Chairlift to Martinské hole – commission for artistic decoration* to Dielo, an enterprise within the Slovak Fund of Fine Arts, Martin.

representatives of the enterprise Dielo reported that the client had cancelled the commission. At this meeting, the designers submitted their work – a

*“conceptual design for the entrance emblem at 1:10 scale (materials – timber and brass) and an architectural elevation of the entrance façade” for review to show how far they had progressed. The commission noted that “[...] it recommends that, should the building be brought into operation, the investor should continue to consider the use of the submitted proposal”.*<sup>90</sup>

That, in all likelihood, marked the end of the project.

Fig. 13: In August 2021, the regional project Spoznaj Turiec (“Discover Turiec”) captured in a risograph print the distinctive view of the cableway ascending the steep valley above Martin, running alongside the power line.



Source: Spoznaj Turiec, 2021. Risographic print: Radovan Šenšel

90 Ibid., extract from Minutes 4/75, drawn up on 10 April 1975, at a meeting of the plenary of the Artistic Sculpture Commission for Works in Architecture, held in the meeting room of the Olympia Café, Nám. 1. mája no. 34, in “Blava” (sic!), item 7 – Artistic sculptural solution for the lower station of the chairlift to Martinské hole, designers: Anton Stolárik and Oto Opršal.

The Martinské hole cableway was last in operation on 30 April 2005. Both stations have since stood unused and unmaintained, steadily deteriorating and heading towards irretrievable loss. Parts of the cableway technology have already been dismantled.<sup>91</sup>

### Discussion and conclusion

Station buildings for cableways have a number of specific characteristics that influence research methodology. One such issue is determining the start and end dates of their operation. There were instances where a cableway entered service while its stations were still under construction, with completion taking place during operation.<sup>92</sup> Later – including in the period we are covering – the reverse became true: the interval between completion of the station building and commissioning of the cableway itself lengthened, particularly from the late 1960s onwards. Establishing the end of a building’s operational life is no simpler. After a cableway ceases operation, its stations may be repurposed for various uses. However, because the building’s layout is so closely bound to the cableway technology, the year that technology is taken out of service is a key milestone. Any subsequent use of the building is practically impossible without reconstruction or adaptation.<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, where this study indicates the beginning or end of station operation, it refers to the year in which the original cableway entered or ceased service. Research is further complicated by the large number of uncatalogued archival records of the original investors, operators, and local state authorities, particularly the former district and municipal national committees. It is likely that documents currently inaccessible will come to light in future and help to resolve some of the outstanding questions.

In the 1960s, Slovakia saw the emergence of its first coherent network of cableways, unmatched in scale throughout the socialist era.<sup>94</sup> Contemporary

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91 A replacement cableway has yet to be built. Long-term plans envisage a gondola lift that would cover a greater transport distance and vertical rise, allowing the lower station to be sited further towards the valley entrance. See, for example, PALINSKÝ. *Mestské/prímestské lanové dráhy v územnoplánovacích podkladoch slovenských miest*. Košice 2020.

92 For example, the original Jasná – Luková “Roll system” cableway, commissioned in 1949.

93 A clear discrepancy exists between the service life of the architectural and technological components of a cableway. According to the engineer Ján Gavalier, Transporta unofficially assumed a technological service life of 17 years. Naturally, this lifespan could be extended through a general overhaul or modernisation, though such measures did not address the design’s moral obsolescence. In practice, the near-unlimited longevity of station buildings contrasts sharply with the finite life of the technology itself. This contradiction was later tackled – and perhaps resolved – by discontinuing the construction of station buildings, a step that affected chairlifts in particular. Station buildings continue to be designed for “large-scale” cableways (aerial tramways and gondola lifts), both in Slovakia and abroad. On the service life of Transporta cableways, see GAVALIER. *Nová lanovka na Solisko?* In *Lavex info*, 1992, 2, p. 10.

94 From the early 1980s onwards, licensed Tatrapoma cableways were gradually brought into

architecture thus introduced into the mountain landscape a building type – the cableway station – previously found only occasionally in such settings. The development of these stations was unprecedented in earlier decades and was not repeated later. It is only natural that the two principal components – mechanical engineering and architectural – continued to evolve during this period. The initially austere stations, resembling industrial structures, gave way to elegant mountain buildings in a late modern style. The clean lines of the specially designed architecture complemented the modern technological component of the cableway, the work of the cableway team at Transporta in Chrudim. In a measured way, the modernist treatment of station buildings may also have contributed to resolving the “tension between the technical and the traditional”, as Matúš Dulla describes it in connection with Dušan Jurkovič’s stations for the Lomnický štít cableway.<sup>95</sup>

The 1960s were, overall, a highly positive period for Slovak cableways. Closer examination, however, shows that this progress took place under demanding conditions. A chronic problem lay in the coordination of mechanical and construction deliveries, which in many cases made it necessary to overhaul the supplied cableway technology even before it was commissioned. This was nothing new: similar coordination failures were familiar from other sectors of socialist capital investment.<sup>96</sup> The paradox was particularly evident within Transporta itself, which from the late 1960s increasingly diverged from the officially declared aim of developing tourism and cable transport. During this period, Transporta’s cable transport division underwent a series of reorganisations and production cuts, pushing cableways to the margins of the engineering giant’s programme. In retrospect, this created the conditions for the gradual

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service, eight of them completed by 1990.

- 95 *“In his buildings, Jurkovič took account not only of the demands of pioneering enthusiasm, but also wove in references to the past [...] Large, ponderous structures, predominantly of stone, contain little of the engineers’ fervour or the easy confidence of the cableway builders. Yet traces of these qualities can still be found – for example, in the reinforced-concrete frames on the south side of the Štart station [...] For us, however, the cableway stands as a historical document, and we perhaps view its traditionally styled parts more favourably than the naively exposed structures that, as technology advanced, often lost their justification. Perhaps in the measured approach of the old master lies a model for how to place an artificial work within exposed nature.”* DULLA, Stavba, ktorá leží najvyššie, p. 252.
- 96 As the historian Drahomír Jančík observes: “[...] it sometimes happened that, because of delays in the construction of production halls, machinery delivered on schedule – often imported from hard-currency countries – remained stored on factory premises. This occurred, for example, at the Vítkovice Ironworks, which, for an investment project planned in 1962, purchased equipment worth 7.24 million crowns, yet, owing to delayed building works, it became clear that commissioning would not take place until around 1965. It was far from an isolated case. Improperly stored machinery suffered damage, and some was even completely ruined. [...]” JANČÍK. Mocenské centrum, direktivní plánování a hospodářská realita před nástupem Pražského jara. In PETRÁŠ and SVOBODA, eds. *Předjaří*, p. 213.

termination of cableway and ski-tow production, which also brought an end to the associated station buildings. Those buildings, however, are linked less to Transporta's technology than to their era – a time when multifunctional station buildings in mountain resorts provided a solid foundation for further stages of development, including, in the next phase, the emergence of cableways without station buildings.

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