INTRODUCTION

What lies behind the sleek façade of national pavilions at world's fairs? Looking behind the veneer of official presentations of states reveals who and what helps to shape what is displayed and why. Any state that decides to invest in a national pavilion at a world's fair pursues a concrete, rational set of goals ranging from establishing new business relationships to proclaiming its political and ideological stance to the allies and enemies. How the pavilions are constructed and conceived, read and received is, nevertheless, subject to various circumstances that do not always align with the original intent. The political, cultural and social environment, in which the pavilions appear, together with the agency of various exhibition participants construct national pavilions and their meaning. This book is concerned with world's fairs, which is a term I use as a shorthand for the largest exhibition events between the two World Wars. The interwar period was a time marked by important changes that included political restructuring in Europe, the Great Depression, new threats of war, and rising nationalisms. All of these had a major impact on the logic and purpose of world's fairs and how they were organized.

Ever since the Great Exhibition of 1851, world's fairs had been staged on an enormous scale and were visited by millions of people.[1] For participating states, they provided a significant opportunity to gain visibility, strengthen political

1 Some more recent contributions on the subject include David Raizman and Ethan Robey, eds., *Expanding Nationalisms at World's Fairs: Identity, Diversity and Exchange, 1851–1915* (London: Routledge, 2017); Joseph Leerssen and Eric Storm, eds., *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities: International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851–1958* (Leiden: Brill, 2022); Robert W. Rydell and Laura Burd Schiavo, eds., *Designing Tomorrow: America's World's Fairs of the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

and economic alliances, and find new trading partnerships, embedding a distinct image of the state in the minds of others. This was especially the case for the new states that were created out of the wreckage of Tsarist Russia, the Ottoman Empire, imperial Germany and Austria-Hungary during and after the First World War. In this respect, one of the keenest participants in international exhibitions and world's fairs between the wars was Czechoslovakia. Created on October 28, 1918, it was a new political entity and one of the successor states to the Habsburg monarchy. In many respects, Czechoslovakia stands out amongst the countries created out of Austria-Hungary. It saw itself on the winning side of the First World War and it remained a more-or-less stable democracy until 1938. This relative political stability helped its diplomatic relations, especially with the USA, France and the United Kingdom. Czechoslovakia also participated in all major exhibitions of the interwar period.

Within the specific environment of world's fairs, states—including Czechoslovakia—promoted a sense of their national identity through their pavilion architecture, exhibits and accompanying events. At the same time, participating countries endeavoured to fit in and embraced the shared vision of modernity that international exhibitions promoted. Yet alongside showcasing themselves as modern and progressive, states such as Czechoslovakia also bolstered with legitimacy by emphasising their longstanding cultural traditions and history. This inevitably led to the creation of a tension between the competing principles on which their participation in world's fairs were based. Various studies of national participations at world's fairs have highlighted the numerous contradictions in the displays that foregrounded national exceptionalism while also trying to demonstrate their place in the shared modernity.[2]

If we recall Zygmunt Bauman's thesis that order and chaos are the twin pillars of modernity, we can view world's fairs as reflecting the chaos and order of the modern world.[3] The exhibitions, via their initiators, organizers and exhibitors, gathered the seeming chaos of the present, sorted it, classified it and explained it. The seeming order they brought to the disarray of competing ideas that enter the exhibition space was, however, idealised as well as ambiguous. One of the purposes of this book is to interrogate what was selected to be or-

2 For example, Christine Romlid, "Visualizing Sweden at the 1937 World Fair in Paris," in Holger Weiss, ed., *Locating the Global Spaces, Networks and Interactions from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020); Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), Patricia A. Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000) and others.

3 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2007), 4.

dered and what exhibition organizers (in the widest sense of the expression) sought to achieve with that selection.

Interwar world's fairs embraced modern ideas of progress, capitalism, individualism, and secularization, reflecting the interests of states, as well as the processes of urbanization and the growing interconnectedness of the world by new means of communication. The visions presented at world's fairs built an idealised interpretation of the future and of how it could be planned and constructed. World's fairs were therefore both the products of modernity and its agents. As Joseph Leerssen has recently argued in relation to world's fairs, "modernity turns the world into a panorama."[4] The panoramic view of the globe offered classifications and explanations in a concise place and time.[5] Yet who was responsible and what motivated them? This question is seldom addressed directly, and the concern about who was responsible for selecting, ordering, classifying and displaying the world is one of the key issues I address in this book. I acknowledge that the state, in my case Czechoslovakia, was the primary agent in the organization of world's fair, represented by what could be called the *exhibition elites* that consisted of government officials, business leaders, ambassadors, as well as architects and designers. However, I argue that their effort was complemented, challenged and modified by other actors too. They ranged from female performers and casual workers to scientific experts, all of whom promoted their own understanding of what they represented or promoted in these contexts.

Agency has become a concern of recent world's fairs scholarship, which has turned away from focusing solely on those representatives of the state who were, at least in principle, in control. World's fairs as physical and mental spaces were co-constructed or disrupted by participating countries and audiences, as well as workers and performers of various ethnic backgrounds. A new perspective on the topic has been provided by for example approaches from gender studies that turned long needed attention to the multifaceted roles of women in world's fairs.[6] Restoring their presence and highlighting their absence has enriched the understanding of world's fairs as intricate mechanisms reflective of societal structures. Attention to questions of gender is a distinguishing feature of *Czechoslova-*

4 Leerssen and Storm, *World Fairs*, 37. Cf also Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (Stanford University Press, 1990).

5 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison* (London: Allen Lane, 1977); Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Harvard University Press, 1999); Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *new formations* 4, no. 1 (1998): 73–102.

6 Tracey Jean Boisseau and Abigain M. Markwyn, eds., *Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and Gender at World's Fairs* (Illinois University Press, 2010); Myriam Boussahba-Bravard and Rebecca Rogers, eds., *Women in International and Universal Exhibitions, 1876–1937* (London: Routledge, 2018).

kia at the World's Fairs, too, which argues that the noticeable absence of women amongst the exhibition elites reflected the general situation in Czechoslovakia.

The topic of great exhibitions and world's fairs in the interwar era continues to generate new studies because of the ability of these events to reflect the vast complexity of the modern world in a single space, that keep offering new material to consider.[7] Yet Czechoslovakia and its participation in interwar world's fair has seldom been a subject of sustained research in this connection. The reasons for this are numerous, but they undoubtedly are related to the fact that it was often regarded as a state of little political and economic significance in the global scheme of things. And while some literature has been devoted to Czechoslovak presence at expos after the Second World War, especially in Brussels 1958 and Montreal 1967, the interwar period remained understudied.[8]

The careful examination of the different aspects of Czechoslovak participation offered here is based on in-depth archival research and reveals not only one state's trajectory through the interwar world and world's fairs but also sheds light on the important political, economic, social, and cultural circumstances that shaped these events. The attempts by successive Czechoslovak governments to be part of every large exhibition of the interwar period indicate that the state had the ambition to become a recognised player in global affairs. I argue that this was done by two methods: on the one hand, the state put strong emphasis on presenting itself as a new entity that took a democratic direction. On the other hand, it benefitted from the industrial and cultural legacies of the Habsburg empire it could build on. The selective inclusions and exclusions of objects, people and ideas for display in Czechoslovak pavilions therefore demonstrate the extent to which national presentations, as well as nations, reflected

7 Martin Wörner, *Vergnügung und Belehrung: Volkskultur auf den Weltausstellungen 1851–1900* (Münster: Waxmann, 1999); Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Sven Schuster, *Die Inszenierung der Nation. Das Kaiserreich Brasilienim Zeitalterder Weltausstellungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015); M. Elizabeth Boone, *"The Spanish Element in Our Nationality," Spain and America at the World's Fairs and Centennial Celebrations, 1876–1915* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2021); Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984).

8 Pavlína Morganová, Terezie Nekvindová, and Dagmar Svatošová, *Výstava jako médium: české umění 1957–1999* (Prague: AVU, 2020); Martina Mertová and Rostislav Švácha, *Byli jsme světoví!: Expo Brusel, Montreal, Ósaka z archivu architekta Miroslava Řepy: pohledy do sbírek Muzea umění Olomouc = We were world-class! : Expo Brussels, Montreal and Ósaka from the archive of the architect Miroslav Řepa: collection inE sights* (Olomouc: Muzeum umění Olomouc, 2022); Cathleen M. Giustino, "Industrial Design and the Czechoslovak Pavilion at EXPO '58: Artistic Autonomy, Party Control and Cold War Common Ground," *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (2012): 185–212; Daniela Kramerová and Terezie Nekvindová, *Automat na výstavu: československý pavilon na Expo 67 v Montrealu = The automatic exhibition: the Czechoslovak pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal* (Cheb: Galerie výtvarného umění, 2017).

the careful crafting of narratives designed to underpin the construction and promotion of a putative identity.

A new state and a new nation?

Czechoslovakia was formed as an independent state by the Declaration of Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation by its Provisional Government, drafted in the USA by the politician and philosopher Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937) and published on October 18, 1918. It created a union of Czechs and Slovaks in a single state with a view that Slovaks would eventually gain autonomy.[9] The Czech and Slovak National Council, formed during the war and working from Paris, formed the basis of the first Czechoslovak government, Masaryk became the President and was supported by his close aids in France—Edvard Beneš as foreign minister and Milan Rastislav Štefánik as minister of war.[10] The territory of the new state was composed of Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. The latter region joined Czechoslovakia following negotiations that started in 1917 in the USA between Masaryk, the American President Woodrow Wilson and Rusyn-Americans in a temporary solution. The largely rural territory of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia remained under direct Czechoslovak governance until 1924 when the Ruthenians gained representation (however small) in the national parliament. Autonomy of the region, promised in the so-called Uzhhorod memorandum in 1919, however, was not achieved until late 1938.

Apart from the Ruthenians, many other minorities, most importantly Germans, Hungarians, Poles, and Jews, lived in the new Czechoslovak state. Germans comprised of some 23% of the inhabitants of the new state, and Hungarians about 12%.[11] The idea of a single Czechoslovak nation and people was therefore devised by politicians and backed by historians already during the war. It was a conscious strategy of Czech and Slovak diplomats to be presented under a single identity so as not to confuse the politicians of the Alliance, who were expected to be unfamiliar with the history and complex ethnic composition of

9 Pavel Kosatík, *Slovenské století* (Prague: Torst, 2021), 85–86.

10 Brent Mueggenberg, *The Czecho-Slovak Struggle for Independence, 1914–1920* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2014), 206.

11 Zdeněk Kárník, "Výsledky sčítání lidu 1910 a 1021. Němci v Českých zemích, jejich počet a relativní čísla," in *České země v éře První republiky 1918–1938. I. Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918–1929)* (Prague: Libri, 2000), 89.