The simplifications of the ethnic composition in the notion of the Czechoslovak nation had a direct consequence in the selective way Czechoslovakia was presented at world's fairs. As I argue throughout the book, *Czechoslovak* in the national displays was often synonymous with Czech and the industrial heartlands of Bohemia. This was grounded in the latter's economic and political history going back to the Habsburg monarchy. Bohemia, along with Upper and Lower Austria, and Vienna, had been a highly industrialised region and it enjoyed a boom of new industries from the 1890s onwards. Its private enterprises and agriculture were on the rise and the region started developing national capital in the form of its own (Czech) banks and financial institutions that could compete with Austro-German ones.[16]

After the creation of Czechoslovakia, Bohemia continued to be undeniably more industrialised, with about 90% of all Czechoslovak industrial production concentrated here.[17] Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, on the other hand, remained mainly agricultural. In the narrative constructed for the world's fairs, the predominantly rural territories in the east of the state would be commonly reduced to a rather simplified display of the areas as embedded in agriculture and folk culture. Proportionately, Slovakia was usually harshly underrepresented.[18] Moreover, Czechoslovak displays also hardly ever featured other minorities and it was only Germans who enjoyed representation through various trading organizations and businesses that participated in the pavilions.

## The small Czechoslovak nation

The way many politicians, writers and artists envisaged Czechoslovakia can be demonstrated by a short text authored by the writer Karel Čapek (1890-1938). Extracts of the article were used in Czechoslovak national presentations at the International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life in Paris in 1937 and the World of Tomorrow in New York in 1939.[19] The acclaimed writer de-

16 Eduard Kubů and Jaroslav Pátek, "Základní charakteristika výchozí situace a vývoje československé ekonomiky v meziválečném období," in *Mýtus a realita hospodářské vyspělosti Československa mezi světovými válkami*, eds. Eduard Kubů and Jaroslav Pátek (Prague: Karolinum, 2000), 10.

17 Kubů and Pátek, "Základní charakteristika," 16.

18 Pavol Komora, *Hospodárske a všeobecné výstavy 1842–1940* (Bratislava: Slovenské národné muzeum, 2017), 233.

19 Karel Čapek, "Hle, Československo," *Srdce Evropy* I, unpag. (1936), reprinted in *Od člověka k člověku* III. Prague: Československý spisovatel; B. Soumar, ed., *Tchecoslovaquie à l'Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne Paris 1937* (Prague: Melantrich, 1937).

scribed the state as a land of contradictions between modernity, civilization and industrialization on the one hand, and primitive naivety and traditions on the other. This, indeed, was the putative divide between west and east, between Bohemia and Slovakia respectively. Čapek also defined Czechoslovakia as a land at the intersection of history, a site of political, religious and cultural crossroads, and an island. Throughout modern history, Czechoslovakia has often been referred to as an "island of democracy and freedoms," as well as an "island of order and calm," as Čapek calls it in his text.[20]

Such accounts contributed to the myth of a democratic, liberal and peaceful state, tolerant to its minorities and not eliciting conflicts. Nevertheless, some contemporary historians and philosophers like Josef Pekař and Emanuel Rádl and more recently historians, such as Andrea Orzoff and others, have challenged the traditional nationalist rhetoric of Czechs which saw them as suffering under Habsburg rule, eventually liberating themselves, their language and culture in 1918 in an embrace of democratic values.[21]

This myth-making was promoted not only by the so-called "Castle," the term used for the informal group of institutions and allies of T. G. Masaryk and the foreign minister Edvard Beneš, but also more widely and popularly in literature, the arts, and—of course—exhibitions.[22] As a close collaborator and friend of Masaryk, Čapek was an ardent advocate of Czechoslovakia as a small, but capable state with a liberal democracy and a "hardworking and valiant people, whose risorgimento is not yet complete, and who still remain capable of astonishing the world."[23] It is one of the aims of this book to look beyond these myths created by politicians, writers, and artists as well as those involved in constructing the Czechoslovak national displays.

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20 Karel Čapek, "La visage de la Tchécoslovaquie," in *Tchecoslovaquie à l'Exposition*, 15–21.

21 For example, Josef Pekař, *Smysl českých dějin* (Prague: v.n., 1929); Emanuel Rádl, *O smysl našich dějin předpoklady k diskusi o této otázce* (Prague: Čin, 1925); Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914–1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia, The State that Failed* (Yale University Press, 1997); Ladislav Holý, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: national identity and the post-communist transformation of society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996); Robert Pynsent, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1994); Ondřej Slačálek "The Postcolonial Hypothesis. Notes on the Czech 'Central' European Identity," *Annual of Language & Politics & Politics of Identity* 10, no. 10 (2016): 27–44.

22 Michal Kopeček, "Czechoslovak Interwar Democracy and its Critical Introspections," *Journal of Modern European History / Zeitschrift für moderne europäische Geschichte / Revue d'histoire européenne contemporaine* 17, No. 1 (February 2019): 7–15. See also Karel Čapek, *O demokracii, novinách a českých poměrech*, ed. Ivan Klíma (Prague: Academia, 2003); Karel Čapek, *Talks with T.G. Masaryk*, transl. by M. H. Heim and D. Round (North Haven: Catbird Press, 1995).

23 Čapek, *Tchecoslovaquie*, 21.

**Fig.1.** Antonín Strnadel and Josef Novák, collage of Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovak pavilion, New York world's fair, 1939.

When Čapek's quotation about the small but civilised and cultured nation appeared in New York, it was underneath a collage which visualised many of the stereotypes via which Czechoslovakia was presented [fig. 1].[24] The collage showed the "typical" cultural phenomena of the entire country extending from the western border with Germany to the eastern regions of the Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. The westernmost regions were represented by an inhabitant of Chodsko clad in a heavy coat—the Chods were the historic protectors of the borders with Germany. A group of Sokol gymnasts followed while Prague was represented by the castle with middle-class inhabitants. Halfway through the image, more rural scenes appeared with mountainous and agricultural regions of eastern Moravia and Slovakia. These were symbolised by peasants either attending to animals or engaged in dancing or playing a musical instrument. The easternmost Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia was depicted as a land of forests where timber was mined. Both the collage and the quotation extended the simplified reading of the country's character using the west-east hierarchies and stereotypes about cultured Bohemia and primitive Slovakia, so often replicated in exhibitions.

24 The work was designed by the artists and professors of the School of Decorative Arts in Prague, Antonín Strnadel and Josef Novák.