

cized tradition, inviting a further examination of the relationship between gender and primitivism.

Book structure

Czechoslovakia was, indeed, not an exploited colony that would be displayed by means of a pretence of a reconstructed village with indigenous inhabitants and staged behaviour. Nor was it one of the largest political or economic powers that would showcase its possessions and greatness at world's fairs. Nevertheless, it was an ambitious country that invested impressive amounts of resources into taking part in all world's fairs of the interwar period, while selecting and ordering the key aspects of its identity for display. It occupied a space between the unknown and exotic, usually reserved for non-European participants, and the modern and progressive.

Competition in this space was harsh because many other new countries endeavoured to offer their products, cultures and identities. These were new entities like Poland, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, or Ireland, to mention just a few examples from Europe. Austria, Hungary, and Yugoslavia, specifically, are my main comparative examples, as they shared many similar starting points after the war. Their political development, however, took a different course from Czechoslovakia; Austrofascism developed in Austria and Miklós Horthy introduced an authoritarian regime in Hungary. In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which also consisted of diverse ethnic groups like Czechoslovakia, leaders also moved away from democracy toward a dictatorial regime.

Czechoslovakia at the World's Fairs interrogates how the process of political, societal and economic modernization that Czechoslovakia underwent was displayed at world's fairs and specific international exhibitions, from the visual representation in architecture and arts to the displays of modern technology and scientific visions of a modern nation. Most of the chapters that follow do not follow a chronological development of Czechoslovak participation at world's fairs and international exhibitions but instead are focused thematically. The exception is Chapter One, "Continuities and Ruptures: Interwar Displays," where I trace the consequences that the breakdown of the Habsburg empire caused for successor states like Czechoslovakia and their representation at world's fairs. Although Czechoslovakia only came into existence in 1918, its participation in world fairs was informed by a long history of trade and national exhibitions in Bohemia and, more widely, Austria-Hungary that had been taking place since the mid-eighteenth century. On the background of the political, economic and social circumstances of the interwar period, I examine the foundations and

contents of these exhibitions, looking for the patterns of continuities and ruptures amongst them. The historical overview of interwar world's fairs and the individual national pavilions sets out the discussion of the trajectory Czechoslovakia followed in the short span of not even twenty years.

The main issues that Czechoslovak representations faced included practical problems of space organization and selection of objects. Chapter Two, "Exhibition Spaces," explores the physical designs of the national pavilions that reflected political, commercial, and artistic needs of the time and aimed at creating exhibitionary order. The concerns of architects and designers of how to entice visitors in its physical and mental spaces of display and keep them there became a pressing issue for everyone. While they were limited by the interests of the state and the exhibitors, designers applied complex theories about space distribution, visitors' psychology and information communication, as well as inspiration from other disciplines like graphic or stage design. They were inevitably responsible for the most visible aspects of the national presentations.

Chapter Three, "Art and Design: The Limits of Modernism," focuses on the visual arts displayed in Czechoslovak pavilions and on the fluid understanding of what *modern* means. The artistic displays throughout the interwar period were driven by the question of what kind of art should represent the state. Embracing modernity and progress was important for the Czechoslovak organizers and while architecture of the national pavilion was the first and most visible feature of the official presentation, the modernity of the display was also projected through fine art and design. Yet as I argue in this chapter, *modern* often did not stand for radical or avant-garde. The attempt to find the right balance between international and national forms of visual expression informed the selection of artworks. Alongside its modernity, the state tried to proclaim its historical legitimacy and traditions through its visual arts, most visibly at the 1925 Exposition in Paris where crafts and decorative tendencies had a prominent place. It also found an important medium in the inclusion of folk art and culture, which were a fitting vehicle for displaying the country's distinctiveness as well as a means of including Slovakia in the displays.

In Chapter Four, "Commodifying the State," the book examines what *Czechoslovak* meant in relation to commercial goods. In the volatile environment of the interwar period, marked especially by postwar shortages, the Great Depression and German expansionism, many large and small companies also used Czechoslovak pavilions to promote their products to find new markets. The analysis of four case studies of Detva textiles, Moser glass, Pilsner beer and Baťa shoes shows that the content of the national presentation was largely shaped by busi-

ness elites in which the showcasing “national” products was intertwined with business interests. These interests were, however, not always aligned with those of the state, as in the case of the shoe company Baťa, which proposed its own vision of the national pavilion and its focus for the world’s fair in New York. The involvement of the four companies ultimately demonstrates how they navigated the political and economic challenges of the interwar period.

Apart from businesses and the government, the content of the pavilions was created by numerous individuals and interest groups. In Chapter Five, “People of the Fair,” I turn the focus away from the exhibition elites to actors whose interventions received smaller exposure but helped to shape the content of the pavilions. These less visible, yet formative actors were not a uniform but a diverse group, including members of émigré communities, especially in the USA, the workers who helped to design and build the displays, and the performers who participated here. American Czechs and Slovaks participated not only in the physical construction of the national pavilions but also in the mental formation of the idea of the Czechoslovak nation. The idea of Czechoslovakia was born abroad at the end of the First World War and émigré communities especially in the USA retained influential views of the new political entity and identity. They were often involved in constructing the ideological content of the national pavilions, shaping their material as well as ideological content.

I use the discussion of the diaspora to further consider the topic of inclusion and exclusion at world’s fairs. I draw attention to those who were employed by the exhibitions, as well as to visitors and journalists, for example. Their views of the way the state and the nation should be presented revealed alternative views of Czechoslovakia to the official narratives. Many of the employees in Czechoslovak, and indeed other pavilions, were women. In the Czechoslovak case, however, women predominantly occupied service positions; they were waitresses and sales attendants, performers and objects of display through their products or bodies, and they attended as visitors and observers. In a few cases, women were designers and exhibitors, but in general, their presence in Czechoslovak pavilions beyond the services like sales and waitressing was marginal. Set against the debates on gender and emancipation held in Czechoslovakia at the time, I argue that the exclusions of women from the Czechoslovak representations contradict the image of Czechoslovak democracy constructed in the fairs.

Alongside gender and class, the ethnic diversity of Czechoslovakia was a complex matter that exhibition organizers did *not* readily display at world’s fairs. The Czechoslovak majority dominated at the expense of the minorities of Germans and Hungarians, as well as Jews, Poles, Ruthenians, and Roma. In Chapter

Six, “Race, Science and Ethnicity: Molding the Ideal Czechoslovak,” I interrogate the ethnic construction of the unified Czechoslovak nation and put it into the context of international discussions about race and ethnicity during the inter-war period. Fairs were often used to impress messages about race upon visitors; these included a condoning of colonial expansionism, white supremacy and racial hierarchy. Although Czechoslovakia had no colonies, these issues were still relevant to it when one considers the conscious ethnic and racial hierarchies of the displays.³⁰ The chapter scrutinises especially the relation between the efforts to present Czechoslovakia as a young and healthy nation based on theories of social Darwinism and eugenics that were widespread in the 1920s and 1930s.

In the Czechoslovak pavilions, health establishments were promoted next to depictions of the latest housing projects and social care facilities that the state, and in some cases private enterprises, built not only in the name of modernization and progress but also future improved society. Throughout chapter and the book, I argue that the concerns with presenting the nation as young and progressive were linked to the interest in the betterment of *humanity* in the first half of the 20th century, or, in other words, eugenics.³¹ Such alignment with eugenics brought dangerous ideas into Czechoslovak politics, scholarship, and, indeed, exhibitions in the form of justification of the biological, social and cultural hierarchies between people. By examining concrete examples, I reveal that as part of the international eugenic community, Czechoslovakia brought these ideas either explicitly or implicitly to its presentations at international exhibitions.

The engagement in eugenics of many scholars and politicians in Czechoslovakia lead to a selective presentation of material and facts. One of the main concerns of *Czechoslovakia at the World's Fairs* is the way information and ideas were shown and visualised. Diagrams and photographs explicitly or implicitly linked to eugenics are one example, display of heavy machinery, modern art, touristic destinations, or food and drink as Czechoslovak another. National presentations become specific forms of communication where the repetition of the same narrative, i.e., display of the same or similar message in successive national pavilions, endorsed and normalised such modes of representation.³²

30 Mark A. Brandon, *The Perils of Race-Thinking: A Portrait of Aleš Hrdlička* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2023).

31 Marius Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Marius Turda, ed. *The History of East-Central European Eugenics. Sources and Commentaries* (London – New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

32 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1977).

How exceptional was Czechoslovakia in its efforts to be at every single world's fair with its products, arts and visions? The Conclusion, and the entire book, claim that behind the primary concern with establishing trade relations at the world's fairs was a complex array of motivations about what kind of Czechoslovakia should be displayed, who should represent it and how. These drives created a discrepancy between the official portrayal of the state and the agendas of individuals, companies and organizations. The organizers, consisting of the political, business and cultural elites, used the means of visual diplomacy to validate Czechoslovakia as a new, modern, democratic state and partner for the external audiences. Interests of various other actors from outside of these closed circles of the exhibition elites disrupted the seemingly perfect picture. The questions of inclusions and exclusions whether of race, gender or class affected many individuals and groups who took part in the world's fairs. Czechoslovakia with its insistence on showcasing democratic principles throughout the entire inter-war period makes a great example of the volatility that was taking place behind the official façade of its pavilions. The attempt to place Czechoslovakia through its pavilions in the world order becomes symptomatic of the efforts of many other countries and new states who were not the largest players in world's fairs.