

National days at world's fairs promoted the homogenous picture of Czechoslovak culture further with music, dance and dramatic performances, often in national costumes. They were massive gatherings, consisting of thousands of participants. As part of the Chicago world's fair in 1933, for example, 1,800 Sokol gymnasts performed their routines while a further 4,000 people created a tableau vivant celebrating the home country. These events were an expression of uniformity, uncomplicated by ethnic diversity and tensions growing over the interwar decade. Modernity was similarly underplayed in these events in favor of what was promoted as a traditional, authentic culture with references to the historicity of the people.

### Agency

The local diaspora was often involved in running the pavilion restaurants, delivering the program of the national days and contributing to the shape of the displays. It was especially the American Czechs and Slovaks who offered their own understanding of what the Czechoslovak nation was at the world's fairs in Philadelphia, Chicago, New York and San Francisco. They stood outside the Prague-based exhibition elites in charge of the main aspects of the exhibits and included a range of contributors from casual workers like builders and waitresses to performers and journalists. These individuals, nevertheless, were not a single group with a unanimous view. In the USA, the diaspora consisted of such diverse voices as those of Slovak autonomists, former legionnaires, or women's associations, all trying to make their mark in the representation.

The real agency these groups and individuals had was, nevertheless, limited. While the diaspora became formative for the content of the displays in the American world's fairs in the last interwar years, its impact on the overall ideology of the pavilions was limited. Their input was the result of external political and economic circumstances like the loss of statehood rather than an outcome of a conscious plan of the pavilion organizers for inclusivity. The presence and involvement of women in the exhibition activities linked to the official Czechoslovak presentation were similarly curtailed. On only a few occasions, women appeared as exhibiting fine artists and designers or appeared in the roles of assistants to architects and designers. More often, though, women occupied anonymous service positions in the restaurants and shops and as attendants in the pavilions. They featured in parades, performances and official events but their agency was minimal and unrecognized. The male organizers could only envisage

their roles in increasing the attractiveness of the pavilion and sales. The main input into the content, structure and delivery of the national pavilions remained with the exhibition elites, a group women were excluded from.

### Trajectories and developments

The displays in national pavilions were put together to show a desirable interpretation of the outside reality, yet they did not function in a vacuum and responded to the political and economic situation. The Czechoslovak organizers reacted especially to the global financial circumstances when considering whether to participate in the fairs. While the earlier pavilions in Rio de Janeiro in 1922 and Paris in 1925 were influenced by discussions of the main focus of the exhibits, the cost of the subsequent participation in Philadelphia, Barcelona and Chicago in the late 1920s and early 1930s, affected by the global economic downturn, became one of the major issues. However, the fact that the government ultimately always opted to invest money and energy in the national pavilion or section, despite the financial difficulties, speaks of the importance Czechoslovakia placed on participating in these events.

Throughout the interwar period, a set of regular exhibitors and features formed the basis of the national presentations. Companies like Baťa, Vítkovice and Pilsner provided not only the content but also materials and commodities which could be used for the construction and offset the overall cost of the participation. In cases like beer, they could also be consumed while the exhibition was open. The commercial side was habitually complemented by the visual arts which took the form of fine art and design displays with a representative function. Several references had their fixed place in the national pavilions, and they included the bust of President Masaryk and large-scale paintings of Prague and the Tatra mountains.

### Crumbling façade

The case of Czechoslovakia at world's fairs therefore reflects the general attitudes of the world's fairs towards minorities, typical of other, often larger political entities. The pavilion might have been built from below by casual workers, members of the diaspora, and visitors, but it was Czechoslovakia, through its exhibition elites, that carved itself a space in the ranks of major exhibitors and