

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

the world order established at the fairs. Like other great powers, it contributed to the classification of humanity in its displays, presenting its own views of superiority and distinction among different groups of people and objects. Bata's "Hymn to Work" in New York provided such a visualization of a world, that could be easily classified and represented in windowpanes. In a world threatened by the coming war, the colorful vision in glass as well as the entire pavilion became a nostalgic reminder of the interwar ambition of the Czechoslovak state.

Compared to other European, especially Central European countries, Czechoslovakia indeed gave the impression of an island of exceptional democracy. While Poland, Austria, Hungary and Germany grappled with autocratic regimes and internal conflicts and did not invest the same energies or ideologies into world's fairs, the external image of Czechoslovakia was one of democracy, stability, and modernity. The national pavilions at world's fairs helped to sustain such a notion with the modern structures and objects in them and the drive towards progress and improvement. Behind this façade, however, the reality was different and internal tensions and alliances, ethnic and gender stratification of society and the belief in Czech supremacy in the state penetrated the displays. Despite the concerted effort to present a unified image of the "island of democracy," the project of the democratic state and its pavilions ultimately crumbled. One of the reasons for this failure was the fact that the Czechoslovak identity was built and visualized on flawed and simplified attributes which suppressed the multi-ethnic aspect of the state. The different actors behind the Czechoslovak displays at world's fairs ultimately presented a limited, wishful portrayal of reality through the inclusions, exclusions and proposed hierarchies and classifications in these highly ambitious exhibition projects.