

Anti-Modernism and Anti-Urbanism as Ideological Foundations of Urban Exhibitions of Slovak Culture and Art in the Nazi and Fascist "New Europe"^{*,**}

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vol. 14, 2025, no. 1, pp. 65–81
<https://doi.org/10.33542/CAH2025-1-04>



This article is a contribution to research on the cultural diplomacy of Nazi Germany on the periphery of Axis Europe. It focuses primarily on an analysis of the ideological assumptions underlying the organization of exhibitions about Slovakia and Slovak art in German cities in 1942. It assesses the thesis that the discourses of anti-modernism and anti-urbanism were the basis for the presentation of Slovak realities and culture. Interactions between the Nazi center and the Slovak periphery were characterized by an emphasis on the authenticity of folk culture and art, which implied a contrast between the "pure" countryside and the "decadent" city. This research shows that the decisive actors in this discourse were not domestic but "foreign" Germans, that is, members of the German-speaking minorities of Central and Southeastern Europe, who wanted to make up for their sense that their development lagged behind that of the Reich by emphasizing the originality and authenticity of the periphery, which they also projected onto local non-German-speaking majority cultures.

Keywords: anti-modernism and anti-urbanism; cultural diplomacy; exhibitions; Nazi Germany; Slovak State.

While the relations and interactions between the Slovak State and Nazi Germany during the Second World War have been the subject of historical research for decades, less is known about the perceptions of the two unequal actors toward each other and the presentation of these perceptions externally, especially by the self-proclaimed "protective power", that is, Germany. While in Slovakia official propaganda portrayed the Third Reich as the protector of the rights of small nations against the threats of both Bolshevism and Western democracies, allegedly guided from behind the scenes by "world Jewry",¹ in Nazi propaganda Slovakia was to represent a kind of showcase or "calling card" (*Visitenkarte*) of Nazi Germany's condescending attitude toward the peoples of so-called Southeastern Europe (*Südosteuropa*) (referring to the Balkan countries plus Hungary and Slovakia).² In view of the priorities of Nazi ideology, the role of German minorities in this region was generally to act as a kind of vanguard of

* This article was researched and written with the support of the Slovak Research and Development Agency under agreement No. APVV-22-0301 entitled *History of Art in the Slovak State and Nazi Europe: Institutions and Reception between Centre and Periphery*.

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1 NIŽNANSKÝ, *Obráz nepriateľa*.

2 During National Socialism, "Southeastern Europe" (*Südosteuropa*) also included Hungary and Slovakia in order to distinguish them from German-dominated Central Europe (*Mitteuropa*).

"Germanness" in the process of "racial" reorganization of the region. In addition to the elimination of "foreign elements", above all "Jews" and "Gypsies" – and, in the specific case of Slovakia, even "Hungarians and Magyarons" – this was to consist of the Germanization of suitable "racial" material.³ Although the Nazis did not overtly promote this goal by highlighting the "healthy" roots of folk culture and art in selected non-German ethnic groups, they seem to have at least implied it.

In the present study, I will examine public exhibitions to show by way of example the limits of the presentation of images of such accepted difference under the conditions of the Nazi "racial order". In so doing, I proceed from the thesis that in Southeastern Europe the modernism of Nazi ideology and culture in relation to the "ethnic Germans" (*Volksdeutsche*) and the majority peoples that surrounded them was accompanied by a *völkisch* or ethno-nationalist tendency toward anti-modernism to a greater extent than within the Reich. Maria Todorova understands modernism on the eastern periphery of Europe in the affirmative sense of catching up with the "western core", which prompted Sorin Antohi and Balázs Trencsényi to reconceptualize Roger Griffin's thesis of fascist modernism as a rejection of modernity and a projection of an alternative modernism. Indeed, modernity on the eastern periphery still remained largely a program or projection, and both authors therefore propose the use of the term anti-modernism, which better describes the oscillation between the modern and the premodern, or the recurrence of the latter.⁴

In the case of Nazi Germany's cultural diplomacy in relation to the regions of Central and Southeastern Europe, anti-modernism manifested itself in an emphasis on the ethnic roots of national culture and the preference for folk, or at least "old", art among both the German minorities and the majority peoples there. This is also true of one variant of anti-modernism, *völkisch* anti-urbanism, which demonized the cosmopolitan city and projected the "pure" city of the future being firmly tied to the land as a source of collective vitality. This is the best way to explain the paradoxes of the presentation of folkloristic or directly rural architecture in the environment of dynamically developing German cities, or the coexistence of the "engaged romanticism" of local *Volksdeutsche* and the modernist urban development programs of the capital city of Bratislava, protected by the Reich.⁵ In the present study, I will not examine this paradoxical, essentially anti-modernist oscillation between traditionalism and modernism through the example of architecture, but I will apply it to the analysis of ideological influences on the conception of the exhibition "Slovakia" shown in Stuttgart in 1942, which had a relatively large resonance both in Germany and Slovakia, but which has nevertheless not been the subject of historical or ethnological research to date. This understanding of anti-urbanism also indirectly influenced the presentation and perception of contemporary art, which I will demonstrate in the discussions that accompanied the plans to hold a representative exhibition of Slovak art in Berlin at the same time.

The present study is a contribution to a topic hitherto little researched, at least in the context of East–Central Europe (although it has been an important aspect of research on the history of Axis Europe over the past decade): cultural diplomacy. According to

3 KAISER, *Politik des Dritten Reiches*, 433– 434; TÖNSMEYER, *Dritte Reich*, 46–47; SCHVARC, *Nacionálno-socialistická nová Európa*.

4 ANTOHI – TRENCSENYI, *Approaching Anti-modernism*, 7–8.

5 NĚMEC, *Pressburg als Satellit*; STOLIČNÁ, *Deutsches Bauen*.

recent research, cultural and artistic influences and the presentation of individual national cultures were not merely a footnote to the bigger picture of political, economic and military history, nor were they limited to the interactions between German Nazism and Italian Fascism.⁶ This was an independent power sphere (*Kulturmacht*) that operated at the intersection of state structures and private associations and thus represented, in many ways, a more successful cultural pendant to an explicitly political fascist internationalism, which should not therefore be entirely reduced to a propagandistic aspect.⁷ This development would not have been possible without the renationalization of culture. The essence of this new internationalism, which replaced liberal internationalism and became the basic premise of the new cultural diplomacy, was the glorification of one's own national culture and, at the same time, at least in principle, the recognition of the legitimacy of the existence of other national cultures.⁸

The 1942 Exhibition "Slovakia": One of the Highlights of Nazi Germany's Cultural Diplomacy toward its Satellites in Southeastern Europe?

Public exhibitions were already one of the basic tools of cultural diplomacy long before the era of fascism and Nazism, but they were further developed by the latter in terms of their ideological and propagandistic priorities. Even before military expansion, Hitler – and Stalin as well – used the pavilion at the Paris World Exhibition in 1937, to name one example, for these purposes. Marla Stone characterizes the exceptional function of exhibitions for fascism and Nazism as follows:

The possibilities embedded in the exhibition as a cultural form – its ability to contain and propagandize any message, to direct the gaze, to control the narrative, and to regulate emotions – made it an ubiquitous presence and a defining aspect of the Fascist and Nazi cultural imaginary. Moreover, exhibitions offered a physical meeting-place and mixing-point for cultural producers and consumers, as well as fulfilling the propaganda exigencies of the regimes.⁹

This, of course, did not only apply to the explicitly propagandistic – especially anti-Bolshevik and antisemitic – exhibitions that also came to Slovakia after the establishment of the Slovak State in March 1939.¹⁰ In a sense, the seemingly apolitical, or at least not exclusively and primarily political, exhibitions were even more impressive and influential.

Immediately after its establishment, the Slovak State became heavily dependent on Nazi Germany and, despite recognition by several states, internationally isolated. The nationalist fervor that accompanied its proclamation manifested itself in a unilateral effort to constantly convince the Nazi protector of the legitimacy of the Slovaks' national and state existence. At the same time, by its willingness to collaborate, this diminutive state sought to overshadow its much larger southern neighbor, Hungary, to

6 Benjamin G. Martin uses the term "soft power" as an equivalent to cultural diplomacy. MARTIN, *Nazi-Fascist New Order*, 2; NASTASĂ-MATEI, *Transnational Far Right*.

7 TROMMLER, *Kulturmacht ohne Kompass*, 425.

8 TROMMLER, *Kulturmacht ohne Kompass*, 422. See also IRIYE, *Cultural Internationalism*, 91–130.

9 STONE, *Acts of Self-Representation*, 235–236.

10 See BURGSTALLER, *Inszenierung des Hasses*.

which it had had to cede vast territories even before its declaration of independence on the instructions of fascist and Nazi "arbiters". These problems also resonated in cultural policy and diplomacy, which in turn copied the patterns of relations with other nominally independent countries in the Nazi sphere of influence, especially in Central and Southeastern Europe, whether these involved the conclusion of interstate cultural agreements, the establishment of independent interstate societies to cultivate cultural relations or the founding of German scholarly institutes.¹¹

The idea of organizing an exhibition on Slovakia as a model satellite in Germany, specifically in Stuttgart, emerged even before the establishment of the Slovak State in February 1939.¹² In the meantime, Slovakia had been presented at fairs in Leipzig and Vienna but it was only the Foreign German Institute (*Deutsches Auslands-Institut*) in Stuttgart that undertook the task of presenting this German "calling card" (*Visitenkarte*), as Slovakia was internally called by the Nazi authorities, for "ideal motives", as the Bratislava-based German newspaper *Grenzbote* wrote approvingly.¹³ The real contours of the venture began to take shape only in the course of 1941, when it was taken over by the former head of the Foreign German Institute, a German from Transylvania, Richard Csaki. Established after the First World War to cultivate the language and culture of "foreign Germans", under Csaki's leadership the institution after 1933 became an instrument of ethnic politics (*Volkstumspolitik*) under the auspices of the newly established Foreign German Center (*Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*), which was under the direct supervision of the *Schutzstaffel*, better known as the SS.¹⁴

The organizers of the "Slovakia" exhibition had the support of important institutions, headed by the Reich Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Propaganda, as well as the German Embassy in Bratislava. The plan probably gained importance in early 1942 after the establishment of the Italian Cultural Institute in Bratislava, which the German envoy Hanns Ludin interpreted as competition for Nazi Germany in the field of cultural diplomacy.¹⁵ The importance of the exhibition enterprise is underlined by the fact that at this time, due to the danger of air raids, fairs and other similar events were no longer being held, and even shortly before the opening of the exhibition there was a threat of a "general ban on exhibitions".¹⁶ Despite the competition between Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, and

11 The Slovak-German Society in Bratislava was founded at the beginning of 1939, the German-Slovak Society in Berlin only in 1941. DALFINGER, *Kulturbeziehungen*, 206–210. The signing of the German-Slovak cultural agreement also took place only in 1942. Although the Slovak side partially defended its competences in the field of higher education, the agreement overall strengthened "German hegemony in the cultural life of Slovakia". BARBIAN, "Kulturwerte im Zeitkampf", 434. On the cultural agreement, see also SCHVARC – HALLON, *Nemecká kultúrna politika*, 262–266, and DRAGŮN, *Nemecko-slovenská dohoda*.

12 Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (hereafter BA), R57/11499, Zur Besprechung der vom DAI (Deutsches Ausland-Institut) für die Zeit vom 1. 10. – 15. 11. 1939 geplanten Deutsch-Slowakischen Ausstellung..., 24. 2. 1939.

13 BA, R57/11499, Slowakei-Ausstellung in Stuttgart. Von Elfried Fürstenberg. Aus: *Grenzbote*, Pressburg, 16. Juli 1942.

14 BURLEIGH, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, 181–182. The terminological shift from *Auslandsdeutsche* to *Volksdeutsche* to refer to foreign Germans sanctioned the penetration of ethno-nationalism and racism into the terminology of institutions that, even before 1933, were responsible for promoting the culture of Germans living outside Germany. See LUTHER, *Volkstumspolitik des Deutschen Reiches*.

15 BARBIAN, "Kulturwerte im Zeitkampf", 433. Indeed, during this period Italy was trying to catch up with Nazi Germany precisely in the field of cultural diplomacy. TROMMLER, *Kulturmacht*, 487.

16 BA, R57/11499, Dr. Csaki: Zur Begründung des Vorschlages an den Herrn Generalsekretär Dr. Brestensky..., 23. 7. 1942; BA, R57/11341, Aktennotiz über eine Besprechung mit Dr. Maiwald am 5. 5. 1942.

in this case especially from the SS organizations under Heinrich Himmler, all those involved apparently agreed on the need to present Slovakia as a "calling card" for the supposedly tolerant Nazi policy towards small nations. The different views of the SS and the Foreign Office on the question of how to approach Slovak policy do not change this. While the former advocated a heavy-handed strategy, the embassy, under the leadership of senior *Sturmabteilung* (SA) functionary Ludin, tried to maintain a balance between the radicals around Prime Minister Vojtech Tuka and Minister of the Interior Alexander Mach (also commander of the fascist Hlinka Guard under the direct control of the SS) on the one hand and the supporters of President Jozef Tiso, who cultivated a national-conservative image despite his active collaboration and fascist rhetoric, on the other.¹⁷

The conveyance of a harmonious image of tolerance towards small nations on the way to an anti-Bolshevik and anti-democratic – or simply antisemitic – "New Europe" apparently caused the typical disputes over the tendency of Nazi politics to recede into the background. This is evident from the remarks of a representative of the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, a certain "Herr Riemann", who approved of the political tendency of the exhibition at a meeting with Richard Csaki in January 1942. Only Slovak flags were to be flown at the exhibition, and not even a bust of the Führer was to have a place on the grounds. On the other hand, the positive role and importance of the German minority (*Volksgruppe*) for Slovakia, as well as the place of the Hlinka Guard – "because it is supported by the Reichsführer" (Himmler) – were to be highlighted everywhere. The *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* was to provide the logistics. After taking his directives into account, Riemann agreed that Csaki should discuss further details with the German envoy Ludin.¹⁸ This occurred a few days later in Bratislava, when Ludin agreed to everything and stressed that "the sovereign Slovak State should be presented impressively, but the performance of the German *Volksgruppe* should of course be absolutely outstanding".¹⁹

In fact, Ludin held a more critical view of the role of the German minority and denounced its condescension toward the Slovaks and its dislike of their state, whose existence he saw as a stabilizing element in the region, necessary for the achievement of the final German victory. He went so far as to place the local Germans on the same level as the allegedly arrogant members of the Hungarian minority.²⁰ Ludin shared this anti-Hungarian sentiment with the German Csaki from Transylvania.²¹

Initially, it was considered whether the Hungarian minority should also be given a place at the "Slovakia" exhibition. In spite of its presence in cultural life, especially in Bratislava, this issue was sensitive on the Slovak side due to a sense of historical injustice committed under Hungarian rule. Nevertheless, in the space between the exhibition

17 SZABÓ, *Hitler's Priests*.

18 BA, R57/11499, Besprechung am 7. I. 1942 mit Herrn Riemann, Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, zuständig für die politische Beurteilung der Slowakei-Ausstellung.

19 BA, R57/11499, Dr. Csaki: Dienstreise in die Slowakei, 8. – 14. 1. 1942. In addition, both actors agreed that one of the founding fathers of Czechoslovakia, Milan Rastislav Štefánik, would not be mentioned in the same line as the Slovak People's Party leaders Hlinka, Tiso, and Tuka.

20 Dokument 91, 326.

21 During his visit to Bratislava in 1940, Csaki met with several representatives of the Hungarian minority and noted their "ambivalence" toward "everything German", betraying both contempt for the local Germans (as a *Volksgruppe*) and feelings of inferiority toward the Reich. BA, R57/11499, Dr. Csaki – Bericht über Dienstreise nach Pressburg 1. – 6. II. 1940.

halls devoted to the Slovak and German nationalities, respectively, a showcase was to be placed with examples of Hungarian literature and press, photographs from everyday life, as well as a likeness of the "leader" János Esterházy and an ethnographic map, which was intended to preempt any complaints from the Hungarian side.²² The German Embassy, on the other hand, was opposed to the integration of the Hungarian minority from the beginning, but was waiting for a final statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.²³ Although the latter gave the organizers a free hand, Anton Endrös (cultural officer of the German Embassy and advisor to the Slovak Propaganda Office) eventually swept the whole matter off the table with the telling reasoning that the aforementioned János Esterházy – the only Hungarian Party member of the Slovak Parliament – had abstained from voting on the constitutional law legalizing the deportation of the Jewish population to extermination camps on the territory of the General Government. Endrös argued that "This should have been a sufficiently compelling argument to disregard the Hungarian national group."²⁴

The exhibition had a surprisingly large impact. According to the available data, as many as 300,000 visitors visited it in the summer months of 1942, which is surprising even after taking into account that group visits were organized for high school pupils in September.²⁵ Needless to say, Slovak politicians, led by Prime Minister Vojtech Tuka, and the media felt extremely honored. The exhibition's success was also aided by the institutions that participated in the extensive preparations and willingly loaned exhibits. Some of these exhibits, not least the Slovak and German wooden house and its furnishings, were graciously donated to the collections of the planned *Umweltmuseum*.

Slovak Wooden Houses in the "City of Foreign Germans": Richard Csaki as an Ideologue of Anti-Modernism and Anti-Urbanism

Richard Csaki, who took over the leadership of the German Foreign Institute in 1933, elevated German minorities above majority populations in accordance with the racist theories of Nazism, although only in order to subordinate them to a hierarchical structure analogous to the Nazi Party. When he was dismissed from the leadership of the institute in the summer of 1941 because of his lack of authority, he threw himself into new, though less prominent tasks, in particular the organization of a so-called *Deutsches Umweltmuseum*, a museum of "foreign" ethnic groups in the midst of which German minorities lived.²⁶ The concept of the "Slovakia" exhibition, which was the first and only

22 BA, R57/11341, Slowakei – Ausstellung, Stuttgart, 25. 2. 1942.

23 BA, R57/11499, Dr. Csáki: Dienstreise vom 15. bis zum 22. März 1942.

24 BA, R57/11499, Dr. Csáki: Dienstreise vom 14. bis zum 23. Mai 1942. The exhibition likely also included anti-Jewish posters of the Slovak Propaganda Office; Richard Csaki asked for and received these in any case. BA, R57/11341, A. Stengel an Dr. Csaky (sic), 29. 4. 1942. The debate on the inclusion of Hungarians continued for some time. Ambassador Ludin also presented a negative position in Berlin, while Rudolf von Scheliha, a diplomat in the Foreign Ministry (and secret resistance fighter) adopted a pro-Hungarian position. BA, R57/11341, Aktennotiz über Besprechung mit Legationsrat von Scheliha..., 5. 5. 1942.

25 Die Ausstellung "Die Slowakei". In: *Deutschtum im Ausland*, vol. 25, 1942, nos. 7/8, pp. 175–176. On group visits, see BA, R57/11499, Betr. Slowakei-Ausstellung, 23. 7. 1942. This figure also seems relevant in comparison with the number of visitors to the Bulgarian Culture Week, which took place in Frankfurt am Main the same year. Despite the much more developed cultural contacts and diplomacy between Germany and Bulgaria, the organizers counted only 50,000 visitors there. DALFINGER, *Kulturbeziehungen*, 157. The fact that a substantial part of the "Slovakia" exhibition was placed in the open air, which was not commonplace in times of threatening air raids, may have played a role in this.

26 RITTER, *Das deutsche Auslands-Institut*, 59–61.

one to be realized within this museum project, was thus conceived within an institutional framework that relied on an ideologically distorted process of legitimizing the power transformations of conquest and subjugation of "living space," which in the case of Southeastern Europe took into account the non-Germanic "environment" (*Umwelt*) in an ethnographic and cultural sense.²⁷ The task of the *Deutsches Umweltmuseum* was thus to acquaint Germans with the specificities of "those nations which, together with the German one, will be incorporated into the new world order".²⁸

That not all nations were chosen for this new order was already suggested by Csaki's emphasis; after all, the new order was to differ from "democratic egalitarianism". One of the criteria of this quasi-natural selection was to be the "cultural performances past and present" that created the "face" of the respective nations, the view of which had been distorted in the past for the Germans by the "upper classes with their Jewish relatives or Jewish financial backers" (*jüdisch versippte oder jüdisch bezahlte Oberschicht*).²⁹ The Germans' true face was therefore now to be revealed in the open-air installations, inspired by those Csaki had previously seen in Scandinavia, intended to convey an essentially anti-modernist image to German visitors: "In everyday life, in the farmhouse with all its accessories, in the urban room, in agriculture, in craftsmanship, in customs and traditions, in clothing and housing, the character of the people arises from the natural soil of the landscape."³⁰ The reference to the "urban room" hardly neutralizes the emphasis on the "natural soil of the landscape", in which the "characteristic nature of the nation" is supposed to have its roots. With public events like the Slovak exhibition, the city fathers hoped to help overcome Stuttgart's provincial character (despite the fact that it was industrialized and boasted the title "City of Foreign Germans") and to aid its transformation into a metropolis.³¹ Yet Csaki's city was not intended to be cosmopolitan or exploitative, i.e. "Jewish", but national and socialist – a "living space" (*Lebensraum*) of Germans, surrounded by other authentic peoples (*Umwelt*), supposedly chosen to accompany them into a bright future.

Even before the victory of Nazism in Germany, Richard Csaki had already stressed the agrarian character of "foreign Germans" in Eastern Europe and their mission to defend their *Lebensraum*, their "fatherland" (*Scholle der Väter*), in the face of foreign ethnic groups.³² However, all we read in Csaki's 1932 travelogue about the majority "foreign-race" peoples surrounding the German "minorities bound by fate" (*Schicksalsminderheiten*) in Eastern Europe is that they were "young", culturally backward, and "hungry" for German soil.³³ In the introduction to the 1942 brochure for the "Slovakia" exhibition, Csaki therefore had to look for positives in Slovakia and found them in the role of a "small nation" and "a model example of a state formation alongside the Central Powers".³⁴ The foundations on which the Slovak nation was building its

27 MISCHEK, *Das Völkerkundliche Institut*, 184. The *Umweltmuseum* was to be the culmination of a museum complex themed around "primitivism" and German colonialism.

28 CSAKI, *Vom Sinn auslandkundlicher Darstellung*, 19.

29 CSAKI, *Vom Sinn auslandkundlicher Darstellung*, 20.

30 CSAKI, *Vom Sinn auslandkundlicher Darstellung*, 20.

31 MISCHEK, *Das Völkerkundliche Institut*, 185, FN 86; RITTER, *Das deutsche Auslands-Institut*, 111.

32 CSAKI, *Deutscher Wegweiser*, VII. On Bratislava/Pressburg in German travelogues, see TANCER, *Neviditeľné mesto*.

33 CSAKI, *Deutscher Wegweiser*, VIII.

34 CSAKI, *Antlitz der Slowakei*, 14.

future came from its “healthy folk culture”, which allowed it to survive in unfavorable circumstances under the domination of the Hungarians and the Czechs and to avoid the mistakes that accompanied the coming-of-age of more developed and modern nations. The Slovak State could therefore enter the “new Europe” as a “particularly proactive and progressive element” – not despite, but precisely because it had not lost its links with traditional culture.³⁵ This last point also linked it to the German element, which was also “fighting” against oppression and assimilation: Slovaks, like Germans, were presented as the bearers of a true “earth-bound” culture. This, of course, did not mean that the former were equal to the latter. Rather, their subordination in all areas of modern life was to be viewed by both sides as something quite natural.

The exhibits from Slovakia covered older culture and history and complemented the areas of economics, tourism, current politics and ideology. However, ethnography predominated. This was evident, among other things, in the ubiquity of national costumes (the accompanying staff were to be dressed in these as well), embroidery, ceramics and, above all, rural wooden architecture. Wood, as the “main export article” of the still largely agrarian Slovakia, was to be the subject of an entire section of the exhibition.³⁶ The organizers built a shepherd’s hut in the open space of the exhibition where cheese and wine were sold, a ceramic workshop and, most importantly, two wooden huts with authentic furnishings. According to a plan from the autumn of 1941, these were to be “permanently inhabited by a family dressed in national costumes”, in the style of a human zoo. One of the huts was modelled on the distinctive Slovak village of Čičmany and the other on the German-speaking town of Wagendrüssel (today called Nálepko). This open-air space on the grounds of the former flower fair, including the passage leading to it from the indoor area, was conceived as the culmination of the whole exhibition.³⁷

Modern urbanism was not directly addressed in the “Slovakia” exhibition. Apart from Bratislava, which was only portrayed as a kind of outpost of the Reich,³⁸ Csaki did emphasize – alongside the natural beauty and picturesqueness of Slovak folk culture – the influence of the urban landscape, but he was referring to *medieval* German towns such as Banská Štiavnica/Schemnitz, Kremnica/Kremnitz, Kežmarok/Käsmark, and especially Levoča/Leutsche, which he portrayed as testimonies of “medieval German culture and thus testimonies of centuries of connection with the Reich”.³⁹ One section of the exhibition was to be explicitly devoted to “intimate representations of old urban culture”.⁴⁰ Anti-urbanism, directed primarily against the modern cosmopolitan and

35 CSAKI, *Antlitz der Slowakei*, 15.

36 CSAKI, *Antlitz der Slowakei*, 23.

37 BA, R57/11499, Plan zur Gliederung der Slowakei-Ausstellung (2. Entwurf, 31. Okt. 1941); BA, R57/11499, Dr. Csaki: Dienstreise in die Slowakei, 8. – 14. 1. 1942.

38 Already during his visit to Bratislava in 1940, Csaki noted the aesthetic contradiction between the old German Bratislava and “Czech” modernity: “The contrast between blatant lack of culture and the highest formal beauty is particularly stark in the old town with its wonderful wealth of architectural treasures. I would just like to point out the barbaric façade of the Bata shoe store.” BA, R57/309, Dr. Csaki – Bericht über Dienstreise nach Pressburg 1. – 6. II. 1940.

39 CSAKI, *Antlitz der Slowakei*, 22. An illustrative example of this understanding is provided, for example, by the “Slovak issue” of the Leipzig picture magazine *Illustrierte Zeitung*, where a number of large-format photographs of folklore and late Gothic architecture and art are complemented by only one smaller illustration of the first high-rise residential and commercial building in the center of Bratislava, the so-called Manderla. Slowakei – ein Land stellt sich vor. In: *Illustrierte Zeitung*, no. 4969. Leipzig: J. J. Weber, 1941, 168b.

40 BA R57/11499, Plan zur Gliederung.

capitalist big city, was not explicitly mentioned by Csaki in the exhibition brochure, but it was nonetheless a hidden structural element of the exhibition.

We do not know to what extent the theses of the Sudeten German ethnologist Bruno Schier, who held a visiting professorship at the Slovak University in Bratislava at the time of the exhibition preparations, were reflected in its conception. Schier considered Slovak folk art to be "pure" and "untouched by the destructive influence of big-city civilization", which – along with a suitable "racial" profile – was to serve as a solid basis for the national existence of Slovaks, albeit in a German-dominated Central Europe.⁴¹ The only mention of Schier concerns the decision regarding what kind of Slovak wooden house to build in Stuttgart. Schier, who was an expert in vernacular village architecture, suggested a house from Orava, while Csaki suggested one from Čičmany. The architectural elements of the Orava house struck Csaki, who went to see it for himself, as very similar to the German ones, and he argued that there was no point in "building a quite similar or identical Slovak peasant house next to the German one". Moreover, the Čičmany wooden house was, in his opinion, more representative and more beautiful.⁴² Csaki may here have drawn inspiration from the research of the Slovak–German art historian Elisabeth Günther-Mayer, whose study on folk art Csaki colorfully highlighted in the margin when preparing his list of scholarly sources on Slovak folk culture.⁴³ Günther-Mayer's article on Slovak folk art from early 1941, which she wrote for the Slovak thematic issue of the German picture magazine *Illustrierte Zeitung*, was illustrated with a reproduction of the Čičmany house. In it, she praised the aesthetics of Slovak folk art for its immediacy and liveliness, which was supposed to be typical of "natural peoples" (*Naturvölker*).⁴⁴

The connection between anti-urbanism and the folk culture of the Slovaks was explicitly emphasized by Günther-Mayer in the aforementioned scholarly study from 1939, which Csaki apparently received. In it, she explained the originality and compactness of Slovak folk art by reference to the peasant conservatism that allowed Slovaks to preserve their "racial distinctiveness" (*rassische Eigenart*) despite ethnic pressures. Its natural environment was supposed to be the village, whereas ethnically mixed Slovak towns – "with the exception of the old German ones" – "do not show a unified face".⁴⁵ The "gap" between the denationalized town and the Slovak village before the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918 had the immediate effect of stunting the higher culture, but at the same time it preserved the folk peasant art from which modern Slovakia was to draw in the future, because it carried within it the "germs of urban culture with strong ethno-national ties" (*Keime völkisch-verbundenen städtischen*

41 PANCZOVÁ – KILIÁNOVÁ – KUBISA, *Volkskunde in den Diensten des Dritten Reiches*, 126. On Schier as an authority for the SS's suggestions concerning the Germanization of Slovaks, see TÖNSMEYER, *Bruno Schier*.

42 BA, R57/11499, Dr. Csaki: Dienstreise in die Slowakei, 8. – 14. 1. 1942.

43 BA, R57/11499, Schrifttum zur Slowakei (zusammengest. 11. 7. 1941). The likeness of "Frau Dr. Günther" was to be placed among photographs of "leading personalities" or "prominent figures in artistic and scientific life". BA, R57/11499, Plan zur Gliederung. Elisabeth Günther-Mayer, in Slovak Alžbeta Güntherová-Mayerová, was one of the pioneers of Slovak art history, especially after the Second World War. BARCZI, *Alžbeta Güntherová-Mayerová*. During the years of the Slovak State, Günther-Mayer not only profiled herself as a scholar within the frame of reference of nationalist ideology, she was also in charge, among other things, of registering works of art from the possessions of deported persons falling under the racist category of "Jew". ŠVANTNEROVÁ, *Expropriation of Jewish Collections*, 27–33.

44 GÜNTHER-MAYER, *Artgebundene Volkskunst*.

45 GÜNTHER-MAYER, *Ziele und Entwicklung*, 684.

Kultur).⁴⁶ However, the Stuttgart exhibition did not present this contemporary ethno-national Slovak urban culture, or even its “germs”.

“Not without folk and old art”: The Background to the Unrealized Exhibition of Slovak Art in Berlin

The background to the Stuttgart exhibition was not only of interest to the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* at the beginning of 1942 but also to Goebbels’s Ministry of Propaganda. In February 1942, Richard Csaki was approached by E. W. Maiwald, Head of the Department for Fairs and Exhibitions in the Reich Ministry of Propaganda and Popular Education, with a request for information about the forthcoming “Slovakia” exhibition. Reich Commissioner Maiwald was interested in the possibility of somehow linking the “Slovakia” exhibition with the exhibition of Slovak art that Dr. Aschenbrenner, President of the newly founded German–Slovak Society, wanted to organize in Berlin. Maiwald had apparently adopted this idea, because he kept insisting on it even after Csaki assured him that his exhibition on Slovakia had a completely different concept, that it had already been approved by several authorities, and that preparations had progressed to such an extent that the idea of combining it with another exhibition was simply not feasible.⁴⁷ Maiwald countered that the two exhibitions “are indeed intertwined in the sector of modern applied arts and especially folk art, which is all the more important because these areas are particularly important in terms the public appeal”.⁴⁸ Csaki eventually relented and showed his willingness to cooperate in the transfer of the Stuttgart exhibition, or part of it, to Berlin. However, this plan never came to fruition, because Dr. Aschenbrenner had in the meantime enlisted in the Wehrmacht.⁴⁹

The emphasis on “peoplehood” was by no means accidental; on the contrary, it was based on similar ideological premises as Csaki’s concept for the *Umweltmuseum*, Bruno Schier’s ethnology and art historian Elisabeth Günther-Mayer’s theses concerning Slovak folk art. In the case of the planned Berlin exhibition, representatives of the German Embassy put pressure on the Society of Slovak Visual Artists (*Spolok slovenských výtvarných umelcov*, SSVU) in this regard. The SSVU, the only approved organization of Slovak visual artists, originally wanted to organize the exhibition on its own, as was the case in the parallel exhibition being planned for the Venice Biennale. There, the Slovak Propaganda Office, after discussion with the Ministry of Education, under whose remit the SSVU fell, relinquished its supervisory role in favor of an accelerated preparation of the event.⁵⁰

The commission for the selection of works for the Slovak pavilion in Venice, of which Günther-Mayer was a member, took into account the whole range of Slovak art at the time – 58 works were exhibited, mostly paintings but also a few sculptures – including representatives of the younger generation of modernists such as the painter Ján

46 GÜNTHER-MAYER, *Ziele und Entwicklung*, 685.

47 BA, R57/11341, Dr. Csaki to Dr. Maiwald, 23. 2. 1942.

48 BA, R57/11341, Dr. Maiwald to Dr. Csaki, 28. 2. 1942.

49 BA, R57/11341, Dr. Csaki to Dr. Maiwald, 7. 3. 1942; Aktennotiz über eine Besprechung mit Dr. Maiwald am 5. 5. 1942.

50 Slovenský národný archív (hereafter SNA), fund Úrad predsedu vlády, box 12, Úrad propagandy v Bratislave (Tido J. Gašpar) to Predsedníctvo vlády, 27. 5. 1942. On SSVU see BAJCUROVÁ, *Umenie – štát – umelci* and HANÁKOVÁ, *Umenie – štát – propaganda*.

Mudroch and the sculptor Jozef Kostka.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the government commissioner Adalbert Hudec stressed the “national and Christian” character of the exhibited works – in the environment of Slovak art at that time, a “radical attitude towards so-called degenerate art” was generally declared.⁵² Folk motifs were therefore, understandably, prominent here. Even the Italian King Victor Emmanuel III showed interest in them, and was said to have “looked with relief at the play of colors of Slovak costumes”, as the Slovak envoy in Rome reported.⁵³ The Slovak pavilion – like the pavilions of other Nazi satellites in Central and Southeastern Europe – also highlighted folk traditions for nationalist purposes, but compared to the pavilion of Nazi Germany, where the central motif was the glorification of war and heroism, the Slovak exposition was very restrained.⁵⁴

In the case of the Berlin exhibition, however, representatives of the German Embassy were also invited to the preparatory committee. It was they, together with Ferdinand Hoffmann, head of the Slovak Propaganda Office’s cultural department, who were responsible for the originally purely artistic exhibition becoming, to a large extent, an ethnographic one. As a result, the representative of the Reich Ministry of Propaganda could claim that the Stuttgart exhibition and the planned Berlin exhibition overlapped in this respect. Yet their argumentation on this matter exhibited the same elements of anti-modernism as that of Richard Csaki, Bruno Schier and Elisabeth Günther-Mayer.

From the beginning, the German authorities had the ambition to examine the works selected for the representative exhibition of Slovak art in Berlin. The Union of Interstate Associations and Institutions (*Vereinigung zwischenstaatlichen Verbände und Einrichtungen*), under whose aegis the German–Slovak Society (the main organizer of the exhibition) also belonged, entrusted its representative Walter Nedoma with the task at the end of 1941. He in turn made contact with representatives of the German Embassy and the Propaganda Office in Bratislava. Rudolf Musik, a young German from Bratislava who wrote radio plays and poetry and translated Slovak poetry, told him that “not much could be expected from Slovak art in the narrower sense, i.e. sculpture and painting, and that folk art should be used as much as possible for this exhibition”.⁵⁵ Musik arranged a meeting between Nedoma and Ferdinand Hoffmann, head of the cultural department of the Propaganda Office, who confirmed this opinion and reported on the protection of “non-Slovak” works of the “Catholic current” by the Ministry of Education, to which the SSVU was subordinate. Hoffmann argued that the SSVU set the tone for artists who “still today are into Futurism and Cubism and can in no way embody the character of Slovak culture with their purely subjective so-called art”.⁵⁶ Musik subsequently proposed setting up a permanent exhibition in Berlin of “pure” folk art, the presentation of which in Germany – for instance, in the form of

51 *Catalogo XXIII^a Esposizione Biennale*, 273–278.

52 BAJCUROVÁ, *Umenie – štát – umelci*, 38.

53 SNA, Úrad predsedu vlády, box 12, Vyslanectvo Slovenskej republiky v Ríme to Ministerstvo školstva a národnej osvety v Bratislave (transcript), no date.

54 TOMASELLA, *Bienalli di guerra*, 98; BECKER, *Venice Biennale*, 85–88.

55 Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (hereafter PAAA), RAV 215/394, Aktenvermerk für Herrn Ges. Rat I Endrös, mit der Bitte um Unterrichtung des Herrn Gesandten (Musik), 17. 12. 1941. On Musik, see EMERITZY, *Dichter des karpatendeutschen Aufbruchs*.

56 PAAA, RAV 215/394, Aktenvermerk für Herrn Ges. Rat I Endrös, mit der Bitte um Unterrichtung des Herrn Gesandten (Musik), 17. 12. 1941.

folk songs or folk dances – was much more important than “intellectual art”.⁵⁷ In his report to the Foreign Office, Ambassador Ludin, who seemed to have a penchant for the creativity of the Slovak people, joined in recommending the inclusion in the exhibition of “creations” of Slovak folk art, “which is very expressive, has firm roots and expresses the character of the Slovak people better than other artistic attempts”.⁵⁸ Nedoma conveyed this view to the President of the German–Slovak Society, Aschenbrenner, and it was also taken up by Maiwald, the high official of the Ministry of Propaganda who subsequently approached Richard Csaki with the proposal of combining the Stuttgart exhibition with the Berlin one.

At a meeting of the Preparatory Committee of the Berlin Exhibition of Slovak Art in February 1942, Hoffmann apparently presented his views as Nedoma’s, so the committee – also in view of the generous prospects for German cofinancing of the venture – agreed to the proposal and expanded the scope of the exhibition to include folk art.⁵⁹ The idea of the extension was also supported by the chairman of the preparatory committee, Vladimír Wagner, as well as by Vojtech Tilkovský and Elisabeth Günther-Mayer, according to whom “the various Slovak artists were only comprehensible in connection with folk art, and contemporary art should be presented with a short historical development in the environment of Slovak folk art”.⁶⁰ Moreover, Tilkovský was concerned that it was hardly possible to organize a good exhibition with the “existing material” and he therefore also wanted to show “how Slovak art of the past decades was influenced by German art, by the German spiritual attitude”.⁶¹ At a meeting of the expanded preparatory committee in April – which was already attended by the German cultural attaché Hans Snyckers and the assistant cultural officer Rudolf Musik – Wagner proposed expanding the exposition under the motto “Slovak art and its relation to the old art in Slovakia”, stressing that Slovak art should not be compared with “Dutch, Bulgarian, Romanian, etc.” This was probably his way of saying that artists of these countries could afford to exhibit contemporary art in Germany on their own.⁶²

The SSVU initially considered staging the exhibition in the autumn of 1942, and later planned to stage a smaller version, but in the end the exhibition was not opened at all. There were several reasons for this: problems with financing and, perhaps almost importantly, the reluctance of Prime Minister Vojtech Tuka, who said that “the time was not right” for the exhibition, a view that was shared by Ambassador Ludin.⁶³ We can only speculate whether this reluctance was due to ideological objections to modern Slovak art, as presented from the outset by the representative of the Propaganda

57 Ibidem.

58 PAAA, RAV 215/394, Deutsche Gesandtschaft (Ludin) to Auswärtiges Amt – Kulturabteilung, 16. 1. 1942. On Ludin’s sympathy for the Slovak people precisely because of their creativity, see Dokument 91, 324. We do not know to what extent Ludin followed Bruno Schier, who was convinced that folk art was the source of the Slovaks’ “national individuality”. PANCZOVÁ – KILIÁNOVÁ – KUBISA, *Volkskunde in den Diensten des Dritten Reiches*, 126.

59 PAAA, RAV 215/394, Přípravný výbor berlínskej výstavy slovenského umenia to Deutsche Gesandtschaft Bratislava, 7. 3. 1942.

60 PAAA, RAV 215/394, Aktenvermerk für SA-Sturmbannführer Dr. Snyckers (Musik), 10. 3. 1942.

61 Ibidem.

62 PAAA, RAV 215/394, Zápisnica o schôdzi prípravného výboru berlínskej výstavy, konanej dňa 23. apríla 1942 v hoteli Bláha/Protokoll über die Zusammenkunft des Vorbereitungsausschusses der Berliner Ausstellung, abgehalten am 23. 4. 1942 im Hotel Blaha (translation).

63 PAAA, RAV 215/394, Auszug aus Niederschrift Nr. 26 über die Aussprache mit Herrn Ministerpräsidenten Dr. Tuka vom 28. Mai 1942 (Grüniger); Herrn Dr. Snyckers, 2. 6. 1942.

Office, Hoffmann, and the assistant cultural officer of the German Embassy, Musik. When another German official spoke to him in early July, Tuka expressed concern that Slovakia could not yet boast a sufficient number of "valuable, truly artistic performances".⁶⁴ On the same occasion, Tuka characteristically expressed his willingness to take over, together with Ambassador Ludin, the patronage of the exhibition "Contemporary German Sculpture", which featured the work of Arno Breker and other sculptors protected by the Nazi regime and which had been "a great success in Zagreb".⁶⁵

The final decision was delayed, with the German Embassy in Bratislava asking the Reich Foreign Ministry for its opinion, which in turn pushed the matter with the Ministry of Propaganda. The Slovak side also did not formulate a clear opinion, as it was unable to provide a preliminary list of exhibits or to state the estimated cost that the Ministry of Propaganda was demanding in order to decide whether to pay generously to host an exhibition on Reich territory. It was not until October 1942 that the preparatory committee for the Berlin exhibition of Slovak art submitted a plan. It envisaged approximately 1,000 exhibits and reproductions – for comparison, the Slovak pavilion at the Venice Biennale displayed fewer than 60 exhibits – most of which were categorized under the headings of folk and old art. The list was to be drawn up by Günther-Mayer, who had recently been elected to the Executive Committee for the Berlin exhibition. According to the minutes of its meeting on 30 October 1942, the Reich authorities wanted clarity on this matter, as Hungary was said to be considering a similar exhibition. The whole matter was to be submitted again to Tuka because the funds of the Ministry of Education were not enough to cover the costs for the Slovak side.⁶⁶ However, Tuka's government did not discuss it, so the plan could not be specified.⁶⁷ In April 1943, the Reich Ministry of Propaganda informed the Reich Foreign Ministry that it still did not have the supporting documents or photo documentation, so it could not even reserve the space in the Berlin Kunstshalle. The vice-president of the Union of Interstate Associations, after a conversation with the Slovak envoy Matúš Černák, came to the conclusion that "the Slovaks are not yet in a position to provide the artistic material that would allow a worthy exhibition to be held in Berlin".⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the Foreign Ministry stressed their willingness to organize and co-finance such an exhibition in the future.⁶⁹

Conclusion

The efforts and plans to organize exhibitions with Slovak themes in Nazi Germany in 1941 and 1942 reveal the differences between Nazi cultural modernism and the strategies of presenting Slovak culture, for the characterization of which I proposed in the introduction to apply the concept of anti-modernism. If we perceive Nazi Germany as a center of hegemonic culture, as suggested by art theorist Ján Bakoš, then the Slovak side reveals not one but two cultural peripheries: the Slovak and the Slovak–

64 PAAA, RAV 215/394, Aktennotiz Nr. 46 über meine Besprechung mit Herrn Ministerpräsidenten Dr. Tuka vom 7. Juli 1942 (Dr. Grüninger).

65 Ibidem.

66 PAAA, RAV 215/394, Zápisnica o schôdzi výkonného výboru pre berlínsku výstavu dňa 30. októbra 1942 v Dome umenia.

67 SNA, fund Úrad predsedu vlády, box 12, Prezídium Ministerstva školstva a národnej osvety v Bratislave to Predsedníctvo vlády v Bratislave, 4. 12. 1942. Handwritten note: "The matter preempted at the Cabinet meeting on 18/12 was taken off the agenda (illegible signature)."

68 PAAA, RAV 215/394, Auswärtiges Amt, Kult Pol K 2462/43, 29. 4. 1943.

69 Ibidem.

German.⁷⁰ While in the case of contemporary Slovak art we can speak of a mixture of modernism (by reference to the old avant-garde centers of Berlin, Paris, Prague and Budapest) and anti-modernism (in the sense of the new Nazi and fascist centers of Berlin and Rome), the local German minority, also from its position as the object of the dominant center's affirmative cultural-scientific interest, profiled itself as rather more anti-modern and projected this perspective even more explicitly onto Slovak culture.⁷¹

Moreover, the whole constellation was reinforced by the interaction between imperial modernism and the peripheral anti-modernism of originally Transylvanian, Sudeten German and Slovak (Upper Hungarian) provenance, as we had the opportunity to see in the concepts of Richard Csaki, Bruno Schier, and Elisabeth Günther-Mayer. At the core of this semantic overlap was a nationalist anti-urbanism, emphasizing the supposed "peoplehood" and "earthiness" of any authentic, i.e. rural, culture and art in opposition to cosmopolitanism and exploitation in the environment of the modern city, which was antisemitically coded as "Jewish". The anti-modernist city was to draw its "nutrients" directly from the national "soil", which Csaki illustrated by installing a Slovak and a German wooden house in the middle of industrial Stuttgart, and Günther-Mayer in turn by predicting the boom of Slovak culture as a result of the Slovakization of the formerly "formless" Upper Highland towns. In the meantime, what was to happen to the German cities once they were formed remained unspoken, as Germanization programs were only formulated covertly in the ideological laboratories of the SS.

While the center supplied the periphery with Nazi modernism (or at least neoclassicism) without direct reference to folklore – as in the case of the Bratislava exhibition "Contemporary German Sculpture" which ran partly parallel to the Stuttgart exhibition "Slovakia" in September 1942⁷² – a representative exhibition of Slovak art in Berlin was to take place only on the condition that it integrated folk and so-called old art. The same reduction would apply in the case of the inclusion of examples of contemporary Slovak art in the Stuttgart exhibition, which the German venues were considering and which arose in the context of autonomous plans to make Slovak art visible in the centers of the Axis powers. This intention was only partially realized – at the same time as the Stuttgart exhibition was being staged, Slovak artists exhibited in the former Czechoslovak pavilion at the Venice Biennale, where they were allowed to present their own blend of modernism and anti-modernism. Although the Berlin exhibition of Slovak art did not take place in the end for a number of reasons – not least, perhaps, because of the anti-modernist opposition of Prime Minister Tuka and the Bratislava Propaganda Office – the background to the discussions surrounding its preparation illustrates, at least from a historical perspective, the dual nature of the interaction between the cultural center and the periphery under the conditions of the wartime Slovak State. At the same time, this study demonstrates that cultural diplomacy, as an important instrument of power and more-or-less overt propaganda, not only took place between the Axis centers but also shaped the relations between the centers and peripheries of Axis Europe.

70 See BAKOŠ, *Art of Hegemony*.

71 On the cultural-scientific interest in Slovak Germans and the respective projections of especially Sudeten German researchers, who also served as liaisons between Reich German institutions such as the *Deutsches Auslands-Institut* in Stuttgart, see PANCZOVÁ – KILIÁNOVÁ – KUBISA, *Volkskunde in den Diensten des Dritten Reiches*, 51–78.

72 HANÁKOVÁ, *Umenie – štát – propaganda*, 72–75.

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