

CELEBRATING SLAVIC PRAGUE: FESTIVALS AND THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT, 1891-1912

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In the course of the nineteenth century, Prague was transformed from a provincial German city into a modern Czech metropolis. As the population of the city grew, an influx of Czech-speaking peasants changed its ethnic makeup. In 1861, the first Czech mayor of the city was elected, beginning an era of Czech domination of city government that lasted until the end of the monarchy. The Czech mayors of Prague undertook to remake their city into a modern metropolis with a distinctly Czech character. In addition to modernization projects like ghetto clearance, these leaders imprinted a Czech identity on the public space with new representational buildings and other projects. In the years leading up to World War I, the city hosted grand festivals that attracted international attention and enhanced its reputation as a modern urban center. Three events exemplify this process: the 1891 Jubilee Exhibition, the first great triumph for Czech Prague; the 1895 Ethnographic Exhibition, a celebration of national identity; and the 1912 gymnastic festival of the Slavic Sokol movement, one of the largest celebrations up until that time in the city. Reports from foreign visitors to the 1912 festival praising Prague as the modern capital of the Czech nation show how the identity of the city had been transformed on the eve of World War I.