

BETWEEN CIVILISING MISSION, FOLKLORISATION,
AND FOLKLORISM

The Prague exhibition “Art and Life in the Podkarpatská Rus” (1924)

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Based on the exhibition “Art and Life in the Podkarpatská Rus [Transcarpathia]” held in Prague in the year 1924, this article analyses how Czechoslovakia constructed this easterly territory as a periphery that was to be simultaneously modernised and staged. The discourse of the “civilising mission” was closely linked to the folklorisation of the region. The contribution of this study consists in revealing this paradox: By purporting to integrate and stimulate the region, the Czechoslovak state solidified its exoticised otherness. The article shows that the exhibition did not limit itself to presenting the region’s folk culture, but that instead the selection of objects and practices constructed the image of an “authentic” culture of Transcarpathia, thereby contributing to its folklorisation and differentiation from the rest of Czechoslovakia. The analysis of the choice of exhibits, their regional classification and distribution across the museum venue, and their scientific framing and economic valorisation allows the connections between knowledge, pedagogy, and power within a single representation project to be understood. It becomes clear that the preservation of cultural heritage in a quasi-colonial context did not represent a neutral gesture; rather, it involved processes of hierarchisation, standardisation, and cultural control.