

Exhibition activities of Ukrainians in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s and 1930s as an important tool for promoting culture and history

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Abstract

The article aims to investigate and identify the various forms of exhibition activities conducted by the Ukrainian émigré community in Czechoslovakia during the period 1920-1941, acknowledging these activities as a pivotal component of cultural, educational, and enlightenment efforts dedicated to the preservation and advancement of Ukrainian science, culture, and traditions. **The study's scholarly** contribution lies in its focused analysis of the exhibition practices of the Ukrainian intelligentsia in exile within the Czechoslovak Republic and in revealing their importance in the dissemination and promotion of Ukrainian cultural heritage. **The research methodology** is grounded in general scientific principles, encompassing analytical and logical methods; broadly historical approaches such as historical-problematic and historical-chronological analyses; and a range of specialized source-critical techniques including source criticism, classification, and typology. The application of bibliographic and archival heuristic methods enabled a systematic identification, processing, and organization of relevant materials. Moreover, concrete-historical sources, documents and materials contemporaneous to the studied period that reflect specific events or individual contributions, were integral to the inquiry. **Conclusion.** Operating under the frameworks established by the Czechoslovak government, a range of institutions, educational entities, societies, museums, and other organizations actively engaged in cultural and educational initiatives. These bodies organized numerous exhibitions showcasing books and other collections, thereby facilitating the promotion of Ukrainian culture and historical identity. A substantial proportion of these exhibitions were thematic, portraying Ukrainians as a community dedicated to preserving their cultural identity and, fundamentally, to the realization of an independent statehood. Many of the publications exhibited retain their scholarly and historical significance, serving not only as important artifacts within the context of Ukrainian scientific publishing history but also as meaningful contributions to Ukrainian science across diverse fields. This cultural work also involved significant participation from young Ukrainian scholars and students embarking on their academic and pedagogical careers. Notably, the support of the local Czechoslovak population, particularly in urban centers such as Prague, Poděbrady, and Brno, proved considerable. By the late 1930s, exhibition activities had evolved into a prioritized domain for museums and libraries; however, this area still requires further comprehensive and detailed scholarly investigation.

Keywords: Ukrainian emigration, cultural and educational activities, exhibition activities, enlightenment efforts.

Виставкова діяльність українців у Чехословаччині 1920-1930-х рр. як важливий інструмент популяризації культури та історії

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Анотація.

Метою статті є дослідження та виявлення форм виставкової роботи української еміграції у Чехословаччині у 1920-1941 рр. як важливого чинника культурно-освітньої та просвітницької діяльності, спрямованої на збереження та розвиток української науки,

культури та традицій. **Наукова новизна дослідження** полягає у спробі проаналізувати виставкову діяльність української інтелігенції в еміграції у Чехословацькій Республіці та виявити її значення для популяризації досвіду українського народу у сфері культури. **Методологічною основою дослідження** стали загальнонаукові методи, зокрема: аналітичний та логічний; загальноісторичні: історико-проблемний, історико-хронологічний; низка спеціальних джерелознавчих методів: джерелознавчої критики, класифікації і типології. Методи бібліографічної та архівної евристики сприяли поетапно виявленню, опрацюванню і систематизації. Також були використані конкретно-історичні джерела: документи та матеріали, які сформовані у досліджуваній період і відображають конкретну подію чи діяльність особистості. **Висновки.** Установи, навчальні заклади, товариства, музеї та інші організації в умовах, створених урядом Чехословацької Республіки активно включались у культурно-просвітницьку роботу. Вони організовували виставки книг та інших колекцій з метою популяризації української культури та історії. Значна частина виставок була тематичною і презентувала українство як народ, який прагне зберегти власну культуру, ідентичність, а головне збудувати власну незалежну державу. Багато з цих публікацій досі мають цінність і є цікавими не лише в контексті історії українського наукового видавництва, але й як внесок в українську науку в різних галузях. У цю діяльність залучалась велика кількість молодих українських студентів, які тільки починали свій шлях у науковій та освітній сфері. Значною допомогою була підтримка місцевого чехословацького населення, особливо таких міст як Прага, Подєбради та Брно. У кінці 1930-х років виставкова діяльність стає пріоритетним напрямком роботи музеїв та бібліотек, але цей напрямок потребує глибокого і детального дослідження.

Ключові слова: українська еміграція, культурно-освітня діяльність, виставкова діяльність, просвітницька діяльність.

The problem statement. Ukrainian emigration to Czechoslovakia became a landmark in the history of emigration in general. The Ukrainian intelligentsia marked this period by laying down important experiences in preserving and developing national culture, traditions, and understanding of their identity in a multicultural space and complex political realities. Representatives of the Ukrainian diaspora in Czechoslovakia established several secondary and higher education institutions. Furthermore, scientific and cultural-educational societies and organisations commenced their activities, evolving into key institutions for scientific research, educational development, and cultural dissemination. The main goal of these centres was to promote Ukrainian identity as an important part of European history and culture.

Analysis of sources and new research. The historiography of the study and the source base The cultural, educational, and enlightenment activities of Ukrainian emigrants in Prague have been studied by individual Ukrainian scholars, including S. Vidnyansky, O. Danilenko, and O. Sukhobokova. However, they only touched upon this topic in the context of studying other issues related to Ukrainian emigration to Czechoslovakia. The cultural, educational, and enlightenment activities of Ukrainian emigrants in Czechoslovakia in 1920-1941 have not been the subject of attention of any domestic or foreign researcher. In particular, Ukrainian scholar S. Vidnyansky, who studied the activities of the Ukrainian Free University, examined the issues of its scientific, pedagogical, cultural, and educational work. He concluded that from the beginning of its activity in Prague, the Ukrainian Free University was at the centre of the cultural and scientific life of Ukrainian emigration. However, he did not consider the specific forms of cultural, educational, and enlightenment work, including exhibitions, carried out by the university staff and students (Vidnyanskyi, 1994).

The subject of Ukrainian emigration in Czechoslovakia was also among O. Danylenko's areas of scholarly interest. In his examination of Ukrainian emigration within the Czechoslovak Republic, O. Danylenko emphasized the particularly challenging moral, psychological, and material circumstances faced by Ukrainian emigrants during the interwar period. He observed that the Ukrainian intelligentsia played a crucial role in shaping the sociocultural profile of the emigrant community. The scholar concluded that the intellectual resources of emigrant political organizations and associations gradually transitioned from political engagement to activities in the scientific, cultural, and educational domains. This shift led to the establishment of numerous centres, institutions, and organizations of diverse orientations throughout Czechoslovakia in the 1920s. Despite a thorough analysis of Ukrainian emigration activities, cultural, educational, and exhibition activities remained outside the scope of the scholar's interests (Danylenko, 2001, s. 37–40).

O. Sukhobokova devoted her research to the cultural and educational centre of Ukrainian emigration formed in Czechoslovakia. In her study, she demonstrated that the cultural and educational institutions founded by the Ukrainian intelligentsia served as unifying platforms for both the broader Ukrainian community and its intellectual elite, leading to the development of a comprehensive system of Ukrainian national schools and cultural organisations. However, her research primarily concentrated

on the exhibition activities of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, without delving into the specific forms and practices of their cultural and educational initiatives (Sukhobokova, 2010, s. 133-137; Sukhobokova, 2023, s. 23-27).

Among foreign scholars, this issue was also considered by the Czech historian Ljubitza Harbulova. In her work "The Life of Ukrainian Emigration in the Interwar Czechoslovak Period in the Works of Czech and Slovenian Historians," she describes the scientific works of Czech and Slovenian historians who studied Ukrainian emigration in Czechoslovakia. She revealed the great interest of these scholars not only in the life and activities of Ukrainians in Czechoslovakia, but also in their influence on Czech and Slovak society. (Harbulová, 2019, p. 120-136).

Czech scholar Ondřej Havel, who in his work examined the activities of the Ukrainian Civic Committee in Czechoslovakia from 1921 to 1925. He showed that the Committee was engaged not only in economic work, but also in active educational and propaganda activities. His team contributed to the opening of other educational institutions and societies for Ukrainian emigrants (Havel, 2009, p. 73-87).

Thanks to the close cooperation between Ukraine and Czechoslovakia, we have a significant number of sources for researching this topic, including: statutes, letters, bulletins of societies and scientific institutions, reports on the activities of institutions and public organizations, and archival materials. These materials reveal the opportunities and problems that arose for Ukrainian emigrants in the process of their activities.

Thus, an analysis of scientific works devoted to the study of the activities of Ukrainian emigration in Czechoslovakia showed that the topic of cultural and educational work and the popularisation of achievements has not yet become an area of interest for Ukrainian scholars. In some works, historians touch upon the problems of cultural, educational, and enlightenment work to one degree or another, but research into the forms of such work, in particular the exhibition activities of higher education institutions, societies, and various Ukrainian emigrant organisations, has not become a priority. But the availability of important sources requires in-depth disclosure of the topic today.

Given this, **our study aims** to identify the forms of exhibition activities of Ukrainian emigration in Czechoslovakia in 1920-1941 as an important factor in cultural and educational activities to preserve and develop Ukrainian science, culture, and traditions.

The methodological basis of the study was general scientific, in particular, analytical and logical; general historical, which was historical-problematic and historical-chronological; and several special source study methods, such as source criticism, classification, and typology. Methods of bibliographic and archival heuristics helped to gradually identify, process, and systematise specific historical sources.

The results of the research. It is widely recognized that exhibition activity constitutes a significant component of cultural and educational work, as it serves to engage a broad audience with cultural heritage and intellectual achievements. Ukrainian emigrant higher education institutions, libraries, societies, and cultural centres actively organized exhibitions featuring books, experimental findings, and scientific and technological accomplishments. Similarly, art institutions and educational establishments in the arts curated exhibitions of artworks and architectural designs. These exhibitions, which highlighted artistic, craft-based, and other cultural contributions, played a crucial role in preserving national identity, fostering connections with the homeland, and promoting Ukrainian culture on the international stage.

Scientific, educational, and art exhibitions organised by the Ukrainian Free University, the Ukrainian Economic Academy, the Ukrainian Higher Pedagogical Institute named after M. Dragomanov, and other institutions gained widespread popularity. Among them were exhibitions dedicated to the achievements of Ukrainian education, the liberation struggle of the Ukrainian people, the preservation of memory about the past, and the cultivation of patriotism among Ukrainian emigrants (Zubko, 2024, S. 90-91).

The most active cultural and educational, and in this context, exhibition activities were carried out by the staff of the Ukrainian Economic Academy, which not only engaged in educational and scientific activities, but also worked systematically to acquaint Czechoslovak society and its citizens with the achievements of Ukrainian emigrants. In addition to academic lectures, the Academy's teachers gave popular science lectures and organised exhibitions of literature and scientific achievements of the staff and students. Among other things, some lectures aroused great interest not only among students but also among city residents. These included a lecture by Karel Havlíček Borovský on the influence of Czech educators on Ukrainians and a lecture on the activities of President Masaryk. In addition, every year the Academy organised parties in Poděbrady, to which it invited the most influential people in the city (Ukrainska hospodarska, 1935, s. 112–113).

The management and staff of the Ukrainian Economic Academy created several societies and centres, which also participated in many cultural and educational events and exhibitions, presenting their achievements and experience in Czechoslovakia and beyond. Active exhibition activities were

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initiated in 1923 through the engagement of faculty and students at an agricultural exhibition held in Prague. The team was awarded diplomas from the Czech Agricultural Council based on the achievements presented. Subsequently, every time the Academy team participated in such exhibitions, it received honorary awards and medals for its exhibits and presentations (Shulha, 2019, s. 111).

Regarding the materials presented at the exhibitions, it is noteworthy that, to promote Ukrainian culture and history, scientists and students of the Academy, upon the request of the Ukrainian Committee in Lviv, produced 20 large maps and diagrams about Ukraine for presentation at the world exhibition in Chicago in 1932 (Biuleten, 1966, s. 5)

The Ukrainian Bibliophile Society, founded by Ukrainian emigrants, played a leading role in uniting bibliographers, librarians, and publishers. Among its primary objectives was the organization of scholarly meetings featuring professional presentations and discussions focused on matters related to Ukrainian bibliography (Ukrainska hospodarska, 1959, s. 72-1). Almost all scientific meetings were accompanied by interesting exhibitions, where new Ukrainian publications were presented or dedicated to a specific topic. Such exhibitions contributed to the popularisation of the scientific achievements of the Ukrainian scientific elite and the development of Ukrainian-Czechoslovak relations in science and culture. Among them were exhibitions dedicated to the works of T. Shevchenko and O. Kobylanska, Ukrainian bookplates, book graphics, and Ukrainian publications in the United States and camps for Ukrainian prisoners of war. One such exhibition took place in 1924 and was dedicated to the 350th anniversary of the Apostle (Gospel) publication in Lviv. Not only representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia were invited, but also residents of the cities where they were held.

The majority of exhibitions were critically examined in periodicals through reviews, commentaries, and general discussions. For example, the newspaper "Czechoslovak Republic" published a review of one of the exhibitions of Ukrainian books. The article emphasised that the books presented at the exhibition came from all Ukrainian territories, in particular: Soviet Ukraine, Galicia, Bukovina, and Transcarpathia.

Another exhibition of Ukrainian books was organised by the Ukrainian Bibliophile Society during the International Congress of Librarians and Bibliophiles in Prague in 1926, with the support of the Association of Czechoslovak Librarians. The exhibition featured Ukrainian books published in Ukraine and abroad, periodicals, materials about Ukraine in other languages, works by Shevchenko, and graphics from various publishers and libraries (Z istorii mizhnarodnykh, 1999, s. 129-130).

It is worth noting that in 1932, the Society independently organised a book exhibition during the Ukrainian Scientific Congress held in Prague. Attendees were provided with a catalogue encompassing all published books, with particular emphasis on those displayed at the exhibition (Katalog výstavy, 1933). In 1933, the Society also curated an exhibition of graphic works from the 19th and 20th centuries, featuring contributions from over 100 Ukrainian artists. This event was actively discussed in scientific circles and the media (Z istorii mizhnarodnykh, 1999, s. 129-130). Exhibition activity emerged as a significant aspect of the Ukrainian Historical Institute's scholarly and cultural agenda. Aimed at disseminating knowledge about the cultural and social life of Ukrainians, the Institute regularly organized exhibitions as part of its broader outreach efforts. The inaugural exhibition, dedicated to periodicals from the Transcarpathian region, was held from May 31 to June 2, 1934, in collaboration with the Society of Ukrainian Writers and Journalists. This event was accompanied by a series of lectures and informational sessions. Notably, the exhibition attracted considerable interest from both Ukrainian emigrants and residents of various cities in Czechoslovakia. Later, the Institute's staff curated two additional exhibitions, focusing on early Ukrainian periodicals and contemporary Ukrainian journalism.

The Ukrainian Historical Institute also contributed to exhibitions organized by other institutions, primarily by supplying exhibition materials. Two such exhibitions were held in major Czechoslovak cities: Prague and Brno, thereby enabling broader public access and engagement. One of them took place in Prague and was held at the Central City Bookstore from April 22 to May 7, 1933. The exhibition presented more than seventy illustrated magazines published by the Institute. Another exhibition occurred from October 1 to 15 of the same year at the Czechoslovak Academy of Agriculture. The Institute's staff presented 178 illustrated magazines on literature, art, history, cultural and social life, agriculture, and technology. Importantly, the exhibition also included periodicals intended for children and youth, highlighting the Institute's commitment to diverse audiences. The Ukrainian Historical Institute took part in exhibitions initiated by other institutions, including those held by the Ukrainian Higher Pedagogical Institute in 1934 and 1936 (Zhyvotko, 2014, s. 92; Biuleten, 1932, s. 7-10).

The Ukrainian Historical Institute and the Museum of the Struggle for the Liberation of Ukraine actively engaged in the collection and preservation of archival, library, and museum materials in Prague. The Ukrainian Historical Institute was financially independent, while the Museum of the

Struggle for the Liberation of Ukraine was funded by the government. Oleksandr Mytsiuk, in an article in the journal *Nasha Kultura*, noted that despite these circumstances, these institutions did not compete with each other, but rather complemented each other, serving different segments of Ukrainian émigré society (Mytsiuk, 1937, s. 48).

Despite the challenging circumstances under which it commenced its activities, first in Vienna and then in Prague, the Ukrainian Free University gradually expanded its focus beyond academic and scientific pursuits to include active engagement in cultural and educational initiatives. The University began its activities in Prague under conditions facilitated by the Czechoslovak government in support of Ukrainian émigrés (Ukrainskyi, 1927, s. 68). The University's academic community paid great attention to organising scientific congresses and exhibitions to present its achievements in printed literature to the scientific community in Prague. The initiative to convene the first congress originated with the Ukrainian Academic Committee, and the event was held from October 3 to 7, 1926. This congress served both to highlight the scientific contributions of the Ukrainian scholarly community and to foster connections with Ukrainian research institutions and academic circles within the Czechoslovak Republic and beyond. It is noteworthy that the majority of participants were Ukrainian émigré scholars, with only a small number of participants representing scientists from other European countries. Although the University's achievements at that time were still modest, they were nevertheless presented in a small exhibition aimed at introducing their work to international colleagues (Ukrainskyi, 1928, s. 8-9).

The congress was attended by distinguished Czech professors Bidlo and Pastřnek and Slovenian scientist Matyas Murko, who taught at Charles University then. They sincerely supported their Ukrainian colleagues in their desire to turn Prague into a centre of Slavic science, including Ukrainian science (Ukrainskyi, 1928, s. 10).

During the congress, Ukrainian scientists presented their achievements and opportunities realised in the Czechoslovak Republic. Czech and Slovak researchers expressed particular interest in the prospects for collaborative, forward-looking research across multiple scientific disciplines as proposed by the Ukrainian participants.

The second Ukrainian Scientific Congress was held in Prague from March 20 to 24, 1932, drawing increased interest from a broader range of scholars across European countries (Derysh, 2024, s. 90). This period marked a turning point for many Ukrainian academics in exile, as hopes for returning to their homeland were increasingly diminished. As the Czechoslovak government's aid program was gradually being phased out and there were insufficient funds to support higher education institutions operating in the Czechoslovak Republic, it became clear that it would be impossible to implement a significant part of their plans. The Ukrainian academic community tried to unite and make important joint decisions despite this (Statut, 1932).

A significant accomplishment of the second congress was the organization of a book exhibition at the Central Library in Prague (Ústřední knihovna v Praze), which featured about 1,000 titles including scholarly monographs and articles authored by Ukrainian researchers and published by various Ukrainian publishing houses over the preceding decade. It is important to note that, in addition to the congress participants, representatives of Czech scientific circles also visited the exhibition (II Ukrainskyi, 1932, s. 2-10).

The scientific and pedagogical staff, along with students of the Ukrainian Free University, were engaged not only in teaching and research activities but also in organizing various events, including exhibitions, aimed at showcasing and promoting their contributions to Ukrainian science (Dzhus, 2019, s. 16-17).

Beyond higher education institutions, cultural, educational, and exhibition initiatives were also undertaken by public organizations established by Ukrainian émigrés within the Czechoslovak Republic, such as foundations, societies, and cultural centres.

Thus, from the very beginning of its activity, the Ukrainian Historical and Philological Society in Prague set itself the task of becoming a powerful cultural and scientific center of the Ukrainian emigration. At the same time, it considered scientific research and educational work to be the main form of its activity (Salata, 2020, p. 177). However, already in the process of its work, the society began to actively organize broad scientific discussions on various issues and exhibitions of books that were published by members of the society and with their participation (Voron, 2020, s. 102-104).

Among other things, publishing and exhibition activities were one of the main areas of activity of the Ukrainian Public Publishing Fund (the Fund), established by the Ukrainian Civic Committee on April 24, 1923. The Fund published original works and translations into Ukrainian for the educational sector: textbooks for secondary and higher education institutions, reference books, and fiction. To coordinate activities and approve books and textbooks for publication, the Fund established a Publishing Council and an executive body – the Bureau of the Ukrainian Public Publishing Fund (BUGVF) under the leadership of Yevhen Vyrovnyi. The Council was assigned a crucial supervisory role (Halchuk, 1998, s. 43-46).

By the beginning of 1925, the Fund's membership had grown to 112, comprising both individual members and institutional entities. During this period, the Fund published thirty-seven books in various fields, including Ukrainian literary criticism, philosophy, ethnography, anthropology, and art, as well as monographs on mathematics, statistics, agriculture, pedagogy, medicine, history, music, and political economy (Halchuk, 1998, s. 44). In total, by 1926, the Fund had published twenty-four works with a circulation of 52,000 copies. All these works were in high demand among Ukrainian scientists and educators, as well as among the population of the Czechoslovak Republic. Notably, almost a fifth of all Ukrainian books published by the Foundation aroused interest in Czechoslovakia. As for Galicia, given that there were no conditions for the publication of Ukrainian-language scientific works at that time, these books were in great demand there (Maruniak, 1983, s. 658).

In addition to publishing scientific and educational literature, the Ukrainian Public Publishing Fund periodically organised book exhibitions in Prague. One was an exhibition of Ukrainian literature and book graphics in Prague in 1924. One of the documents states that "the Foundation aims to present our new book graphics, while promoting the development of Ukrainian graphics and encouraging Ukrainian publishers to take a greater interest in the design and appearance of books" (Halchuk, 1998, s. 45).

As evidenced by archival documents, the Fund approached the preparation and execution of such exhibitions with a high level of responsibility. An announcement issued by the Bureau of the Ukrainian Public Publishing Fund regarding the organization of the exhibition and the invitation extended to all interested parties clearly indicates that the organizers established specific criteria for the formatting and publication of books intended for display at the exhibition, namely:

The book graphics section may primarily include publications featuring external graphic design elements such as covers, posters, and illustrated works, as well as original graphic designs prepared for yet-to-be-published materials.

Either the complete book with its cover or the cover alone may be submitted for exhibition.

Submitted exhibits will be reviewed by a jury of Professor D. Antonovich, V. Sichinsky, P. Bogatsky, Y. Tishchenko, and a representative of the Society of Plastic Arts in Prague.

Accepted works will be listed in the exhibition catalogue, including details such as the name of the graphic designer, the book title, the publisher, and the place and year of publication (Lyst, 1924, s. 75).

Accordingly, an illustrated catalogue with special articles devoted to Ukrainian book graphics was produced for the exhibition. In our opinion, it was also important that the organisers of the exhibition decided to leave the vast majority of the exhibits in the Ukrainian National Library. Over time, this exhibition of Ukrainian book graphics in Prague became permanent.

The Foundation was particularly active during the years 1923 and 1928. However, its level of activity gradually declined, leading to its dissolution in 1932. Despite its relatively short lifespan, the Foundation made a significant contribution to Ukrainian-language scientific publishing, comparable to that of other interwar publishers that promoted high-quality scholarly, educational, and reference literature in Ukrainian (Rehuliamin, 1923, s. 2).

Conclusions. Thus, various institutions, educational establishments, societies, museums, and related organizations played a vital role in advancing cultural and educational work during this period. They organized book exhibitions and other displays to promote Ukrainian culture and history. A significant part of the exhibitions was thematic and presented Ukrainians as a people striving to preserve their culture and identity and, most importantly, to build their own independent state. Many of these publications are still valuable and engaging in the context of the history of Ukrainian scientific publishing and as a contribution to Ukrainian science in various fields. Many young Ukrainian students at the beginning of their academic and professional careers were actively engaged in these efforts.. The support of the local Czechoslovak population, especially in cities such as Prague, Poděbrady, and Brno, was instrumental in sustaining these initiatives. By the late 1930s, exhibition activities had become a central focus for museums and libraries, although this area still requires comprehensive and detailed academic investigation.

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