

# CZECHOSLOVAKIA AT THE 5<sup>TH</sup> MILAN TRIENNIAL IN 1933

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**ABSTRACT:** The Milan Triennial moved into new exhibition spaces in 1933 and saw a major development in its history. The architecture exhibition presented the audience with an extensive collection of local and foreign productions, as well as the most influential people of the time. The Czechoslovak mission presented more than thirty buildings on its territory. The designs for some of them were published by architectural periodicals, such as *Stavba*, *Stavitel* and *Forum*. These magazines were amongst the selection regularly reported on by Milan's *Casabella*, which in the same year, under the leadership of Giuseppe Pagano, decided to accentuate the need to come closer to the European avant-garde approach. The mapping of the main European periodicals on *Casabella*'s pages made it possible firstly to form a picture of the general foreign architectural situation both in a national and a global context, and secondly to convey it to the Italian audience and the emerging generation of Italian rationalists. The purpose of this work is an analysis of Czechoslovak architecture from the Milan exhibition's point of view. A second purpose is to map the publishing activities of the foreign section of an influential local medium – *Casabella*, covering the Czechoslovak architectural scene from 1930 to 1935.

**KEY WORDS:** Czechoslovakia interwar architecture, Triennale di Milano 1933, *Casabella*

## **Traditions of the Milan Triennial**

The history of this important cultural event begins with the Biennial of Decorative Arts in Monza. The international exhibition was held in this original format four times before 1933, when its new headquarters in Milan were completed. The ‚Palazzo

dell'Arte" exhibition palace was designed by the architect Giovanni Muzio, whose design was an example of a modern exhibition building. The building itself was also an important point in the city's urbanism, ending one of the axes that structures the city park. Part of the park was used to house temporary experimental pavilions, serving as a demonstration of new materials, techniques and aesthetic forms.

The important people participating in the exhibition in terms of its organisation and content were the architect Gio Ponti and painter Mario Sironi. The architects Alberto Alpago Novello, Pietro Aschieri and Agnoldomenico Pica were in charge of curating the modern architecture section. During the fifth Triennial, architecture became a dominant theme, and this historic moment became an opportunity to influence its overall direction. A particularly valuable experience was the exhibition of foreign architectural work, thanks to which the emerging generation of Italian rationalists tried to change the main theme of discussion from the aesthetic and formal side of architecture to its social, economic and technical aspects, corresponding to the main topics discussed in the mainstream of European modern architecture.

The aim of the all-embracing exhibition was to present new aesthetic forms as an inseparable part of the modern life of Italy. However, it must be stated that the desire of fascist propaganda was to present a particular national style, which, differing in conception from the above-mentioned coming generation of rationalists, was hugely promoted for instance by the neoclassical academics Marcello Piacentini and Armando Brasini. They perceived the new Italian architecture as a formalistic legacy of the past, referring to classical Roman architecture (Paladini 1931, s. 37).

### **Photography as a mediator of architecture**

The exhibition of architecture was divided into multiple spaces devoted largely to domestic production and foreign exhibitors. The first part was devoted to the visiting nations, and the selection of foreign architecture was according to building types. The central part was divided into several thematic blocks informing visitors about the state of Italian architecture, construction and education in related fields. The final part of the exhibition was devoted to important world personalities and members of CIRPAC (Img. 1). Although the exhibition was enriched by several dozen temporary experimental buildings, photography became the main communication tool and played an irreplaceable role in the exhibition.

The architecture of all the respective participating states was to be reproduced using photomosaics. The choice of its content was to be made by the national curator, who had the task of preparing a short report giving information about the current situati-

on on the domestic scene. Oldřich Starý, the editor-in-chief of the journal *Stavba* and the chairman of the Club of Architects in Prague (Klub architektů v Praze) was in charge of selecting Czechoslovak buildings for this purpose. Czechoslovakia was the only nation having not one but two photomosaics at the exhibition. The vast majority of the buildings were civic. Schools and sports grounds were represented to a great extent among them. There were thirty exhibited works in total, while the amount of architects presented was twenty-eight (Img. 2). In comparison with other countries, Czechoslovakia had the widest range of exhibited buildings and their designers.

### **Czechoslovak magazines about Italy**

In 1931, the magazine *Stavba* published an article by Vincio Paladini informing readers about modern Italian architecture. He did not rate its situation as the best possible. In his text, he drew attention to the threat of nationalist art and criticised a large number of architects who promoted historicism in architecture, and who raised aesthetic and nationalist issues. He described the emerging generation of rationalists around Giuseppe Pagano, Piero Bottoni and Gino Pollini as the second group participating in the internal struggle for the new direction of Italian architecture. However, Paladini stated that the aesthetics of modern architecture were received with disgust and criticism (1931, s. 40).

*Stavba* magazine informed readers about the course of the Milan Triennial with an article written by Oldřich Stibor. He described the state's control over culture and art in Italy as a fundamental problem, hindering its free theoretical development. „Thus, from the very beginning of its development, modern Italian architecture has come into conflict with the theses of modern, international architecture, which does not desire to be an art form, but the materialisation of the biological, social, productive, cultural and societal needs of man,“ wrote Stibor (1933, s. 158). According to him, modern Italian architecture manifested itself through the mechanical adoption of constructivist elements, in the sense of artistic –isms.

In 1932, the magazine *Stavitel*, founded by the Association of Architects (Sdružení architektů), whose editor-in-chief was Josef Setnička, published a review of Alberto Sartoris' book called 'Gli elementi dell'architettura funzionale'. It was a book theorising functionalism in architecture. According to Setnička, Sartoris correctly drew attention to the requirements of inner space and functional disposition. However, he preferred a formal image of the work, which, according to Setnička, was not the very essence of it. 'Although Sartoris rightly focuses on technical and spiritual forces that influenced the origin and development of modern architecture, it does not explain its whole essence and final direction because it lacks all material and social postulates,“ Setnička explained (1932, s. 154).

## Casabella as a world medium

In 1933, Giuseppe Pagano became editor-in-chief of Casabella magazine. The stated goal for the upcoming editions was to advance the question of new Italian architecture and to promote the upcoming generation of rationalists. Pagano's idea was to elevate the best domestic and world buildings built in the spirit of pure modernity, while striving to build stable relations with European artistic directions. Casabella's foreign architecture section regularly mapped the situation in other countries and provided an excerpt from monitored foreign journals, including photographic attachments.

During the period from 1930 to 1935, the Czechoslovak journals *Stavitel*, *Stavba* and *Forum* regularly appeared among those monitored (Img. 3). In total, there are at least 30 mentions informing readers about the content of Czechoslovak magazines, and at least fifty photographs of Czechoslovak buildings. In 1934, three separate articles were published about buildings by Ladislav Machoň, Karel Hannauer and Jaroslav Frágner. The pinnacle was an extensive article by Paulo de Giovanni published in 1935 named 'Architettura nuova in Cecoslovacchia', which broadly described the development of architecture in Czechoslovakia, and included key historical figures such as Jan Kotěra, Otakar Novotný and Josef Gočár. Josef Setnička assisted with the preparation. In the article, one can recognise several photographs that were published in the magazine *Stavitel*.

Through its foreign architecture section, Casabella paid attention to the quality of civic buildings emerging in Czechoslovakia. For instance, aside from building types exhibited at the Triennial, the editors pointed to the exceptional quality of sanatoriums, based on an issue of the magazine *Stavitel* with this theme, published in 1933. In a similar fashion, an issue was published dedicated to schools.

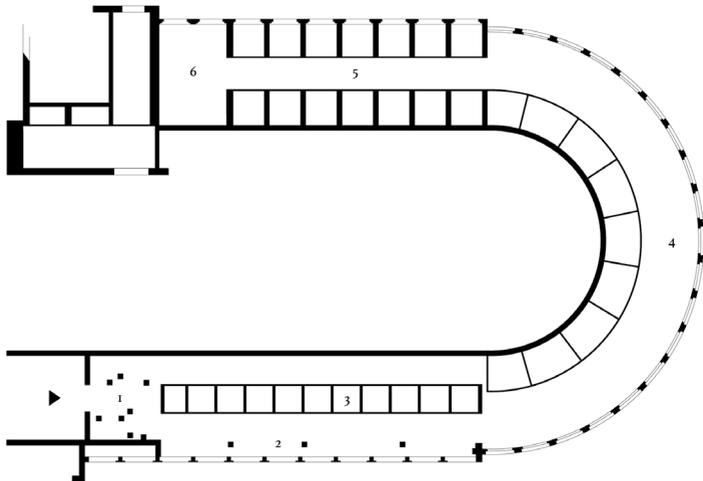
## Conclusion

It can be stated that the fifth Milan Triennial met the expectations of a historical turning point. Upon reviewing articles published by Czechoslovak magazines about the state of Italian architecture before its unfolding, it is clear that the starting point for its change of direction was indeed difficult. However, organisation of the exhibition, including a substantial number of foreign participants, was a decisive step towards forging an important moment of ideological modernisation. Thanks to its participation, Czechoslovakia strengthened its position in Italy as a centre of modern architecture. This fact is confirmed by the great deal of Czechoslovak buildings published in Casabella magazine, which became the main conveyor of foreign architecture in its domestic nation. An extensive section on international architecture allowed reconstruction of the overview of its development around the world, and at the same time accelerated the pace of approaching the European

architectural avant-garde. Despite its initial provinciality, the Milan Triennial has gained a renowned position. Today it is one of the most important cultural institutions in Italy.

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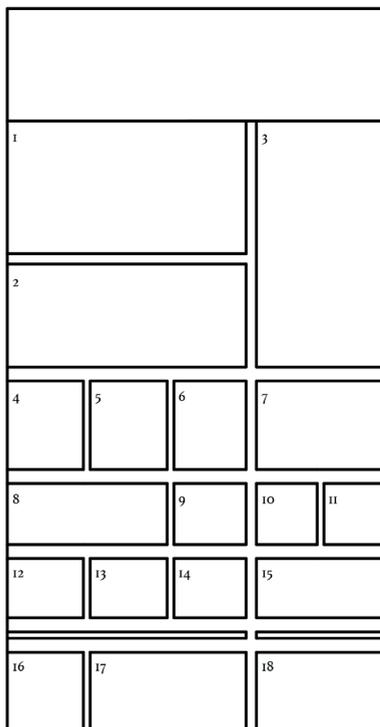
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1. Entrance with models - local production
2. Foreign examples divided by building types - international section
3. National photomosaics - international section
4. Italian section
5. Presentation of important personalities - international section
6. Hall for CIRPAC members - international section

**Img. 1.** Scheme of architecture exhibition (source: 5. *Triennale di Milano: catalogo ufficiale*)

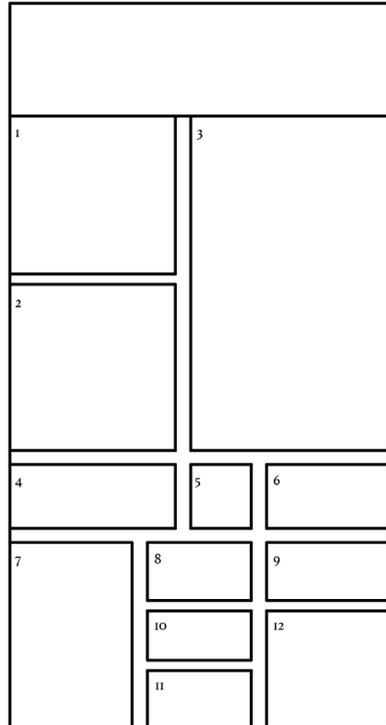
# CECO SLOVACCHIA



1. Karel Honzík, General pension institution in Prague, 1930-34
2. Dušan Jurkovič, Milan Rastislav Štefánik memorial in Bradlo, 1924-28
3. Ludvík Kysela, Bafa store in Prague, 1928-29
4. Karel Hannauer, Guesthouse Arosa in Prague, 1931
5. Ladislav Machoň, Sports centre with cinema in Hostivař, 1931-32
6. Juraj Tvarožek, Municipal savings bank in Bratislava, 1930-31
7. Emil Králík, Exhibition centre in Brno, 1927-28
8. Vladimír Frýda, Complex of school buildings in Prague, 1927-29
9. Oskar Poříška, Tyršova primary school in Brno, 1932
10. Miloš Vaněček, Procházka restaurant in Letná in Prague, 1931
11. Josef Marek, Residential block Avion in Prague, 1930-31
12. Kamil Roškot, Czechoslovak pavilion on world's fair in Chicago, 1933
13. Alois Mezera, Crematorium in Strašnice, 1927-30
14. Jan Zázvorka, Monument of resistance in Vítkov 1929-33
15. Adolf Benš a Josef Kříž, Building of Electrical enterprises in Prague, 1927-35
16. Jan Víšek, UP store in Bratislava, 1928-29
17. Mojmir Kyselka, Masaryk primary school in Brno, 1930-31
18. Bohumír Kozák, Masaryk hospital (currently Thomayer) in Prague, 1926-28

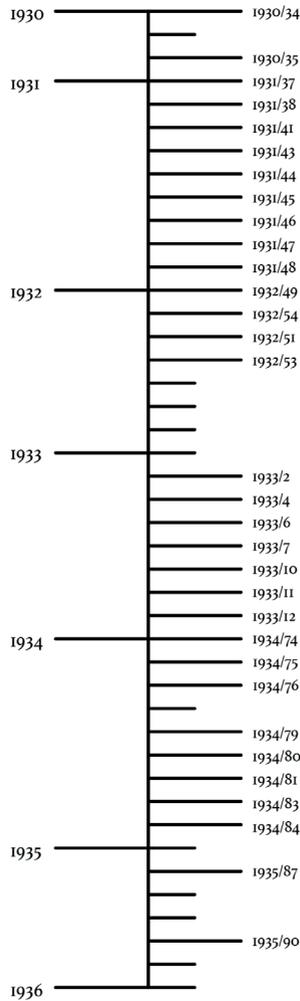
**Img. 2a** Czechoslovak photomosaic, first panel (source: 5. *Triennale di Milano: catalogo ufficiale*)

# CECO SLOVACCHIA



1. Bohuslav Fuchs, Municipal spa in Zábřdovice in Brno, 1929-31
2. Václav Kolátor, Public swimming pool in Barrandov in Prague, 1929-31
3. Václav Kolátor, Public swimming pool in Barrandov in Prague, 1929-31
4. František Albert Libra, Stadium in Braník in Prague, (competition 1929)
5. Miloš Kopriva, Sports centre in Komín in Brno, 1929-30
6. Alois Balán a Jiří Grossmann, School of arts in Bratislava, 1928-37
7. Oldřich Tyl, Commercial palace Bondy in Prague, 1929-33
8. Antonín Brebera, Airport hangar in Prague
9. Antonín Brebera, Airport hangar in Karlovy Vary, 1930
10. Jiří Kroha, Cafe at the exhibition center in Mladá Boleslav, 1927
11. Antonín Engel, Waterworks in Podolí, 1923-28
12. Miloš Vaněček, Bridge over Lužice in Bechyně, 1928

**Img. 2b** Czechoslovak photomosaic, second panel (source: 5. *Triennale di Milano: catalogo ufficiale*)



**Img. 3.** timeline of publishing Czechoslovak architecture in Casabella (source: Ondřej Hanuš)