Editorial. Volume 13. The Study of National Identities at World Fairs – from Methodological Nationalism to Transnational Approaches and Cultural Isomorphism

ERIC STORM
Leiden University

The study of national representations at world fairs could provide a strong incentive to the field of nationalism studies, since it enables the construction of national identities to be studied as a global process. This way, it can be shown that the process of national identity construction during the heyday of the world fairs between 1851 and the 1930s demonstrated many converging tendencies.

This introductory article is divided into five sections. First, I will show how national and other territorial identities have been shaped at world fairs during the second half of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century. The second section will provide a brief overview of developments in the field of nationalism studies, where scholars have recently placed more emphasis on transnational and bottom-up approaches, while trying to overcome the dichotomy between nation-states and empires. The third section assesses the contributions on nationalism at world fairs published in this and the previous issue of *Studies on National Movements*, showing how they already integrate many fresh perspectives. In the fourth part, I argue

that more attention should be given to the construction of national identities as a global process, showing that world fairs actually had a strong isomorphic effect, as countries increasingly adopted common elements and templates in order to give shape to their national identities. The final section shows that world fairs reflected the existing international order, developed a common taxonomy to categorize human productivity, created a global conceptual framework, defined the main components of a national identity and created successful templates in order to display them for an international audience. World fairs as a consequence had a lasting and homogenizing effect on national identities around the globe.

Keywords: World fairs, national identities, nationalism studies, isomorphism, international order, cultural heritage, folklore

Territorial identities at world fairs

World fairs were held regularly from 1851 onwards. They quickly developed into mega events and were organized on all continents. These large-scale international exhibitions could be seen as the most important (visual) mass medium of the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. They were attended by millions of visitors and received widespread coverage in the press. Tens of millions of armchair travellers around the world could become acquainted with the often-spectacular buildings of the world fairs and their most important exhibits through extensive articles and reports in newspapers and specialist magazines. Moreover, world fairs had scores of national and regional offshoots, which often also received several million visitors during the six- to eight- month season in which an exhibition tended to be open for the public.[1] World fairs also provided crucial opportunities through which to define a national identity before a global audience. A vital step was the introduction of national pavilions at the Paris Universal Exposition of 1867, where countries could show the highlights of their national heritage in a characteristic building. From that point, national pavilions continued to have a prominent position at almost all successive world fairs.[2]

Other territorial identities, such as those of cities, stateless nations, regions, tribes, colonies or even entire civilizations, could also be expressed at these mega events. Hosting a major international exhibition was a prestigious affair and many cities did their best to use the occasion in order to attract the attention of the world, not just by hosting the exhibition, but also by beautifying the urban landscape or by constructing a signature building, such as the Eiffel Tower, which was erected in Paris for the Universal Exposition of 1889. Cities could also profile themselves by defining the main theme of the exposition, which was often expressed in the title; for instance, in Amsterdam's Colonial

Trade Fair of 1883 or the 1933 Century of Progress International Exposition in Chicago. Another possibility was to represent the city's own past. Thus, Old London, an ensemble with twenty-five reconstructed historical buildings at the International Health Exhibition of 1884, was a huge success among visitors. As a result, similar large-scale representations of the architectural heritage of the host city became a regular feature of subsequent exhibitions [Fig. 1].[3] Stateless nations, such as Scotland, Flanders and Catalonia, had difficulties participating in their own right at world fairs, but they were particularly active in organizing major international exhibitions themselves. Glasgow, Edinburgh, Antwerp, and Barcelona, for instance, organized various world fairs, which helped to give them and their Scottish, Flemish or Catalan home regions global exposure.[4]

Fig. 1. The Old London Street at the International Health Exhibition, South Kensington, London. From *The Builder* (17 May 1884). Source: Welcome Collection, public domain.

Ethnographic villages offered the opportunity to give a more vernacular interpretation of a territorial identity. At Chicago's World's Colombian Exposition of 1893, no less than twelve ethnographic villages could be visited and these would become a regular feature of successive world fairs [Fig. 2]. Probably one of the last international expositions where ethnographic villages played a major role was the Brussels Expo of 1958, which hosted both a Congolese village and a Merry Belgium Village.

Fig. 2. The Swiss Village at the Swiss National Exhibition in Geneva in 1896. This ethnographic village contained no less than 56 typical buildings from all Swiss cantons, an artificial mountain, a lake and a cascade and was inhabited by over 300 traditionally dressed villagers. The village was such a success that it was rebuild at the Paris Universal Exposition of 1900. Source: Bibliothèque de Genève, public domain.

Ethnographic villages could therefore represent both faraway exotic lands — mostly colonies or 'tribes' that were depicted in an orientalist way — or a unity-in-diversity view of Western nation-states, mostly showing a folkloric image of the various regions of the host country.[5] The primary goal of most world fairs also was to take stock of the state of human civilization, which in fact meant Western civilization. This was clearly the case with the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations of 1851, but also very explicitly with the Paris Universal Exposition of 1867. At the enormous Palais Omnibus, human production was divided into 10 categories, ranging from agricultural products and primary materials in the outer rings, to manufactured products, clothing, furniture in the inner rings, and fine arts in the centre [Fig. 3].[6] At later exhibitions, there were also explicit attempts to provide an overview of other civilizations, such as those of the Native Americans. San Diego's Panama-California Exposition of 1915, for instance, contained both an overview of the history and cultural heritage of the ancient peoples of Central America in the main building and an Indian Arts pavilion where contemporary Native American arts and crafts were shown.[7]

World fairs are therefore an ideal lens through which to explore the construction of territorial identities. They offer several advantages to historians interested in the process of national identity construction. Participation at a world fair was a rather formal affair, which involved a high number of debates in ministries and among special commissions, officials, diplomats, architects, artists and entrepreneurs, while catalogues and official reports contain large amounts of information on what exactly was presented to the visitor. Moreover, national representations were generally discussed extensively in the press, and sometimes even provoked heated debates. In addition, there was a lot of visual material, such as postcards, posters, miniature models, photographs, drawings and documentaries. This therefore entails a large amount of documentation, most of which has been preserved in archives

and libraries. Visual, textual and oral sources originating from ordinary participants and visitors must also have been abundant, but unfortunately much of it has not been preserved or is scattered throughout different archives and as a result is much harder to come by.[8]

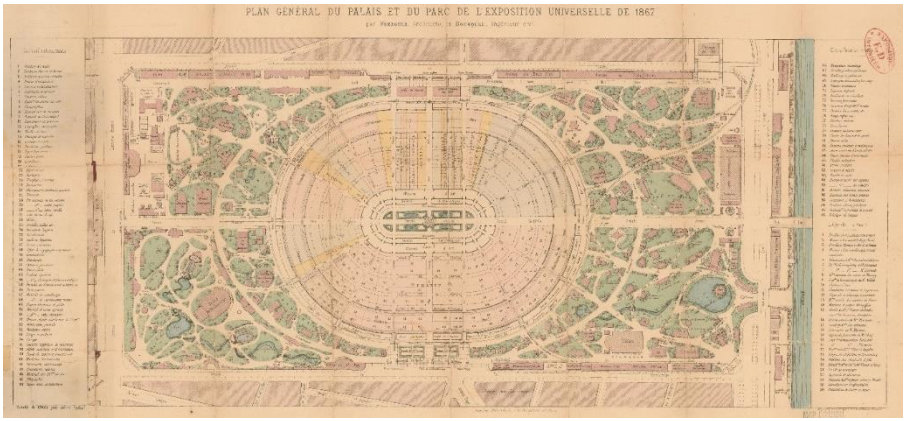

Fig. 3. Plan of the Universal Exposition, Paris, 1867. At the Palais Omnibus human production was divided into ten categories and 95 classes. The new national pavilions were located around the central hall in the park of the Champ de Mars. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Another major advantage is that world fairs have a serial character and many countries participated regularly at major world fairs.[9] Therefore, shifting views or diverging ideological positions regarding a nation's identity can be examined over time,[10] and the same applies to the impact of new aesthetic forms, such as Art Nouveau, Neo-vernacular designs, Art Deco or Functionalism.[11] Studying national representations at world fairs further enables scholars to examine various aspects of a nation's cultural heritage in conjunction, such as historical objects and archaeological finds, or traditional folklore, artisanal traditions and typical dishes and beverages.

Other fascinating aspects are the prominent role of entrepreneurs, showing that profit-seeking often had a major role in the way territorial identities were defined. Most ethnographic villages were organized by private undertakings. The Irish villages that could be found at every major world fair between 1908 and 1924 were set up by the Irish soap company Brown and Son. Sometimes foreign entrepreneurs had a major role, which often occurred with colonial villages, but this could also be the case with European ensembles. Thus, the major *Andalousie au temps des Maures* exhibit at the Paris Universal Exposition of 1900 was organised by two French businessmen.[12] Actually, in many cases foreigners had a prominent role in giving shape to a nation's representation at world fairs. At Parisian world fairs, French architects designed the pavilions of many peripheral countries, among which many Latin American states, although European countries like Romania often also employed a local architect [Fig. 4].[13] At world fairs in the United States, immigrant communities generally played a major role. If their country of origin did not participate with a national pavilion, immigrants often took the initiative to provide a dignified national representation, which could be a full-scale pavilion, and also a more modest building, such as a café or restaurant.[14]

Another remarkable fact was that visitors of world fairs exerted a huge long-term influence. The public at these mega-events consisted to a large extent of middle- and upper-class inhabitants of the host country, but special offers generally also made a visit affordable to the popular classes, especially those of the host city. International tourists, business people, dignitaries, intellectuals and artists were also well-represented and many came from far afield, even from other continents. Pavilions and exhibits that did not succeed in attracting the attention of visitors were generally seen as a failure. Low visitor numbers did not only lead to financial losses for lack of additional entrance fees and revenues from food and beverages, but also implied a lack of consideration for the

nation's products and artistic riches, both of which affected a country's reputation negatively. Lessons — what pavilions and exhibits were a success and which ones did not work out well — were taken very seriously and, if required, countries and entrepreneurs modified their thematic focus, the design of their pavilions and their exhibition techniques in order to be more attractive to an international audience. World fairs were therefore part of a global learning process about how to represent a national identity in a favourable light to an international audience.

Fig. 4. The French architect Alfred Chapon built the Tunisian pavilion for the Paris Universal Exposition of 1867. It was a faithful copy of the Bardo Palace of the Bey of Tunis. After the fair it was rebuilt at the Montsouris Parc, where it survived until 1991. Photo Hippolyte Blanchard, around 1890, Musée Carnavalet, public domain.

New developments in nationalism studies

The study of world fairs, moreover, can help to overcome some of the traditional shortcomings in the field of nationalism studies. Firstly, it is striking that research traditions for Europe, the Americas and the non-Western world are almost separate domains with little interaction,[15] whereas world fairs showed that the world was already intimately connected during the late nineteenth century. In addition, since the 1980s national identities have generally been interpreted as social constructs and until recently their construction was primarily examined as a top-down process. Historians focused primarily on the invention of national traditions by state authorities and intellectual elites, largely ignoring more commercial actors or the role of the public.[16] Nationalism, furthermore, has been studied primarily through national case studies. This also implies that most of these studies suffer from various forms of methodological nationalism. Scholars from the social sciences and humanities generally study the nation or nation-state as a closed container, internally largely homogenous, fundamentally different from neighbouring countries and with little interaction with the outside world. Social scientists assume that 'society' is a national society, and statistics are gathered nationally, whereas linguists have long taken monolinguism for granted, supposing that all members of the nation naturally speak the same standard language.[17] Historians have also been very prone to several forms of methodological nationalism. As Stefan Berger has made clear, national history has been the dominant form of history writing since the Romantic era and, by creating national master narratives, many historians were actually active nation builders. The dominant historicist interpretation — which argues that in order to understand a society one must study its roots — also implies that historians tend to disregard internal differences and outside influences, and in preferring (national) case studies have strongly emphasized differences over similarities, while mostly presenting each case as

unique.[18] This approach can also be detected in most historical studies on the construction of national identities. They still consist predominantly of national case studies that explain developments from the national background, while focusing primarily on the role of domestic actors.

Nonetheless, during the last few decades various promising alternatives have arisen. Firstly, the strong top-down perspective has been supplemented with attempts to provide a more bottom-up approach. This has been done especially in the fields of gender studies, the spatial turn and subaltern studies. Instead of studying the discursive strategies and political initiatives of elite groups, a growing number of scholars now explore the tactics of ordinary people.[19] This has even led to the rise of the new field of everyday nationalism.[20] Scholars from the new domains of global and transnational history, moreover, have opened up the closed container of the nation-state by focusing on the crucial role of transnational networks, global nodes and the transborder circulation of persons, goods and ideas.[21] More recently, scientists have also questioned the divide between the West and 'the rest' and between empires and nation-states, arguing that, until the 1960s, many Western nation-states were actually empires and that the nation-building process occurred internally in both nation-states and colonies and was influenced by the imperial context.[22]

The contribution of the issues on World Fairs

How do these recent scholarly developments intersect with the study of national identities at world fairs? Let us first briefly reflect on the contributions published in this and the former issue of *Studies on National Movements*, which all originate in the conference 'Nationalism and World Fairs', organized by National Movements and Intermediate

Structures in Europe (NISE) and Johannes Koll of the Vienna University of Economics and Business in June 2023.

In fact, all five contributions are national case studies, showing how difficult it is for us historians to detach ourselves from the preferred mode of doing historical research. However, this does not mean that these articles are outdated. The two most ambitious contributions are those of Anthony Swift on the national pavilions of the Russian Federation since the end of communism and Craig Lamont's exploration of seven large scale international exhibitions held in Scotland between 1886 and 1938. Swift's article in this issue can be seen as a follow up of his earlier chapter on the representation of the Tsarist Empire at world fairs during the second half of the nineteenth century.[23] Even though he focuses on the national pavilions of just one country, he clearly shows how the response of the international public at world fairs (for instance, the general disinterest in the rather anodyne pavilion of the Russian Federation at the Japan Aichi International Expo of 2005) provided an incentive for the Russian press to criticize their country's contribution as below standards. This lesson was taken at heart and later pavilions were much more up-to-date and as a result attracted more (positive) attention. Lamont, in turn, shows how the strong rivalry between Glasgow and Edinburgh provided a clear incentive for both cities to put themselves on the international map. The world fairs they organized clearly showed that territorial identities generally are nested: most of the four Glasgow and three Edinburgh exhibitions put emphasis on local urban identities, on regional identities (e.g. Lowlands and Highlands), national identities (both Scottish and British) and the strong links of these cities with the British Empire.[24]

The three remaining articles are more limited case-studies. In his article for this issue, Simon Payaslian focuses on the activities of Vahan Cardashian, an Armenian-American who was involved in the organization of the Ottoman pavilion at the 1915 Panama-Pacific

International Exposition in San Francisco. However, as the First World War progressed and after more news from the atrocities committed by the Ottoman Empire against its Armenian minority became available, Cardashian stepped down from his position. Nonetheless, he continued to use the world fair as an international platform on which to lobby for the Armenian cause. Implicitly, the author presents the world fair as a node, where people from all over the world meet, not just to admire the exhibits, but also to discuss global affairs.

The other two articles deal with the Expo 58 in Brussels. Bjorn Gabriels focuses on the role of Belgian documentary films on their country's Congolese colony at the fair. These documentaries propagated a new fraternal image of colony and European metropole going hand in hand. Nonetheless, the author shows that the films were still very much tainted by paternalistic attitudes. Interestingly, he does not limit himself to showing how these ideas were expressed on the big screen, but also discusses their role in the Congolese ethnographic village, an international conference, newspaper reports and the screening of a documentary on Flemish television, while trying to give both Belgian and Congolese perspectives.[25] Elias Degruyter, in turn, argues that the Expo, and particularly *The Flemish Day*, which is the topic of his article, constituted a turning point in the rise of the Flemish movement in Belgium. Since many activists had collaborated with the German occupation powers during the Second World War, the movement had difficulties in articulating itself in the public arena. But the Flemish Day was seen as a big success and it greatly strengthened Flemish self-confidence. By studying a large number of articles from the main Flemish newspapers, Degruyter aims to provide a more detailed bottom-up perspective of the actual significance of the Flemish Day. This results in a nuanced picture of the main events of the day, the role of the participants and how they were perceived by the various ideologically coloured news outlets.

The promise of cultural isomorphism

These contributions to *Studies on National Movements* testify that world fairs are ideal sites in which to apply many of the fresh approaches mentioned before, be it new bottom-up perspectives, studies focusing on the entanglement of empire and nation-state, or investigations that apply a transnational or global history approach. Such studies certainly provide many innovative insights. However, most of these studies still focus on one case, take its particular circumstances into account and, as historians tend to do, focus more on differences than similarities. This way, we will inevitably end up again with a very fragmented overall picture as each individual case seems to be unique. But as Anne-Marie Thiesse already argued 'There is nothing more international than the formation of national identities' and, in her beautiful book on the history of nationalism in Europe, she pointed to many similarities and shared patterns.[26] But how can we study such similarities in a systematic fashion and not just by pointing at them in a comparative study in which in general only a limited number of national cases are studied together?

A promising alternative would be to consider the recurrent world fairs as global process in which countries learned how to fashion their national identities before a global audience, leading to a process of isomorphism. The concept of isomorphism refers to a trend of a growing equalization (iso) of forms. It was introduced by John W. Meyer, a sociologist from Stanford University, as part of his approach — known as World Polity Theory or Sociological Institutionalism — to explain the surprising and growing uniformity of state institutions around the globe. Already by the 1970s, he had argued that after the Second World War, the institutions of nation-states showed increasing similarities. All modern nation-states have a constitution, a cabinet, with similar ministries and a parliament. But they also have very similar statistical bureaus, legal procedures, welfare systems, health care institutions,

mass education systems and economic policies, etc., which moreover tend to become more uniform over time.[27]

Other authors refined Meyer's theories by distinguished four mechanisms of isomorphic change: *coercion*, *mimesis*, *competition* and *normative pressure*. Examples of *coercive* isomorphism by external powers are the imposition of modern government structures and tax systems on colonial societies during the age of modern imperialism. More subtle forms of coercion are exerted by international organisations, such as the International Monetary Fund, requiring standardized accountability mechanisms as a precondition for member states to receive emergency loans. *Mimesis* occurs frequently, for instance, when countries adopt certain institutions from leading powers. The Meiji Restoration in late nineteenth-century Japan constitutes a perfect example of mimesis as reformist politicians decided to copy state institutions, educational systems, law courts and military organizations, etc., from the major powers in Western Europe and North America. The third mechanism of isomorphic change is *competition*. Companies and state institutions tend to adopt effective regulations, functional standards and cost-efficient procedures that have proven their worth elsewhere. The last form of isomorphism is *normative pressure*, which mostly operates through a process of professionalisation. A good example is requiring diplomas from standardized training programmes for specific jobs, such as soldiers or teachers. Numerous (international) professional associations also tend to propagate certain organisational norms and models for professional behaviour among their members around the globe. The emphasis on routines, standard procedures and a shared hierarchy of status can be detected especially in the medical professions, and can also be seen among legal experts, bankers and civil servants.[28]

These mechanisms of isomorphic change can also be detected at world fairs and even in something so presumably idiosyncratic as the construction of a national identity. Probably the most important isomorphic mechanism at world fairs was *competition*. Countries and companies vied for the attention of visitors. Thus, national pavilions and exhibits had to be bigger and more impressive than others. This had paradoxical consequences, countries did their utmost to distinguish themselves from others, but they all did so in a very similar way. Location, size and finances were crucial and participating countries tried to get the best location, increase their budget and build a larger pavilion than their neighbours. In the highly competitive environment of these mega-events, however, more important than size was spectacle, either in terms of appearance or performance. Exhibits had to stand out to attract visitors; this had important implications. A dignified representation — for instance, in the form of an imposing national pavilion — was vital for a domestic audience. Visitors at world fairs, however, had a strong preference for striking and extraordinary experiences and structures; this is was Joep Leerssen has called the 'typicality effect'.[29] Ideally these national representations should also conform to expectations, based on earlier knowledge gained from travel writing, the illustrated press or novels. This also meant that countries had to adapt themselves to the international audience. Spanish authorities and intellectuals, for instance, preferred to represent their country as a modern, civilised nation and therefore built, at the Paris universal expositions of 1867 and 1900, a Renaissance pavilion that was hardly recognisable as Spanish by the general public. Visitors, on the other hand, tended to be very enthusiastic about everything connected to exotic stereotypes, most of which were associated with Al-Andalus. Because of the fierce competition for attention, in the long run this strong demand for the exceptional and spectacular could not be ignored.[30] Instead of profiling a country with parts of its heritage that could provide a dignified image or that were widespread and quite common, the most colourful and

extraordinary building blocks were needed, thus creating a world of nation-states with easily recognisable unique identities. Consequently, external views in most cases trumped national self-perceptions.

Other processes of isomorphic change can also be detected at world fairs, but they were less ambivalent in nature. The guidelines imposed by the central organisation of a world fair can be interpreted as a form of *Coercion*. This occurred, for instance, at the Universal Exposition of 1878 when the French government required participating countries to construct their section of the Rue des Nations in a characteristic national style [Fig. 5]. At the 1933 Century of Progress International Exposition in Chicago, pavilions in historical or vernacular styles, by contrast, were prohibited in favour of modernist buildings.[31] Coercive forms of isomorphic change also happened when metropolitan authorities took decisions for the way their colonies were represented, for instance by determining that colonies were represented by striking exotic temples, such as with French Indochina at the 1931 International Colonial Exposition in Paris, where a full-scale copy of the impressive Buddhist monument of Angor Wat was constructed.[32]

Normative pressure through processes of professionalisation occurred almost from the very beginning. World fairs were serial events and many organisers, business people, impresarios, architects, museum officials, artisans, musicians and showmen participated in several national and international exhibitions, thus setting international standards to which newcomers from all parts of the world adhered.[33] *Mimesis* also can be detected easily. Many extensive reports were produced, not just by the central organisation of a world fair, but also by many participating countries and organisations. An extreme example was the exhaustive report of the 1874 world fair in Vienna, consisting of no less than 96 volumes, produced by the substantial delegation of Meiji Japan.[34] Through such reports national officials drew lessons from their less

fortunate decisions, while signalling promising innovations that had caught their eye during the exhibition as a source of inspiration for the future. Entrepreneurs, museum officials and other professionals often had an added financial incentive to explore fresh opportunities, especially those that had attracted large crowds.

Fig. 5. The Rue des Nations at the Paris Universal Exposition of 1878. The gothic façade represents Portugal and to its right Luxemburg, Tunisia, Siam, Central America, Denmark, Greece and Belgium. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

The standardization of national identities at world fairs

At world fairs, isomorphic change contributed greatly to the standardization of national identities around the globe. This process operated at four different levels. During the second half of the nineteenth

and the first decades of the twentieth century, national identities increasingly took on standardized forms at world fairs. First, by taking the existing international order as a starting point; second, by adopting a shared conceptual framework; third, by defining the indispensable components of a national identity; and finally, by diffusing several successful templates to showcase national identities.

From the very start, world fairs were presented as peaceful competitions between nations. However, the participants were in fact not so much nations, but states. As the existing international order was taken as the point of departure, only recognized states were invited. Therefore, the main participants were independent states and only they were allowed to construct a national pavilion. Moreover, the large exhibition halls were divided into different national sections, which were awarded to the participating countries. Therefore, private exhibitors were generally classified according to their nationality. This meant that both individual and institutional participants had no option but to conform to this ordering principle, which therefore can be defined as a form of coercive isomorphism. In general, the governments of the participating countries — or imperial authorities in the case of colonies — organised or coordinated the contribution of their state and/or empire. This also implied that stateless nations had no means to get accepted as an official participant. At most, they could hope to get a separate section within the official representation of their country, and for this they depended completely on the good will of their own state authorities. Consequently, ethnic minorities or 'stateless-nations' were largely invisible at the international stage of the world fairs. Flemish exhibitors therefore became Belgians, Catalans were turned into Spaniards and Bengalis were categorized as Indians. But this also applied to objects and practices: they were nationalized in the process as well. Therefore, local and regional products represented the nation — that is the country — and this even happened in colonial contexts. Thus, towards the end of the nineteenth

century, officials in British India were asked to collect great specimens of local artisanal crafts, which subsequently were exhibited at several national and international exhibitions. This way, various local and regional traditions were turned into parts of a now nationally defined category of 'Indian crafts'.[35]

Another isomorphic process at world fairs can be detected in the thematic sections and product categories which the organisers defined in order to create some order at the exhibition grounds. The organisers of the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867 already classified human production into ten groups and 95 classes. Six years later the organisers in Vienna had further refined this taxonomy into 26 groups and 174 sections. These divisions, however, were based on a secular Western world view that was now imposed on the rest of the world, which can be seen as another form of coercion.[36] However, the powers of the organisers to enforce compliance were limited and countries were not obliged to participate in world fairs. One could therefore also argue that this process was to a large extent mimetic: governments, artists and businesspeople wanted to be taken seriously at the global stage and tried to adhere as best as they could to the new international standards. Modernizing states such as Japan, the Ottoman Empire or Siam voluntarily adopted this taxonomy and the conceptual framework of which it was part. And the same was true for the colonial world, although local actors probably had less agency. As a consequence, fundamental distinctions between artistic and artisanal products, or between folklore, cultural heritage and religious traditions — which even in Europe were of quite recent origin — slowly became accepted throughout the world.[37] Meiji Japan, for instance, was initially not very well acquainted with the Western taxonomy used at world fairs and had no terms to distinguish between artists and artisans. At the world fair in Vienna, it exhibited a beautiful old gold kettle in a section for metal industry products. Japanese officials, however, quickly drew lessons from such 'mistakes'

and at successive world fairs they learned to distinguish between artists and artisans, and between cultural heritage and ordinary industrial products. In the colonial world, similar processes can be detected. In the Dutch Indies, colonial officials and European artists and entrepreneurs were attracted especially by the colourful traditions from Bali and quickly began to select beautiful objects, dancers, musicians and craftsmen to represent the colony at world fairs. This way, they transformed ritual practices and objects, whose meaning was largely determined by a religious cosmology, into folkloric traditions and artisanal objects, thereby also slowly diffusing the respective secular terminology.[38]

By defining categories and groups for all human productivity, world fairs also determined what was needed in order to characterize a national identity. This was not done in isolation. The organizers of international exhibitions were clearly influenced by scientific developments — especially in the humanities and social sciences, where new disciplines such as art history, ethnography and folklore studies became institutionalized — or by new intellectual trends, such as the growing shift from 'past to peasant' or from historicism to rusticism, that according to Joep Leerssen occurred during the nineteenth century.[39] World fairs thus had a crucial role in diffusing the components that each country had to have in order to be recognized as a civilized nation with an unique identity. Each country had to have striking historical objects and impressive monuments — which at world fairs could be shown through drawings or paintings — that could testify to a country's glorious national past. Archaeological finds, artistic treasures and intellectual highlights also were integral parts of a dignified national cultural heritage. Over time, more attention was given to the contributions of ordinary people, such as rural peasants and small-town artisans, and this trend was clearly visible at world fairs as well.[40] Every country therefore needed typical vernacular buildings, traditional

costumes, artisanal crafts, folkloric dances and characteristic music, and towards the end of the nineteenth century more emphasis was also given to a country's culinary heritage and its typical landscapes, flora and fauna. Moreover, the typicality effect required that the emphasis for each of these components was on the unique and the extraordinary. Buildings that could be found in many different countries were not very suited to represent the nation. In general, only the most exceptional, colourful traditional buildings, costumes and dances, etc., were selected to represent the nation at a global stage, even if only some old-fashioned peasants or members of a peculiar minority group actually continued to wear such costumes or perform such dances at specific, festive occasions in peripheral parts of the country.[41]

Finally, world fairs also had a crucial role in developing and disseminating templates in which national identities could be successfully shown to the public. In this field there was a close interaction with other exhibition venues, such as museums. Thus, many valuable objects that could be seen at world fairs were taken from or ended up in the collections of museums. Many museum officials also were involved in the organization of ethnographic villages; these in turn were a direct source of inspiration for Artur Hazelius, who in 1891 founded the first open-air museum of Skansen in Stockholm.[42] Largely owing to the world fairs, certain templates to exhibit national identities became standardized. Since they succeeded in attracting the crowds, they were quickly adopted by other countries through a process of mimesis and became part of the standard repertoire of major international exhibitions around the world. This, for instance, was the case with the use of glass cases for displaying valuable historical objects, wax figures to show historical costumes or typical dresses, the diorama presenting historical or ethnographic scenes, the period rooms in which visitors could actually enter the room and temporarily immerse themselves in another world or era, the national pavilion in a typical

style, the historic ensemble inhabited by actors in costume, reenactments of historical battles or folkloric traditions, or the ethnographic village inhabited by real peasants and artisans. Spectacular and hyper-realistic templates that in a way transported the visitor to faraway lands and periods — such as ethnographic villages and historical ensembles — became more prominent towards the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

World fairs, nonetheless, lost their prominent role after the 1930s. Since the turn of the century, specialist trade fairs had slowly taken over their crucial role as platforms of exchange for private companies and the international business community. In addition, they also suffered from the competition of new visual media, such as cinema and television, and of ever more spectacular amusement parks that offered entertainment closer at home and on a more permanent basis. Moreover, in the 1920s and 30s, modern architecture and functionalist design began its quick advance at world fairs, and as a result, they became more future oriented and paid less attention to national peculiarities. After 1945, the mostly rather futuristic world expos would become more of a niche event. Nevertheless, many of the isomorphic tendencies explored in this article continued to have a strong impact. Thus, tourism has largely adopted the role of world fairs in standardizing extraordinary national identities that need to appeal to a global audience. New visual media, such as television and Instagram, expose ever wider audiences to all kinds of national stereotypes, while sporting contests such as the Olympic Games — which in its initial stages, between 1900 and 1908, functioned as a side programme of major international exhibitions — have become the main vehicle to express feelings of national pride. The legacy of world fairs, especially their isomorphic effect on national identities during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, thus is still very much alive.

Endnotes

[1] Paul Greenhalgh, *Fair World: A History of World's Fairs and Expositions, from London to Shanghai 1851–2010* (Winterbourne: Papadakis, 2011); Alexander C. T. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[2] *Cultures of International Exhibitions 1840-1940: Great Exhibitions in the Margins*, ed. by Marta Filipová (Farnham; Burlington: Routledge, 2015); *Expanding Nationalisms at World's Fairs: Identity, Diversity, and Exchange, 1851-1915*, ed. by David Seth Raizman and Ethan Robey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018); *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities: International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851–1958*, ed. by Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

[3] Eric Storm and Joep Leerssen, 'Introduction', in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities: International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851-1958*, ed. by Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 1–30; Wilson Smith, 'Old London, Old Edinburgh: Constructing Historic Cities', in *Cultures of International Exhibitions 1840-1940: Great Exhibitions in the Margins*, ed. by Marta Filipová (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), 203–229.

[4] Craig Lamont, 'Cultural Memory and Nationalism at Scotland's International Exhibitions: 1886–1938', *Studies on National Movements*, 12/1 (2023), 71–100; Eric Storm and Hans Vandevoorde, 'Bierstuben, Cottages and Art Deco: Regionalism, Nationalism and Internationalism at the Belgian World Fairs', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 90/4 (2012), 1373–1388; Ignasi de Solà-Morales, *La Exposición Internacional de Barcelona 1914–1929: arquitectura y ciudad* (Barcelona: Feria, 1985).

[5] Rika Devos and Mil De Kooning, *Moderne architectuur op Expo 58: Voor een humaner wereld* (Antwerpen: Mercatorfonds, 2006); Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boëtsch, Éric Deroo and Sandrine Lemaire (eds), *Zoos humains: au temps des exhibitions humaines* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004); Luis A. Sánchez-Gómez, 'Human Zoos or Ethnic Shows? Essence and Contingency in *Living* Ethnological Exhibitons', *Culture & History Digital Journal*, 2/2 (2013), e022; Martin Wörner, *Vergnügung und Belehrung: Volkskultur auf den Weltausstellungen 1851–1900* (Münster: Waxmann, 1999); Eric Storm, 'The

Global Vernacularisation of Regional Identities: Cultural Isomorphism at World Fairs, 1851–1939', in *Cultural Representations of the Region in Transnational Contexts, 1840–1940*, ed. by Marguérite Corporaal and others (Nijmegen: Radboud University Press, forthcoming).

[6] Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Harry Freemantle, 'Frédéric Le Play and 19th-Century Vision Machines', *History of the Human Sciences*, 30/1 (2017), 66–93.

[7] Matthew F. Bokovoy, *The San Diego World's Fairs and Southwestern Memory, 1880–1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

[8] A scholar who succeeded locating much of this material for one exposition is: James Burkhart Gilbert, *Whose Fair?: Experience, Memory, and the History of the Great St. Louis Exposition* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009). The library of the California State University in Fresno has a large collection of visitors' material, relating primarily to American world fairs.

[9] Florian Groß, 'From the New York Crystal Palace to the World of Tomorrow: World Fairs as a Transnational Series', in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities*, ed. by Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 84–106.

[10] Great national case studies are: Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[11] Eric Storm, 'The Transnational Construction of National Identities: A Classification of National Pavilions at World Fairs', in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities: International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851-1958*, ed. by Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 53–84.

[12] Geppert, *Fleeting cities*, 101–134; Robert W. Rydell, 'Self Becomes Nation: Sol Bloom and America's World Fairs, 1893–1939', in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities*, ed. by Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 217–36; Caroline R. Malloy, 'Exhibiting Ireland: Irish Villages,

Pavilions, Cottages, and Castles at International Exhibitions, 1853–1939' (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013); Luis Sazatornil Ruiz, 'Fantasías andaluzas. Arquitectura, orientalismo e identidades en tiempos de las exposiciones', in *Andalucía. La construcción de una imagen artística*, ed. by Luis Méndez Rodríguez and Rocío Plaza Orellana (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 2015), 79–143.

[13] Myriam Bacha, 'Le Palais du Bardo', in *Les Expositions Universelles à Paris de 1855 à 1937*, ed. by Myriam Bacha and Béatrice de Andia (Paris: Action Artistique de la Ville de Paris, 2005), 87–91; Cosmin Minea, 'Roma Musicians, Folk Art and Traditional Food from Romania at the Paris World Fairs of 1889 and 1900', in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities*, ed. by Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 144–169; Sven Schuster, 'Colombia in the Age of Exhibitions: Envisioning the Nation in a Global Context, 1892–1929', in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities: International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851-1958*, ed. by Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 237–264.

[14] Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair. The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 234–266; Cheryl Ganz, *The 1933 Chicago World's Fair: Century of Progress* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 123–137.

[15] Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales: Europe XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1999); Derek Hastings, *Nationalism in Modern Europe: Politics, Identity and Belonging since the French Revolution* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); Nicola Miller, 'The Historiography of Nationalism and National Identity in Latin America', *Nations and Nationalism*, 12/2 (2006), 201–221; Miguel A. Centeno and Agustin E. Ferraro, 'Republics of the Possible', in *State and Nation Making in Latin America and Spain: Republics of the Possible* , ed. by Miguel A. Centeno and Agustin E. Ferraro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3–24; Jeff Kingston, *Nationalism in Asia: A History since 1945* (Chichester: Wiley, 2017); Bruce Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism', *African Affairs*, 97 (1998), 305–341.

[16] Miguel Cabo and Fernando Molina, 'The Long and Winding Road of Nationalization: Eugen Weber's Peasants into Frenchmen in Modern European History (1976—2006)', *European History Quarterly*, 39/2 (2009), 264–286;

Christian Wicke, 'Constructivism in the History of Nationalism since 1945', in *Writing the History of Nationalism*, ed. by Stefan Berger and Eric Storm (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 131–155.

[17] Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, 'Methodological Nationalism and beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences', *Global Networks*, 2/4 (2002), 301–334; Daniel Chernilo, 'The Critique of Methodological Nationalism: Theory and History', *Thesis Eleven*, 106/1 (2011), 98–117; Britta Schneider, 'Methodological Nationalism in Linguistics', *Language Sciences*, 76, November (2019).

[18] Stefan Berger, *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); George Vasilev, 'Methodological Nationalism and the Politics of History-Writing: How Imaginary Scholarship Perpetuates the Nation', *Nations and Nationalism*, 25/2 (2019), 499–522.

[19] Sanjay Seth, 'Postcolonialism and the History of Anti-Colonial Nationalism', in *Writing the History of Nationalism*, ed. by Stefan Berger and Eric Storm (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 171–191; Elizabeth Vlossak, 'Gender Approaches to the History of Nationalism', in *Writing the History of Nationalism*, ed. by Stefan Berger and Eric Storm (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 191–215; Eric Storm, 'The Spatial Turn and the History of Nationalism: Nationalism between Regionalism and Transnational Approaches', in *Writing the History of Nationalism*, ed. by Stefan Berger and Eric Storm (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 215–239.

[20] Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2002); Eleanor Knott, 'Everyday Nationalism: A Review of the Literature', *Studies on National Movements*, 3 (2015).

[21] Joep Leerssen (ed), *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); Eric Storm, 'Overcoming Methodological Nationalism in Nationalism Studies: The Impact of Tourism on the Construction and Diffusion of National and Regional Identities', *History Compass*, 12/4 (2014), 361–373; John Breuilly, 'Nationalism as Global History', in *Nationalism and Globalisation: Conflicting of Complementary?*, ed. by Daphne Halikiopoulou and Sofia Vasilopoulou (London: Routledge, 2011), 65–84; Matthias Middell, 'The Global Turn in Historical Writing and the History of

Nationalism', in *Writing the History of Nationalism*, ed. by Stefan Berger and Eric Storm (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 239–263.

[22] Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller (eds), *Nationalizing Empires* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015); Josep Maria Fradera, *The Imperial Nation: Citizens and Subjects in the British, French, Spanish, and American Empires* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Siniša Malešević, 'Empires and Nation-States: Beyond the Dichotomy', *Thesis Eleven*, 139/1 (2017), 3–10; Eric Storm, *Nationalism: A World History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024).

[23] Anthony Swift, 'Russian National Identity at World Fairs, 1851-1900', in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities: International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851-1958*, ed. by Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 107–144.

[24] Lamont, 'Cultural Memory'.

[25] Bjorn Gabriels, 'Hand in Hand? Documentary Film and the Paradox of a Belgo-Congolese Union at Expo 58', *Studies on National Movements*, 12/1 (2023), 42–70.

[26] Thiesse, *La création des identités*, 11. The translation is taken from the English edition published in 2021.

[27] See for example John W. Meyer and others, 'World Society and the Nation-State', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 103/1 (1997), 144–181. This section on isomorphism is partially based on: Storm, 'The Global Vernacularisation of Regional Identities'.

[28] Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, 'The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields', *American Sociological Review*, 48/2 (1983), 147–160; Jens Beckert, 'Institutional Isomorphism Revisited: Convergence and Divergence in Institutional Change', *Sociological Theory*, 28/2 (2010), 150–166.

[29] Joep Leerssen, 'Trademarking the Nation: World Fairs, Spectacles, and the Banalization of Nationalism', in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities*, ed. by Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 31–52.

[30] Manuel Viera, *El imaginario español en las Exposiciones Universales del siglo XIX: exotismo y modernidad* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2020), 133–269.

[31] Wörner, *Vergnügung und Belehrung*, 28; Lisa D. Schrenk, *Building a Century of Progress: The Architecture of Chicago's 1933–1934 World's Fair* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

[32] Dana S. Hale, *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples, 1886–1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 146–151.

[33] Groß, 'From the New York Crystal Palace'; Geppert, *Fleeting cities*, 261–279; Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[34] Caroline A. Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016), 54.

[35] Abigail McGowan, *Crafting the Nation in Colonial India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[36] See also: Timothy Mitchell, 'The World as Exhibition', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31/2 (1989), 217–236.

[37] Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[38] Taka Oshikiri, 'Selling Tea as Japanese History: Culture, Consumption and International Expositions, 1873-1910', in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities: International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851-1958*, ed. by Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 193–217; Michel Picard, *Bali: cultural tourism and touristic culture* (Singapore: Archipelago, 1996); Marieke Bloembergen, *Colonial Spectacles: The Netherlands And the Dutch East Indies at the World Exhibitions, 1880-1931* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006).

[39] Joep Leerssen, 'Introduction', in *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, ed. by Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), I, 18–45 (37–38).

[40] Eric Storm, 'The Canonization of the Artisan Around 1900', in *Networks, Narratives and Nations: Transcultural Approaches to Cultural Nationalism in Europe and Beyond*, ed. by Marjet Brolsma and others (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 138–146.

[41] See for instance: Eric Storm, 'The nationalisation of the domestic sphere', *Nations and Nationalism*, 23/1 (2017), 173–193; Storm, *Nationalism*, passim.

[42] Daniel Alan DeGroff, 'Artur Hazelius and the Ethnographic Display of the Scandinavian Peasantry: A Study in Context and Appropriation', *European Review of History*, 19/2 (2012), 229–248; See for other examples: Adriaan A. M. de Jong and Mette Skougaard, 'The Hindeloopen and the Amager Rooms: Two Examples of an Historical Museum Phenomenon', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 5/2 (1993), 165–178; Chris Wilson, *The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).