



FORUM

# A Shakespearean Prophecy Fulfilled? Slav Solidarity and the Colonial Gaze in Czech Tourism on the Eastern Adriatic (1890s–1930s)

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## Abstract

This article discusses discourses of Czech tourism on the Eastern Adriatic coast between the turn of the twentieth century and the 1930s using the Czech resorts in Baška on Krk Island and Kupari near Dubrovnik as case studies. The author argues that the ideological foundation of this type of tourism was a narrative of proximity between the Czechs and their fellow Slav Croatians. At the same time, the practice of Czech tourism was characterized by a pattern of cultural paternalism and economic exploitation toward the local population. It thus became a pseudo-colonial enterprise that distorted the Czech national myth of democracy, rationalism, and cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, tourism still contributed to cultural mediation between Czechs and South Slavs. This article illustrates that point by highlighting the commemoration of the Yugoslav playwright Ivo Vojnović by Czech tourists in the 1930s.

**Keywords:** tourism; colonialism; Slav solidarity; Czech history; Croatian history; Czech-Croatian relations

Historians often portray the development of tourism on the coast of the Eastern Adriatic Sea primarily as a project of Habsburg imperial consolidation and modernization.<sup>1</sup> This is undoubtedly an important part of the story. The completion of the Austrian *Südbahn* (Southern Railway) from Vienna to Trieste in 1857 not only turned Trieste into a major port city, but also spurred the transformation of seaside villages into bourgeois tourist destinations. Further railway construction in the 1870s expanded the network to connect Budapest with the Hungarian port of Fiume (Rijeka). From 1882, the director of the Southern Railway, Friedrich Julius Schüller, who wanted to attract more paying passengers to his trains, spearheaded the transformation of the small fishing village of Abbazia (Opatija) into a fashionable seaside resort.<sup>2</sup> Most of the large hotels in Abbazia or neighboring Laurana (Lovran) were built in the years that followed by companies headquartered in Vienna. In fact, the imperial family themselves took part in this development. Archduke Charles Stephen built a summer villa for himself in Lussingrande (Veli Lošinj) in 1886, which attracted several other nobles to the island.<sup>3</sup> Local elites saw the economic potential of the development of tourism and often supported bourgeois and noble traveling of this kind. These investments came predominantly from Vienna, and, in the case of the Hungarian coast around Fiume, from Budapest.

Seen in this perspective, tourism served to consolidate the Empire. It strengthened the economic and infrastructural hold of the center over previously distant peripheries and radically changed the

<sup>1</sup>See the contributions in Peter Stachel and Martina Thomsen, eds., *Zwischen Exotik und Vertrautem: Zum Tourismus in der Habsburgermonarchie und ihren Nachfolgestaaten* (Bielefeld, 2014); John B. Allcock, "Tourism and Social Change in Dalmatia," *Journal of Development Studies* 20, no. 1 (1983): 34–55, 37; and Boris Vukonić, *Povijest hrvatskog turizma* (Zagreb, 2005), 71.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Jordan, "'Unsere Adria': Kroatische Seekurorte vor und nach 1918," in *Zwischen Exotik und Vertrautem*, eds. Stachel and Thomsen, 151–64, 157.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 159.

demographic structure of these destinations. Abbazia, known as the “Winter Vienna” and “Austrian Nice,” became a hotspot for Habsburg nobility.<sup>4</sup> But, as I will show in this article, tourism on the Croatian coast did not always serve the interests of Habsburg imperialism. From the turn of the century, Czech tourism on the Adriatic used a narrative of brotherhood between Czechs and South Slavs that explicitly opposed German and Hungarian-speaking visitors. After the war, Czechoslovak tourism in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes became a major industry, supported by improved infrastructure such as direct railway and flight connections.<sup>5</sup> These connections created an entangled tourism history between Czechs and South Slavs that has continued to this day.<sup>6</sup> They also facilitated a new territorialization of East-Central and South-Eastern Europe. This spatial representation conceptualized the multi-ethnic and multilingual Bohemian Lands, the Austrian “Küstenland,” and Dalmatia as explicitly Slav, thus discursively lifting them out of an imperial framework and placing them in a new, ethnically defined one.<sup>7</sup> But the pro-Slav and anti-Habsburg tendency of Czech Adriatic tourism was often much stronger in word than in action. The imperial motives and disinterest in local culture that Czech tourism frequently manifested in practice belied the brotherly discourse. What, then, does Czech tourism on the Adriatic tell us about the self-image of Czechs in the context of the Habsburg Empire, the post-war nation-states, and Slav solidarity? Were Czech tours to the “Slav south” (*slovanský jih*) the key to fostering understanding among brotherly nations, as Czech tourist activists made them out to be? Did these experiences of travel facilitate cultural contact and connection between Czechs/Czechoslovaks and Croatians/Yugoslavs? In an attempt to answer these questions, this article discusses Czech and Czechoslovak tourism on the Croatian Adriatic from the turn of the twentieth century until the 1930s, focusing on the two most important Czech resorts: Baška on the island of Krk and Kupari near Dubrovnik. It then turns to examine the memorialization of the Dubrovnik playwright Ivo Vojnović by Czechoslovak tourists in the 1930s to complicate the idea of a neat singular narrative.

### Czechs in the Development of Tourism on the Habsburg and Yugoslav Coast

The long history of close relations between Czechs and South Slavs is mirrored in a rich historiography, both on the relations between the Bohemian Lands and the (Slav) Balkans<sup>8</sup> and on Czech perceptions of South Slavs.<sup>9</sup> This literature shows that these relations form an imperial and colonial

<sup>4</sup>John B. Allcock, “The Historical Development of Tourism in Yugoslavia to 1945,” in *The Studies in the History of Tourism in Yugoslavia*, eds. John Allcock and Joan Counihan (Bradford, 1989), 1–24, 6.

<sup>5</sup>National labels in this region and time period are ambiguous. Since I predominantly deal with tourists from the Bohemian Lands and not Upper Hungary/Slovakia, I use “Czech” when talking about the national group, while “Czechoslovak” refers to citizens of interwar Czechoslovakia or government policy. For the Slavonic speakers of South-Eastern Europe, I use “South Slav” for the pre-1918 period, “Yugoslav” for the Kingdom’s citizens after World War I, or “Croatian,” “Serbian,” or “Bosnian” if this is reflected in the sources. Even though the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was only officially renamed Yugoslavia in 1929, I refer to it by that name for the whole interwar period for the sake of better readability.

<sup>6</sup>In 2021, Czechs and Slovaks together made up 10 percent of all foreign tourists in Croatia, second only to Germans (25 percent). As a single group, Czechs were fifth behind Germans, Austrians, Slovenians, and Poles. See “Dolasci i noćenja turista u 2021,” in *Državni zavod za statistiku*, 2022, <https://podaci.dzs.hr/2021/hr/10190>.

<sup>7</sup>I follow Steffi Marung’s and Katja Naumann’s argument that various complementary and competing territorializations existed in East-Central Europe. See Steffi Marung and Katja Naumann, “Einleitung,” in *Vergessene Vielfalt: Territorialität und Internationalisierung in Ostmitteleuropa seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Steffi Marung and Katja Naumann (Göttingen, 2014), 11.

<sup>8</sup>Václav Žáček, ed., *Češi a Jihoslované v minulosti: Od nejstarších dob do roku 1918* (Prague, 1975); Ladislav Hladký, ed., *Czech Relations with Nations and Countries of Southeastern Europe* (Zagreb, 2019); Borut Klabjan, *Češi a Slováci na Jadranu: Vztahy s Terstem a severním Jadranem v letech 1848–1948*, trans. Jana Špirudová (Prague, 2014); František Šístek, “Český podíl na procesu modernizace jihovýchodní Evropy,” in *České země v 19. století: Proměny společnosti v moderní době II*, eds. Milan Hlavačka et al. (Prague, 2014), 355–72.

<sup>9</sup>Jitka Malečková, *“The Turk” in the Czech Imagination (1870–1923)* (Leiden, 2021); František Šístek, “Slovanský jih, brána Orientu, divoký Balkán. Kořeny a proměny konceptualizace jihovýchodní Evropy v české společnosti 19.–21. století,” in *19. století v nás: Modely, instituce a reprezentace, které přetrvávaly*, ed. Milan Řepa (Prague, 2008), 534–45; František Šístek, “Under the Slavic Crescent: Representations of Bosnian Muslims in Czech Literature, Travelogues and Memoirs, 1878–1918,” in *Imagining Bosnian Muslims in Central Europe: Representations, Transfers and Exchanges*, ed. František Šístek (New York, 2021), 121–44.

*Verflechtungsgeschichte*. Czech entrepreneurs and administrators were involved at the forefront of imperial modernization in Dalmatia and, after its Habsburg occupation in 1878, Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the latter territory, which the Habsburg Empire annexed from the Ottoman Empire in 1908, Czechs soon made up a significant part of the Habsburg administration and industry. This semi-colonial space offered Czechs career paths that were not available at home: for example, the Czech doctor Anna Bayerová became the first state physician in Bosnia in 1892, at a time when women were barred from practicing medicine in the Bohemian Lands. Jitka Malečková has demonstrated that while many Czechs came to Bosnia with benevolent intentions informed by a sense of Slav solidarity, they also did so to further their own careers and thus revealed their “colonial complicity” in a Habsburg imperial context.<sup>10</sup> This blending of nationalism and imperialism is evident in the case of the prominent patriotic politician Jan Nepomuk František Harrach (1828–1909) who, from 1904, headed the Vienna-based *Verein für die Förderung der volkswirtschaftlichen Interessen des Königreichs Dalmatien* (Society for the Promotion of the Economic Interests of the Kingdom of Dalmatia). The society supported numerous projects in what was then considered the Empire’s most economically backward crownland, including the development of infrastructure, the construction of hotels, and the publication of guidebooks.<sup>11</sup> Harrach’s initiative was fully within his conservative ideology of supporting Slavs within the bounds of Empire and exemplified the activities of Czechs in the Habsburg south. The response from Bosnians, Dalmatians, and other South Slavs to the Czech presence was largely ambivalent. The occupation regime in Bosnia-Herzegovina was unpopular among the local population and many did not differentiate between speakers of German, Czech, or the other languages of the newcomers: they were all known pejoratively as *Švabe* (“Germans”) and were often seen as opportunistic gold-diggers.<sup>12</sup> In other contexts, however, South Slav elites shared the pro-Slav ideology of many Czechs. The local Dubrovnik press commented favorably on Harrach’s initiative of modernization in Dalmatia precisely because he was a fellow Slav, “our Czech brother.”<sup>13</sup> Irrespective of the local reaction, the activities of Czechs in the Habsburg south before 1918 must clearly be seen in the context of Habsburg imperial expansion as much as in terms of Slav ideology.

This being said, the narrative of Slav solidarity/reciprocity (*slovanská vzájemnost*) was at the heart of Czech tourism in the Habsburg Adriatic at the turn of the twentieth century. It grew out of the older Pan-Slav ideal, which posited that their common linguistic group united all Slavs, who should consequently seek political unity in a common nation-state.<sup>14</sup> From the mid-nineteenth century, the more pragmatic concept of *Austroslavism* gradually replaced Pan-Slavism among the Slav elites of the Empire. Liberal Czechs and Croatians pushed for a federalization of the Empire, arguing that it would guarantee individual liberties and national equality.<sup>15</sup> This concept focused on the cultural proximity of the Slav national groups within the Empire and encouraged cultural and economic exchange between them. Indeed, the second half of the nineteenth century saw a sharp increase in the intensity of relations between Czechs and South Slavs. Some young Croatians, for instance, went to study at the university in Prague.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, very few Czechs had any experience of traveling to the “Slav south.” This only changed with the advent of tourism. From the 1890s, the *Klub českých turistů* (KČT, Czech Hiking Club), the first Czech tourist association, founded in 1888, organized several trips to the Balkans. It promoted travel to Slavonic-speaking territories even outside the Empire with the explicit aim of strengthening the bonds between Czechs and, as they

<sup>10</sup>Malečková, “The Turk” in *The Czech Imagination*, 124. See also Ctibor Nečas, *Mezi muslimkami: Působení úředních lékařek v Bosně a Hercegovině v letech 1892–1918* (Brno, 1992).

<sup>11</sup>Peter Stachel, “Halb-kolonial und halb-orientalisch? Dalmatien als Reiseziel im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Zwischen Exotik und Vertrautem*, eds. Stachel and Thomsen, 165–99, 187.

<sup>12</sup>Šístek, “Under the Slavic Crescent,” 127.

<sup>13</sup>*Glas dubrovački*, 16 (1886), 127, quoted in Ivo Perić, *Razvitak turizma u Dubrovniku i okolici: Od pojave parobrodarstva do 1941. godine* (Dubrovnik, 1983), 73.

<sup>14</sup>Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism: Its History and Ideology* (South Bend, IN, 1953).

<sup>15</sup>Radomír Vlček, “Panslavismus či rusofilství? Pět tezí k otázce reflexe slovanství a panslavismu českou společností 19. století,” in *Slavme slavně slávu Slávův slavných? Slovanství a česká kultura 19. Století*, eds. Roman Prahel, Zdeněk Hojda and Marta Ottlová (Prague, 2006), 9–20, 16.

<sup>16</sup>Petr Stehlík, “Czech-Croatian Relations,” in *Czech Relations with Southeastern Europe*, ed. Ladislav Hladký (Zagreb, 2019), 49–81, 65–66.

were commonly called, “our dear brothers the southern Slavs.”<sup>17</sup> Jiří Guth-Jarkovský, the Club’s long-time chairman, wrote at the time that “tourism more than anything else is destined to be an important factor of practical Slav reciprocity . . . for reciprocity can develop only by getting to know the landscapes and conditions of the other Slav nations.”<sup>18</sup> An article in the club’s journal clarified the motivation for a trip to Dalmatia, Montenegro, Herzegovina, Bosnia, and Croatia in April 1899: “in addition to getting to know the numerous natural charms of the Slav south, [our trips] have but a single aim: that with all the power at our disposal we might contribute to reaching the goal that real Slav solidarity does not remain the idle wish of a few enthusiasts, but that it may penetrate to the widest layers of Slavs in the north and the south, that our solidarity becomes reality as soon as possible!”<sup>19</sup> The published reports of the tours stressed that the tourists were given a highly hospitable welcome from locals everywhere they went. It quoted from a letter sent to Prague by Vid Vuletić Vukasović from Korčula describing the arrival of the Czech tourists in 1897: “everyone jostled for space to see the Czech brothers and a hundred voices rang out: Dobro nam došli! The town band played Slav pieces and celebrated our dear guests, the valued Czech patriots.”<sup>20</sup> The club shaped its tours in a romantic narrative of rediscovery, of re-cultivating an ancient but neglected Slav kinship. By the eve of World War I, its journal triumphed that “the Czech tourist is at home . . . at the Slav sea.”<sup>21</sup> This territorialization domesticated Czech tourists—who hailed from landlocked crownlands hundreds of kilometers away—at an Adriatic sea that was explicitly associated with Slavs, irrespective of the many Italians, Germans, and Hungarians who lived on its shores.

The KČT’s descriptions of the trips as pathos-laden invocations of Slav unity at every port were powerful, but they should be read with caution. The KČT’s own invocation of tourism as a means to realize Slav solidarity indicates that its activists found the current situation unsatisfactory. Many people outside the local elites were probably all but indifferent to the tour group from Bohemia speaking a related but not mutually intelligible language, even if these encounters went undocumented.<sup>22</sup> At times, the encounters even engendered conflict. When the KČT group reached Dubrovnik’s harbor in 1899, the welcoming party was divided into separate Croatian and Serbian crowds, who started jostling for access onto the boat as soon as it docked. “How embarrassing the mere thought was,” the KČT reported with indignation, “that at the very south of the Slavonic lands brother Slav does not share brotherly feelings toward brother Slav. Oh the fateful discord and stubbornness!”<sup>23</sup> Notwithstanding indifference and conflict, Slav solidarity was the key ideological basis for the strengthening of relations between the Czechs and the South Slavs of the Habsburg Empire in the years leading up to World War I, in both economic and cultural spheres.<sup>24</sup> In Trieste in the early 1900s, Czechs contributed to setting up banks and other businesses, as well as a *Česká beseda* (Czech Club) and a Czech yachting club.<sup>25</sup> The collapse of the Habsburg Empire and the creation of the independent states of Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (renamed Yugoslavia in 1929) following World War I transformed the relationship. Although the peacemakers at the Paris Conference rejected the Czechoslovak demand of being granted a territorial “corridor” between inimical Austria and Hungary to Yugoslavia, the independence of the two countries elevated their ties to the level of

<sup>17</sup>On the general early history of the Club, see *Padesát let Klubu československých turistů, 1888–1938* (Prague, 1938).

<sup>18</sup>Jiří Guth-Jarkovský, “Slovanská turistika,” *Časopis turistů* (1908): 412.

<sup>19</sup>Jan Buchar, “Druhý výlet Klubu českých turistů do Dalmacie, na Černou Horu, do Hercegoviny, Bosny, Chorvatska a Krajiny ve dnech od 3.–24. května 1899,” *Časopis turistů* 11, no. 8 (1899): 257–310, 266–67.

<sup>20</sup>*Časopis turistů*, 9, no. 1 (1897): 179.

<sup>21</sup>Ferd[inand] Velc, “Od břehů Adrie,” *Časopis turistů* 24, no. 5 (1912): 265–67.

<sup>22</sup>Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 93–119.

<sup>23</sup>Buchar, “Druhý výlet,” 209.

<sup>24</sup>With some variations, this also applied to Slavonic-speaking areas outside the Empire, such as Montenegro and Bulgaria. See, e.g., František Šístek, *Junáci, horalé a lenoši: Obraz Černé Hory a Černohorců v české společnosti. 1830–2006* (Prague, 2011); Růžena Havránková, “Jak jsme budovali Bulharsko v 19. století,” in *Slovanství a česká kultura 19. století*, eds. Prah, Hojda, and Ottlová, 134–41.

<sup>25</sup>Borut Klajban, “Scramble for Adria?: Discourses of Appropriation of the Adriatic Space Before and After World War I,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 42 (2011): 16–32, 22–24.

international relations between two sovereign states.<sup>26</sup> The Little Entente in 1920/21 (which also included Romania) formalized this relationship. Especially given that Russia was lost as a partner for capitalist countries after the founding of the USSR, Czechoslovakia became one of Yugoslavia's closest allies. For the Yugoslav elites and intelligentsia, the highly industrialized and relatively wealthy Czechoslovakia became a paragon of a "Slav modernity" that was to be emulated.<sup>27</sup>

Tourism reflected these developments. Spurred on by Slav solidarity, Czechoslovakia became a key destination for Yugoslavs in the interwar period, especially for school and study groups intent on learning from—as it was perceived—a more developed neighbor.<sup>28</sup> For summer holidays by the sea, however, the direction of travel was from north to south. Massive, organized round trips like the ones organized by the KČT, which often had several hundred participants who traveled for hundreds of kilometers in special trains, became less frequent in the years leading up to World War I and even less so in the interwar period. Instead, Czechs started traveling to the Adriatic coast individually and often stayed for several weeks in seaside resorts owned and operated by other Czechs. Czechoslovak tourism on the Adriatic thus became a major industry in the interwar period, aided by excellent infrastructure.<sup>29</sup> The Czechoslovak State Railways offered direct trains from Prague, Brno, and Bratislava to Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sušak, Split, and Belgrade.<sup>30</sup> From 1930, the Czechoslovak State Airlines, ČSA (*Československé státní aerolinie*) flew from Prague and Bratislava to Zagreb, a link that was later extended with financial support from the Little Entente as the *Jadranský expres* (Adriatic express) to Dubrovnik via Sušak and Split.<sup>31</sup> Czechoslovaks made ample use of these connections. In the 1930s, adverts for beach holidays in Yugoslavia were ubiquitous in Czech and Slovak periodicals, from daily newspapers such as *Lidové noviny* (People's newspaper) to glossy magazines such as *Pestrý týden* (The week in color). The legacy of Habsburg-Czech imperial complicity in the region was conveniently forgotten. Slav solidarity had become both a policy of the state and a lucrative business.

This ideology was intertwined with discourses of public health and hygiene in the tourist industry. All seaside resorts were marketed as health spas and most people arrived with a doctor's note for one of the many diseases of civilization that afflicted the overworked urbanites of Czechoslovakia. Especially after 1918, this actually made trips more accessible to a wide section of the population due to subsidies granted by the Czechoslovak government for trips to health resorts. Doctors, for their part, generously issued the necessary documents. A brochure for the Baška resort started with a statement by four doctors praising the resort's healing powers for those looking to strengthen their "weakened organism."<sup>32</sup> Czech tourists themselves internalized and expressed the aim of healing their "tattered nerves."<sup>33</sup> The distinction between medical and ideological motivations to travel soon became blurred. In 1930, the Czechoslovak Doctors' Union (*Ústřední jednota československých lékařů*) declared it the patriotic duty of every Czechoslovak doctor to send their patients to the Slav Adriatic.<sup>34</sup> Thus, holidays on the Yugoslav coast were not only advertised and subsidized, but formally declared to be in the interest of health and nation. It is unsurprising, then, that the number of visitors from Czechoslovakia rose steadily throughout the 1920s and 1930s, reaching more than 68,000 in 1936. Until the mid-1930s,

<sup>26</sup>Klabjan, *Češi a Slováci na Jadranu*, 76–77.

<sup>27</sup>Marie-Janine Calic, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2014), 110–11.

<sup>28</sup>Noah W. Sobe, "Slavic Emotion and Vernacular Cosmopolitanism: Yugoslav Travels to Czechoslovakia in the 1920s and 1930s," in *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, eds. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Ithaca, 2006), 82–96.

<sup>29</sup>Igor Tchoukarine, "The sea connects; it does not divide": Czech tourism on the interwar Adriatic," *Journal of Tourism History* 6, no. 2–3 (2014): 139–57, 145–48.

<sup>30</sup>*Mezinárodní spoje ČSR – Internationale Verbindungen ČSR – Services Internationaux ČSR – International Services ČSR* (Prague, 1938).

<sup>31</sup>Barbora Bartáková, "Rivalové na leteckých tratích: Československá letecká doprava v meziválečném období," *Historický obzor* 10, no. 11–12 (1999): 265–70.

<sup>32</sup>Emil Geistlich, *Baška: Česko-chorvatské mořské a klimatické lázně na ostrově Krku v Istrii* (Prague, 1912), 6.

<sup>33</sup>Listy z Rabu, *Český učitel* 17 (1914): 511–12 and 521–22, 522.

<sup>34</sup>Vlastimil Klíma, "Činnost Čechů na Jihoslovanském Jadranu," *Věstník českých lékařů* 39 (1930): 919–21, 921.

Czechoslovaks were the largest national cohort ahead of Austrians and Germans, and accounted for a third to a quarter of all foreign arrivals.<sup>35</sup> The number was comparable to the tourist numbers in Czechoslovakia's own easternmost region of Carpathian Ruthenia, which was also being developed into a tourist destination at the time.<sup>36</sup> In some areas of Yugoslavia, especially in the early years after the war, Czechoslovaks made up the absolute majority of tourists. In 1923, for instance, 81 percent of foreign tourists in Dubrovnik were Czechoslovaks.<sup>37</sup>

Why did Czechs choose the Adriatic as their holiday destination? Many sources suggest that it was precisely the emotional sense of Slav kinship that was often the most important reason for going. The Ukrainian feminist and émigré to Prague Marie Omelčenková (1874–1946) traveled there in 1934 as part of her research for a book on the “Slav woman,” meeting Yugoslav activists in the women’s movement and relaxing at the “turquoise Adriatic.” Her encounters all confirmed her belief in the unity of all Slavs.<sup>38</sup> This belief created a sense of belonging that guided travelers’ experiences. When, in the early 1930s, a journalist asked prominent members of the Czech cultural elite what they liked most about their holiday, the pervasive sentiment was one of homecoming. The literary critic Miroslav Rutte (1889–1954) wrote that upon his arrival on the “Slav Adriatic,” he felt like he was returning home. For the painter Václav Špála (1885–1946), the highlight of his holiday was “that I felt at home among the local population.” The writer Ignát Herrmann (1854–1935) was “delighted by the sounds of the Slavonic language [Serbo-Croatian], related to our own.”<sup>39</sup> All these voices contributed to a new territorialization of the Eastern Adriatic as a sea that belonged (also) to the Czechs.

This sense of belonging was not just inclusive but was also turned into an exclusive instrument against German and Hungarian economic interests in the region. The painter and travel writer Ferdinand Velc (1864–1920) wrote in 1912 about the Czech duty to support the South Slavs and lamented the lack of Czech and Slav investment on the Adriatic, which risked yielding the field to Germans and Hungarians. “This is where we can practice Slav reciprocity: through economic aid.”<sup>40</sup> Velc’s complaint did not go unheard. Czechs not only traveled to the Adriatic, they also shaped the industry and the very countryside by actively investing in tourism and construction. By the late 1930s, there were dozens of Czech-owned resorts scattered along the Eastern Adriatic coast. There was a wide range of establishments from simple guesthouses to upscale resorts, but they—to a greater or lesser extent—all catered to Czechs. Many advertised their favored clientele already in their names, such as the hotels *Praha* in Rab and in Supetar. Notable Czech architects designed hotel buildings on the coast both before and after the war.<sup>41</sup> One Czech doctor wrote in 1930: “we Czechs were the first to do business and build on the Yugoslav Adriatic. This was no great financial speculation, however, but the simply a patriotic effort to retain for the Slavs the beautiful, sunny, blue Adriatic.”<sup>42</sup> This shows the pride Czechs felt at their contribution to touristic development in Yugoslavia, but also a defensive impulse to reject the implicit charge of economic imperialism.

Indeed, there was local criticism of these investment practices. From 1923, newspapers close to the Croatian Peasant Party of the autonomist politician, Stjepan Radić (1871–1928), who had himself

<sup>35</sup>In 1933, 63,947 of 216,654 foreign visitors were Czechoslovaks (29.5 percent). See *Kraljevina Jugoslavija: Statistički godišnjak 1933* (Belgrade, 1935), 252–53.

<sup>36</sup>Ivan Chorvát, “Czechs and Slovaks as explorers of the Yugoslavian Adriatic coast,” *Akademický repozitár* (2010), 5, <http://www.akademickyrepozitar.sk/Ivan-Chorvat/Czechs-and-Slovaks-as-explorers-of-the-Yugoslavian-Adriatic-coast>; Felix Jeschke, *Iron Landscapes: National Space and the Railways in Interwar Czechoslovakia* (New York, 2021), 71.

<sup>37</sup>By 1933, the figure had fallen to 31 percent, which was comparable to the average for Yugoslavia as a whole. See Rudolf Píša, “Dobrodošli na českém Jadranu,” *Věstník Muzea cenných papírů* 7, no. 7 (2014), 13; *Statistički godišnjak 1933*, 252–53.

<sup>38</sup>Marie Omelčenková, *Mé dojmy z Jugoslavie* (Prague, 1935).

<sup>39</sup>Literární archiv Památníku národního písemnictví (Prague), Fond Urban Jaroslav, box 2. I have not found any evidence that these testimonies were published.

<sup>40</sup>Velc, “Od břehů Adrie,” 266.

<sup>41</sup>Jasenska Kranjčević and Mirjana Kos, *Čeští architekti a počátky turistiky na chorvatském Jadranu* (Ostrava, 2019). Among them was e.g., Jan Kotěra (1871–1923), one of the founders of modern Czech architecture, who provided plans for hotels in Opatica and Dubrovnik which were, however, not built (35).

<sup>42</sup>Klíma, “Činnost Čechů,” 920.

studied in Prague, began criticizing Czechoslovak investors for being able to buy up prime seaside properties cheaply due to the comparative strength of the Czechoslovak crown as compared to the Yugoslav dinar. The criticism also targeted the employment practices of the Czechoslovak hotels. In August 1923, Yugoslavia adopted a law that prohibited foreign investors from purchasing property within fifty kilometers of the coast without the permission of the Ministry of Defense. However, the government assured the Czechoslovak embassy in Belgrade that the measures targeted mainly Italians and that obtaining the permission was merely a formality for Czechoslovaks.<sup>43</sup> It seems the Czechs were generally welcome guests, if often for more mundane reasons than Slav solidarity. In 1938, the Czechoslovak embassy reported that local entrepreneurs preferred Czechoslovaks to Germans, for “they bring cash.”<sup>44</sup>

### “The Ideal Resort”: Czech National Tourism in Baška

Even if it was not the case everywhere, the local elites in Baška shared the idea of Slav solidarity. They founded a “Local Beautification and Hygiene Society” (*Društvo za poljepšanje mjesta i mjestne čistoće*) in June 1904 that began developing a tourist resort in the town in 1907. The initiative in this instance thus came from local actors, not the imperial center. The association positioned itself against German and Hungarian economic interests in the Adriatic and stated that the “ownership of the [resort] company must stay in Baška . . . and must be purely Slav.”<sup>45</sup> The association’s first resort was opened in 1908. Notices of this new destination quickly appeared in the Czech press and several Czechs visited during the 1909 season.<sup>46</sup> Among them was Emil Geistlich (1870–1922), publisher of the right-wing daily newspaper *Národní politika* (National politics). Geistlich loved Baška and returned in 1910 to build a wooden pavilion that served as a Czech restaurant. One year later, he founded the company *Česko-chorvatské mořské a klimatické lázně Baška/Hrvatsko-češko morsko i klimatično kupalište Baška* (Czech-Croatian sea and climatic resort Baška) and opened a hotel purpose-built on the beach. The “Hotel Baška” was by far the largest hotel in town and was an immediate success with Czech tourists. It closed during the war and re-opened in 1921. After Geistlich’s death in 1922, his wife Anna Geistlichová successfully ran the hotel until World War II.<sup>47</sup> Baška was a veritable trademark for seaside tourism in interwar Czechoslovakia and attracted thousands of visitors. The resort continued to draw members of the Czech literary and political elite, such as the poets Jiří Wolker (1900–24) and Konstantin Biebl (1898–1951).<sup>48</sup> From the mid-1920s, Baška gradually opened up to visitors from other countries. In 1921, 95 percent of its 1,069 guests were Czechoslovaks. In contrast, the ratio remained relatively stable around 30 percent from the late 1920s into the late 1930s. Baška became especially popular with Austrians, who made up the largest national group in 1936 (1,387 of 3,202 guests). Czechoslovaks remained in second place (962), ahead of Yugoslavs themselves (766).<sup>49</sup> Yet, as the number of Austrian visitors rose, local hotel owners eventually abandoned the idea of catering only to Slavs.

<sup>43</sup>Balaban, “Czechoslovak Tourists in the Yugoslav Adriatic,” 749.

<sup>44</sup>Jan Štemberk and Ivan Jakubec, “Češi, Čechoslováci a slovenský jih: Trendy v cestovním ruchu a lázeňství v první polovině 20. Století,” in *Čas zdravého ducha v zdravém těle: Kapitoly z kulturních dějin přelomu 19. a 20. Století*, eds. Dagmar Blümllová and Petr Kubát (České Budějovice, 2009), 251–71, 268.

<sup>45</sup>Majda Šale and Miroslav Pavlović, *100 godina turizma u Baški* (Baška, 2004), 35.

<sup>46</sup>“Mořské lázně na Krku,” *Národní listy* (1909), 4; “Mořské lázně Baška,” *Časopis turistů* 21 (1909), 329; Šale and Pavlović, *100 godina turizma*, 37.

<sup>47</sup>On Baška, see Pavlína Formánková, “Jak Emil Geistlich naučil Čechy jezdit na Jadran: Zakladatel českých mořských lázní v chorvatské Bašce,” *Dějiny a současnost* 7 (2007), <http://dejinyasoucasnost.cz/archiv/2007/7/jak-emil-geistlich-naucil-cechy-jezdit-na-jadran-/>; Chorvát, “Czechs and Slovaks as explorers”; and Lenka Bergmannová, “Počátky českého turistického zájmu o jihoslovanské země, zejména o pobřeží Jaderského moře” (unpublished master’s thesis, Masaryk University in Brno, 2010), [https://is.muni.cz/th/kmktv/Cela\\_prace.pdf](https://is.muni.cz/th/kmktv/Cela_prace.pdf); and Štemberk and Jakubec, “Češi, Čechoslováci a slovenský jih,” 259–63.

<sup>48</sup>Šale and Pavlović, *100 godina turizma*, 79.

<sup>49</sup>State Archives in Rijeka, Fond Općina Baška 1804–1951 g., box 255. I am grateful to Gresa Morina for visiting the archives in Rijeka and viewing these documents on my behalf.

Like for Velc and many other Czechs, Geistlich's motivations for investing on the Croatian Adriatic were simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. His Slav solidarity was underpinned by an exclusive struggle for space, a "scramble for Adria" directed primarily against German and Hungarian investment.<sup>50</sup> In his brochures published before World War I, Geistlich criticized the numerous resorts the Germans and Hungarians built in Opatija, Lovrana, and Crikvenica. Croats, he argued, "are reduced to being mere passive observers" and, if anything, receive menial jobs as pool attendants or caretakers. Czech investors, Geistlich suggested, should get in on Adriatic tourism while it was still possible. Indeed, he saw them as the perfect investors for the region. "Since we [Czechs] lack initiative, the Croats themselves are coming to us to tell us that they're just like us." He portrayed the Baška citizens as "conscious Croats" who "will not sell to foreigners." Luckily, he claimed, "they do not consider Czechs to be foreigners and they would like the Czechs to help them resist the material promises made by foreigners."<sup>51</sup> He used the claim of kinship between Czechs and Croats to justify a common opposition against other national groups. However, Geistlich did not seem all too sure of the Croats' loyalty and repeatedly invoked the latent threat that the Croatian side might succumb to the "material promises" made by Germans and Hungarians. In Baška, this fear was unfounded—its elites stood firmly behind a Slav resort and supported cooperation with Czechs.<sup>52</sup> The significance of this cooperation for both sides became clear in January 1912, when Petar Grandić (1861–1931) and Ante Tudor (1879–1956), two prominent members of the Beautification Society, traveled to Prague on a return visit. They were received by mayor Karel Groš, visited the National Theater and the National Museum, dined at the famous inn *U Fleků*, and walked on the frozen Vltava. On 27 January 1912, the grand art nouveau Municipal House (*Obecní dům*) hosted a reception in their honor (less than a month after its opening), which featured Czech and Croatian songs and poetry invoking the nations' brotherhood. In a telegram to Baška's mayor, Geistlich summarized that "tonight's celebration brilliantly strengthened Slav mutuality. *Živili Hrvati!*"<sup>53</sup>

In the discourse, then, Slav solidarity buttressed the cultivation of Czech tourism on the Adriatic. But how much of the ideology remained in practice? Given both the rhetoric and actual cooperation between Czechs and Croats in Baška, it is striking how much of Geistlich's criticism of foreign investment on the Adriatic could also apply to his own hotel. Since Geistlich hired Czech architects and a Prague building company to construct his hotel, and employed no Croats in leading positions, his resort had only an indirect impact on the local economy.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, there was little effort on the part of its guests to embrace the Croatian culture of Baška or meet its inhabitants. The resort's restaurant offered exclusively Bohemian cuisine such as goulash, schnitzel, dumplings and potatoes, and imported beer. All main Czech daily and weekly newspapers were kept in stock. A band led by a Czech musical director gave biweekly concerts, and a Czech doctor monitored the guests' health. In essence, then, the Hotel Baška was an attempt to create a piece of Czech Bohemia by the sea. For all their pro-Slav posturing, this was exactly what the Czech guests came for, at least if one is to believe the testimonies they gave to Geistlich. Emanuel Klein from Prague wrote in one of the hotel's brochures: "we thank your good Czech cooking, which is no doubt an essential advantage for us Czechs, since we are forced to travel to foreign resorts, whose food we are unaccustomed to, which tends to be a cause for complaint." František Kec, also from Prague, praised Baška for its "Czech environment, Czech cuisine and Czech music in combination with the healing powers and attractions of the southern sea."<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps even more important than food, music, and newspapers in making the resort Czech was its philosophy. Geistlich built his hotel around the tenets of simplicity, unpretentiousness, and a lack of class differentiation. He wrote that "most of all, what characterizes Baška is the fact that members of all classes go there, but largely decent people [*lidé slušní*], which means that naturally all guests respect

<sup>50</sup>Klabjan, "Scramble for Adria."

<sup>51</sup>Emil Geistlich, "České mořské lázně," *Pražská lidová revue* 5, no. 8–9 (1909): 220–22, 221.

<sup>52</sup>Šale and Pavlović, *100 godina turizma*, 50.

<sup>53</sup>Geistlich, *Baška: Česko-chorvatské mořské a klimatické lázně na ostrově Krku v Istrii*, 73–77.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>55</sup>Emil Geistlich, *České mořské lázně Baška na Krku 1922* (Prague).



each other.” This was used to set Baška apart from the German-dominated spas in Bohemia, such as Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary) and Marienbad (Mariánské Lázně), as well as from the upper-class, “Austrian” resorts on the Adriatic like Abbazia. This philosophy was not only nationalist, but highly gendered and mainly targeted women, who were discouraged from wearing inappropriate, upper-class clothing with the motto “Dear ladies, leave all unnecessary splendor at home!” [*Odstraňte, mile dámy, jakoukoli zbytečnou parádu!*].<sup>56</sup> Geistlich’s brochures prescribed in occasionally comical detail what guests were to take on the journey. These instructions were much more normative for female guests than for men. “Ladies . . . in Baška wear only bathrobes, on Sundays at most a blouse, on their heads always only a headscarf tied at the back.”<sup>57</sup> Even outside commentators praised the resort for its social equality and unpretentiousness, which they considered representative of the Czech democratic national character. The historian and novelist Alois Žipek (1885–1950) wrote in 1912 that in Baška

almost overnight the Czech entrepreneurial spirit managed to conjure up a truly Czech resort, where everything breathes Czech life, where there is no foreign oppressiveness, where we can be among ourselves. Truly in the spirit of our democratic nation, Geistlich is creating in Baška not only a Czech seaside resort, but truly the ideal seaside resort.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, Geistlich attempted to create a utopia in Baška. This community of Czechs had no Germans, no Croatians (!), no class differentiation, and no frivolity. Instead, it featured hearty Czech culture (beer, pork, and music) and modest women in an ideal place so different from landlocked Bohemia: by the blue sky and the azure sea.

Baška became a distorted version of the Czech national myth. As Andrea Orzoff has written, in the mythical narrative, after 1918

Czechoslovakia made itself an island of democratic values, rationalism, and fair mindedness amid a Europe falling quickly into the thrall of authoritarianism and fascism. The Czechs, now the leading nationality within the multiethnic Czechoslovak state, continued to be depicted as a tolerant, prosperous, cosmopolitan people at the heart of Europe, embodying Europe’s proudest ideals, the quintessential liberal inhabitants of an ideal civic sphere.<sup>59</sup>

Czechoslovakia not only regarded itself in opposition to its authoritarian neighbors as the last bastion of democracy in East-Central Europe. It also set itself apart from colonial empires such as Britain and France. The narrative had a decisive impact on the way Czechs traveled and reflected on what they saw. Sarah Lemmen has demonstrated that in depictions of overseas travel, Czechs positioned themselves in a third space outside of the dual system of colonizer and colonized. As in Baška, they spurned the ostentatious luxury of British and French tourists and considered second-class travel and staying in simple hotels and boarding houses as ways to distinguish themselves from colonial society.<sup>60</sup> Of course, keeping a distance from colonial society was relatively easy given that Czechs did not fit established imperial identification patterns. The discrepancy between this mythical narrative and reality emerged whenever Czechs themselves came into a position of power. Czechs were simultaneously objects and subjects of the orientaling attitudes described by scholars such as Edward Said, Larry Wolff, and Maria Todorova.<sup>61</sup> Recent historical literature has increasingly perceived the interwar administration of Carpathian Ruthenia and, to a lesser extent, Slovakia through a colonial lens.<sup>62</sup> They argue that,

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Geistlich, *Česko-chorvatské mořské a klimatické lázně na ostrově Krku v Istrii*, 11.

<sup>58</sup>Alois Žipek, “Ideální mořské lázně,” *Česká lidová revue* 8, no. 3 (1912): 98–100.

<sup>59</sup>Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914–1948* (Oxford, 2009), 11.

<sup>60</sup>Lemmen, *Tschechen auf Reisen*, 154.

<sup>61</sup>Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1995); Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, 1994); Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, updated edition (Oxford, 2009).

<sup>62</sup>Stanislav Holubec, “‘We Bring Order, Discipline, Western European Democracy, and Culture to this Land of Former Oriental Chaos and Disorder.’ Czech Perceptions of Sub-Carpathian Rus and its Modernization in the 1920s,” in *Mastery*

for all their democratic and cosmopolitan pretensions, Czech rule in the Czechoslovak periphery was characterized by a pattern of cultural paternalism and economic exploitation that is comparable in some aspects to the colonies of European empires. This analytical lens is similarly applicable to Baška. What was purported to be a measure of economic cooperation and cultural rapprochement between Czechs and Croats in the interest of Slav solidarity, ultimately benefited primarily the Czechs. The democratic character of the resort suggested by Geistlich's brochures prefaced on a community of "decent" Czechs without class differentiation was reduced to absurdity by the strict rules for women and the rejection of "foreigners." Baška thus turned into a pseudo-colonial enterprise in which Croatia and Croats featured as exotic backdrops, if at all. It therefore undermined Geistlich's own narrative of Czech-Croatian solidarity.

### A "Czechoslovak Seacoast" in Kupari

In a different way, the Czech national myth was equally instrumental for the resort of Kupari near Dubrovnik. While Baška continued to attract visitors throughout the interwar period, the first golden age of Czechoslovak tourism, Kupari eventually outstripped it as the main Czech resort on the Adriatic. It started in 1911, when the entrepreneurs Jaroslav Fencl (1885–1938) and Jan Máša (1869–1933) bought an extensive tract of land that was the site of a brick factory and disused army barracks in the bays of Kupari and Srebreno south of Dubrovnik. In 1916, in the middle of World War I, they founded the *Dubrovnická lázeňská a hotelová akciová společnost* (Dubrovnik spa and hotel stock company), which had offices in both Prague and Dubrovnik. The actual construction of the hotel complex started after the war. In May 1921, the company opened its first hotel in Kupari, a neoclassical adaptation of an existing factory building.<sup>63</sup> It was named *Strand*, the German word for beach then used synonymously with *pláž* in Czech. The renowned architect Jiří Stibral (1859–1939), former director of the Academy of Arts, Architecture, and Design (UMPRUM) in Prague, adapted two more buildings for use as hotels in 1923: the appropriately named *Hotel Grand* and a smaller annex. The Prague architect Alois Zima's (1873–1960) company carried out the building projects. Further buildings were added until 1931. At its peak in 1938, the resort sported 333 rooms, two beaches, and its own supply of fresh water and electricity. It was the largest hotel in Dubrovnik by far (the next largest, Grand Hotel Imperial in the city center, had 159 rooms).<sup>64</sup> And while it was launched by private initiative, the Czechoslovak state began investing in the company and obtained significant influence in its operation after World War I. From 1927, ministerial representatives held four of the eight seats on the company's board and a third of its shares.<sup>65</sup> The remaining shares were held by prominent members of Czech society, including the shoe tsar Tomáš Baťa, the statistician Jan Auerhan, and the textile entrepreneur Cyril Bartoň-Dobenín.<sup>66</sup>

Kupari was not merely a much larger operation than Baška, its facilities and corresponding prices targeted a different section of Czech society, and explicitly also international visitors.<sup>67</sup> The resort featured all the luxury that Geistlich's "democratic" resort shunned, including tennis courts, receptions, and balls. Its geographic remoteness added to its exclusivity: from Prague, tourists usually took the train via Linz and Zagreb to Split, from where a steam ship took them to Dubrovnik's port of Gruž. From there, it was another thirty minutes by car or boat to Kupari. The entire trip took almost

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*and Lost Illusions: Space and Time in the Modernization of Eastern and Central Europe*, eds. Włodzimierz Borodziej, Stanislaw Holubec, and Joachim von Puttkamer (Munich, 2014), 223–50; Jeschke, *Iron Landscapes*, 64–101; for a similar argument with regard to Bosnia-Herzegovina, see also Malečková, "The Turk" in the Czech Imagination. On postcolonialism in Czech and Slovak historiography, see Filip Herza, "Colonial Exceptionalism: Post-colonial Scholarship and Race in Czech and Slovak Historiography," *Slovenský národopis* 68, no. 2 (2020): 175–87.

<sup>63</sup>Državni arhiv u Dubrovniku, Projekti Hotelsko Kupališno Društvo Kupari (DAD PDK), 82.9, 2492 (1920): request for adaptation and request for building use permission.

<sup>64</sup>Perić, *Razvitak turizma u Dubrovniku*, 187–88.

<sup>65</sup>Piša, "Dobrodošli na českom Jadranu," 16.

<sup>66</sup>Balaban, "Czechoslovak Tourists in the Yugoslav Adriatic," 751.

<sup>67</sup>For instance, an intertitle in the newsreel mentioned below noted that in Kupari "the beauties of Dalmatia elegantly combine with comfort of the kind foreigners of all countries will find satisfactory" (see note 66).

forty hours.<sup>68</sup> It was thus only available to people who not only had the money, but also the time to spend four days in transit. But like Baška, Kupari tried as much as possible to create a piece of Bohemia by the sea. It sported a Czech restaurant, whose chef had previously worked at the grand Hotel Paris in Prague. Its Czech doctor, Václav Náprstek, wrote his own guidebook to Kupari.<sup>69</sup> It employed significant numbers of Czechoslovak citizens as cooks, headwaiters, musicians, and doctors, while many of its menial staff were locals.<sup>70</sup> The resort attracted many prominent members of Czechoslovak public life, including Prime Minister Antonín Švehla, defense minister and later Prime Minister František Udržal, Prague mayor Karel Baxa and the writer Rudolf Medek.

Kupari, as the semi-governmental flagship of Czechoslovak tourism on the Adriatic, was advertised not only in the Czech press. Two feature films used its resorts as filming locations in the 1930s, and a 1931 newsreel advertised the resort as a destination for both Czechoslovaks and other tourists.<sup>71</sup> In its financing, staffing, and marketing, then, the company considered the resort as something of a Czechoslovak exclave in Yugoslavia. An advertising brochure from the 1930s proudly proclaimed: “A Czechoslovak seacost! Our nation has long desired to have a piece of beautiful southern sea with cloudless sky, lush southern vegetation, and never-ending spring. It seemed like an unrealizable dream. But this dream has now been fulfilled. . . . Today members of our nation look with pride upon the numerous foreigners that come from all around the world to the Czechoslovak seaside resort.”<sup>72</sup> More geographically ignorant foreigners might be forgiven in assuming that this ideal destination was actually in Czechoslovakia, not Yugoslavia.

Kupari emphasized not the democratic character of the Czech national myth, as Baška did, but its cosmopolitanism and openness. Alongside companies like the Baťa shoe conglomerate and symbols such as the *Slovenská strela* high-speed train, Kupari contributed to creating a capitalist, globalizing modernity in Czechoslovakia.<sup>73</sup> It demonstrated that in addition to modern industrial products, Czechoslovak liberal capitalism was capable of exporting leisure and luxury. At the same time, the desire to offer Czech tourists a home away from home with as little exposure to otherness as possible undercut both the promise of capitalist modernity in Kupari and the illusion of classless democracy in Baška. This illustrates a paradox of tourism: while traveling has often been seen and advertised to benefit personal development and broaden the traveler’s horizons (not least by tourists themselves), it could often have the opposite effect. Rather than facilitating new perspectives, tourism entrenched existing stereotypes of civilization and backwardness, West and East, Central Europe and the Balkans, the familiar and the exotic. The historian Peter Stachel has noted that the very first tourists in Dalmatia in the nineteenth century characterized the crownland as demi-colonial and demi-oriental.<sup>74</sup>

A colonial, “Balkanizing” gaze is also evident in the Czech perspective on the Adriatic coast.<sup>75</sup> Czechoslovak tourists were depicted (and depicted themselves) as physically and mentally exhausted by modern urban life and in need of relaxation in the undisturbed nature offered by the Adriatic Sea. The local inhabitants were, in most cases, represented as an exotic contrast to the sophisticated but frail Czech urbanites, as strong and noble savages. Václav Náprstek, the doctor employed at Kupari resort, wrote that the “entire Yugoslav tribe stands out in its physical appearance, being of

<sup>68</sup>Píša, “Dobrodošli na českém Jadranu,” 18.

<sup>69</sup>Václav Náprstek, *Dubrovník s okolím a české mořské lázně Kupari-Srebreno* (Prague, 1923). Náprstek left Kupari in 1923. In the 1930s, the resort had a Yugoslav doctor who, as an advertising brochure in the 1930s assured readers, spoke Czech and other languages. See *Kupari: Mořské lázně staroslavného Dubrovníka* (Prague).

<sup>70</sup>Balaban, “Czechoslovak Tourists in the Yugoslav Adriatic,” 753.

<sup>71</sup>The films were *Právo na hřích* (Right to sin, 1932, available at <https://youtu.be/jfeg9syM4bo>) and *Irčin románek* (Irča’s novel, 1936, <https://youtu.be/Rvan5Hjp5HA>). Several other Czechoslovak films were shot around Dubrovnik, for instance *Divoch* (Savage, 1936, <https://youtu.be/ZCEX-0L7R8w>). The film advertisement “Mořské lázně Kupari v pohádkovém okolí Dubrovníka” (1931) is held by the National Film Archives (Prague).

<sup>72</sup>*Kupari: Mořské lázně staroslavného Dubrovníka* (Prague).

<sup>73</sup>On Baťa’s global reach, see Zachary Austin Doleshal, *In the Kingdom of Shoes: Baťa, Zlín, Globalization, 1894–1945* (Toronto, 2021); on the *Slovenská strela*, see Jeschke, *Iron Landscapes*, 163–86.

<sup>74</sup>Stachel, “Halb-kolonial und halb-orientalisch?” 165–99.

<sup>75</sup>On Balkanism, see Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.

tall slender build and nice physical proportions. Especially southern Dalmatia, Herzegovina, and Montenegro can boast a great number of truly beautiful people.”<sup>76</sup> At the same time, there is a palpable sense that the Czechs considered themselves big brothers, benevolent teachers of a slightly backward race. Geistlich wrote approvingly that the Czechs were teaching Croats in Baška about music: “the noble efforts of the local population led to the discontinuation of the monotonous loud singing on the streets that one sees everywhere in the south in the evening and at night. . . . A choir was formed and is led by the Czech F. J. Rulf.”<sup>77</sup> Czech investments contributed to the development of the local infrastructure, with the Kupari resort financing local roadworks and anti-mosquito measures.<sup>78</sup> The hierarchization implicit in the colonial gaze is also conveyed by the newsreel mentioned above. It depicts an encounter between an elderly local man and an elegant Czech woman motorist smoking a cigarette on a rural road by the sea. The woman asks the man for directions to Kupari and then pays him. This is an encounter between two unconnected worlds, one modern and one age-old, an example of national indifference rather than Slav solidarity. Here, the Czech-South Slav relations are reduced to a financial transaction, which might be seen as emblematic of the practice of Czech tourism on the Adriatic. It also indicates a difference between Baška’s normative gender roles and the liberal modernity of Kupari. Between the poles of “democracy” and “modernity,” the Czech national narrative was surprisingly elastic. In Kupari, the Czech civilizing mission on the Adriatic was modern and cosmopolitan, but it was still potentially exploitative and hierarchical. Both before and after 1918, Czech tourism shrouded colonial ambitions in a cloak of Slav solidarity.

### Remembering Ivo Vojnović: Cultural Mediation through Tourism

The story of Czech tourism on the Adriatic is primarily about the Czech self-image between ideals of democracy and cosmopolitanism. However, the realities of traveling made these ideals ring hollow. The democracy espoused in Baška was ethnically exclusive, and the cosmopolitanism promoted for Kupari was socially exclusive. The very idea of enacting Slav solidarity by connecting through travel was based on the assumption that travel turned Slav solidarity into reality and forged lasting and deep cultural connections. Given the cases of Baška and Kupari, it is tempting to answer the question I posed at the outset negatively, to assert that traveling did not lead to more understanding or facilitate cultural contact and connection. One might see the Czech and Czechoslovak tourist industry on the Adriatic as little more than a variation on the theme of an exploitative mass tourism, which eventually destroyed the nature and authenticity it pursued.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the little seaside Bohemias that Czech investors created along the coast made intensive use of local resources while their contributions to their local economies remained questionable. But, as so often, reality was more complex. In this article’s final case study, I would like to suggest that at times, Czech tourists on the Adriatic did indeed turn into cultural mediators.<sup>80</sup> This is illustrated by the Czech memorialization of Ivo Vojnović (1857–1929), one of the most important Yugoslav playwrights of his time. Born in Dubrovnik into a Serbian-Montenegrin noble family, Vojnović was a vociferous advocate of Yugoslav unity and Slav cooperation. In April 1897, he welcomed the first large KČT group tour during their stay in Dubrovnik, stressing the love that all South Slavs felt for the Czechs, who “represented the star that lit their path to victory.”<sup>81</sup> He was active in the *Česká beseda* (Czech Association) in Dubrovnik, which Czechs living in the

<sup>76</sup>Náprstek, *Dubrovnik s okolím*, 85.

<sup>77</sup>Geistlich, *Baška: Česko-chorvatské mořské a klimatické lázně na ostrově Krku v Istrii*, 34.

<sup>78</sup>DAD PDK, 84.12 (1922), request for improving the environment of Župa dubrovačka.

<sup>79</sup>Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Vergebliche Brandung der Ferne: Eine Theorie des Tourismus,” *Merkur* 126 (1958), <https://www.merkur-zeitschrift.de/hans-magnus-enzensberger-vergebliche-brandung-der-ferne/>.

<sup>80</sup>In the Bohemian Lands, the phenomenon of cultural mediation has been researched especially in the context of the Bohemian Jews, who forged a space for Jewish culture between the Czech and German national movements. See for example Scott Spector, *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka’s Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley, 2000) and Hillel J. Kieval, “Choosing to Bridge: Revisiting the Phenomenon of Cultural Mediation,” *Bohemia* 46 (2005): 15–27.

<sup>81</sup>Jan Buchar, “První výlet Klubu českých turistů do Dalmacie, Černé Hory, Hercegoviny, Bosny a Záhřebo ve dnech od 13. do 30. dubna 1897,” *Casopis turistů* 9, no. 5 (1897): 130–78, 159.

town founded in September 1899.<sup>82</sup> In the following years, many of his plays were translated into Czech and Slovak and performed repeatedly in the Bohemian Lands and Slovakia. *Maškerate ispod kuplja* (Masquerade in the Attic), which he dedicated to “Prague, my love,” had its world premiere in Prague on 7 December 1923.<sup>83</sup> He traveled to Prague regularly, both before and after 1918, to attend his plays and express his support for the Czech national movement. Only a few months before the demise of the Habsburg Empire, in May 1918, the Austrian police deported him (and, coincidentally, Stjepan Radić) from Prague for taking part in a celebration of laying of the foundation stone of Prague’s National Theater. As the Czech writer Josef Svatopluk Machar remembered, “Vojnović had given a slightly more boisterous toast somewhere.”<sup>84</sup> At the turn of the century and into the interwar period, Vojnović himself remained one of the most important mediators between Czech and South Slav cultures.

After his death in 1929, Czech tourists played a central role in preserving his memory. Guests of the *Hotel Praha* in Supetar on the island of Brač discovered that in the early 1900s, Vojnović had lived and worked in the building when he was head of the local Austrian district administration. During this time, he wrote the play for which he became most famous in the Bohemian Lands, *Smrt majke Jugovića* (The Death of Mother Jugović, 1907). The tourists launched a successful campaign to have a commemorative plaque attached to the building.<sup>85</sup> The unveiling of the plaque, which took place over twodays in August 1936, was a celebration of Czechoslovak-Yugoslav brotherhood attended by several hundred Czechoslovak tourists. In front of the building, a bust of Vojnović by the prominent Czech sculptor Otakar Španiel (1881–1955) was exhibited; several bands entertained guests with Czech and Croatian music; congratulatory telegrams from associations and prominent politicians from both countries were read. After speeches by local politicians and representatives of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav League (*Československo-jihoslovanská liga*), the plaque was unveiled to the sound of both national anthems.<sup>86</sup> The celebration was concluded with the song *Hej, Slované*. The newspaper *Národní listy* summarized: “the two days devoted to the memory of Ivo Vojnović at the house where he wrote *Smrt majke Jugovića* were far more than a regional celebration in terms of content and significance, for they connected a great many hearts and minds in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia in memory of the great poet, and in his spirit they turned into a wonderful manifestation of the loyal brotherhood of our nations.”<sup>87</sup> The event showed that the pathos of writing about Czechoslovak-Yugoslav brotherhood could be turned into an event that was meaningful for tourists and locals alike and contributed to cultural connection between the two groups.

### Conclusion: Czech Seacoasts Real and Imagined

In *The Coasts of Bohemia*, the historian Derek Sayer uses Shakespeare’s description of Bohemia as a desert country by the sea in *The Winter’s Tale* as a metaphor for Western ignorance of Czech geography and history.<sup>88</sup> But the new territorialization of the Eastern Adriatic as a “Slav sea” and the references to “our seacoast” signified the possibility that Shakespeare’s geographic *faux pas* (or transfer of Bohemia into an “imagined Arcadia”) could, in fact, have been prophetic.<sup>89</sup> In a 1923 speech at the

<sup>82</sup>Perić, *Razvitak turizma u Dubrovniku*, 111; Literární archiv Památníku národního písemnictví (Prague), Fond Urban Jaroslav, box 2: typescript of Vojnović’s speech at the *Česká beseda* in Dubrovnik on 27 October 1923.

<sup>83</sup>Nikola Ivanišin, *Grada Dubrovnika pjesnik: Ivo Vojnović* (Zagreb, 1984); Branislav Choma, “Ivo Vojnović a Slováci,” *Studia Balkanica Bohemoslovaca: příspěvky přednesené na I. celostátním balkanistickém symposiu v Brně 11.-12. prosince 1969* (1970), 380–88; Stehlík, “Czech-Croatian Relations,” 63–64.

<sup>84</sup>J. S. Machar, *Pět roků v kasárnách: Vzpomínky a dokumenty, 1925–1926* (Prague, 1927), 10. Many thanks to Lucie Merhautová for this reference.

<sup>85</sup>For this and the following, see the documents in Literární archiv, Fond Urban Jaroslav.

<sup>86</sup>The Czechoslovak-Yugoslav League, founded in Prague in 1921, was one of several associations that supported relations between the two countries and had a particular focus on the promotion of travel and tourism. See Kateřina Kolářová, “Časopisy Československo-jihoslovanské ligy: sonda do pramenů k dějinám meziválečných československo-jugoslávských styků,” *Porta Balkanica* 7, no. 1 (2015): 47–62.

<sup>87</sup>“Supetarské oslavy Iva Vojnoviče,” *Národní listy*, 1936, in Literární archiv, Fond Urban Jaroslav.

<sup>88</sup>Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton, 1998).

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

Česká beseda in Dubrovnik, Vojnović put it this way: “did not Shakespeare foresee the future when he placed Bohemia by the sea?!”<sup>90</sup> He viewed the increase in Czech visitors as a fulfillment of Czechoslovak-Yugoslav reciprocity. Indeed, despite its limitations, tourism was central to turning Czechoslovak-Yugoslav brotherhood from a romantic slogan into lived experience. The experience of traveling to the seaside varied. Some tourists, like Geistlich’s guests in Baška, were thrilled to be able to holiday in a seaside Bohemia devoid of otherness. Others, like the theater fans in Supetar, used difference creatively. Depending on the context, and despite the overarching narrative of Slav solidarity, this Bohemian seacoast could be both: an exclusive appropriation of space and an inclusive experience of transnational travel. It thus exposed the contradictions of the Czech national myth as it hovered between a democratic-cosmopolitan ideal and the colonial-nationalist reality.

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<sup>90</sup>Literární archiv, Fond Urban Jaroslav, typescript.