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**The Finnish and Czech Art Parallels in the Late 19th & Early 20th Century:
Eliel Saarinen and Jan Kotěra - *Art Nouveau* and Early Modern Architecture
in Comparative Perspective.**

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century the Finns and the Czechs found themselves in a similar situation: they were small oppressed nations seeking independence. Near the end of the First World War the Finnish people emancipated themselves from the Russian Empire and the Czech people from the Austro–Hungarian Empire, to create Finland respectively Czechoslovakia. Moreover, as shown by Miroslav Hroch in his classic work on nationalism, they belong to the same type of national movement concerning the social composition of the patriotic groups. Hence, the Finnish and the Czech national movements are to some extent comparable.

My PhD dissertation will be a comparative study of selected topics from the history of Finnish and Czech architecture, sculpture and painting at the turn-of-the-century. To avoid broadly set comparative research, only the paradigmatic artists and works of art will be analysed and interpreted in depth and wider framework. The aim of my research is to examine a hypothesis that the Finnish - Czech parallel exist not only in the history, but also in the arts.

The part of my PhD research dealing with the architecture discusses two architects, Eliel Saarinen and Jan Kotěra. Both the Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen (1873-1950) and the Czech architect Jan Kotěra (1871-1923) are in their countries considered to be the key figures of the turn-of-the-century architecture. Their lives and works have already been extensively studied which allows us to aptly approach them for a comparative research.

I have chosen their most famous works, the Railway station in the Finnish capital Helsinki (1904-1919) by Eliel Saarinen and the Museum in the East Bohemian city of Hradec Králové (1905-1913) by Jan Kotěra, to serve as my case studies. At the turn-of-the-century a Finnish variation of *Art Nouveau* was enthusiastically developed; Saarinen's early work may serve as its typical example. His 1904 proposal of the Helsinki Railway station was similar to the significant works of these nationalistic trends in the Finnish architecture. It was not only monumental but also rich in decoration with numerous details from the Finnish nature.

Similarly, Kotěra in his early works showed the ability to transform international *Art Nouveau* influences into his very own style. In some of his early buildings he adapted the *Art Nouveau* ornamentation by adding elements referring to their Slavic character. His first proposal for the Museum in Hradec Králové (1905-1906) also inclined towards the *Art Nouveau* in the form and décor of the façade. However, both Saarinen and Kotěra considerably changed the architectural design of these projects. They - in about the same time – shifted them promptly from the *Art Nouveau* to the Early Modernism.

Therefore, the Saarinen's Railway station and the Kotěra's Museum will serve as particularly suitable case studies for my comparative analysis. In my research I shall take a closer look on the reasons of the projects changes. The question arises, what prompted Saarinen and Kotěra to rethink their projects? And how possibly could the architects arrive at such a modern approach? My ambition is to compare these two particular architects in order to shed a new light on the architectural history of the similar, yet different Finnish and Czech nation.