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Visual Promotion of the Sokol Movement on the Czech-Polish Border between the Wars

My dissertation aims to clarify the methods, ways and reasons for the visual promotion of the Sokol gymnastic movement on the Czech-Polish borders during the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938). Sokol, which is still active, was founded in 1862 in a time when absolutist conditions in Austria-Hungary began to loosen and the first Czech clubs were being established. The main model for Sokol was the German gymnastic movement Turnverein which emphasized the ability to fight with weapons. Sokol was also paramilitary, but program-democratic, non-religious, designed for all social classes, and in addition to physical development, it also supported the idea of Slavic reciprocity against the "oppressive Germanic element", as they understood it.

The most famous of the founders of Sokol was Miroslav Tyrš, a philosopher, aesthician and art historian. His education in philosophy was strongly reflected in the ideological foundations of Sokol, when Tyrš formulated a manifesto of the Sokol idea entitled *Our Task, Direction and Goal*, combining the then groundbreaking Darwinism (small nations must fight for their survival and evolve), kalokagathia (a citizen of the country should not only be physically beautiful, but also moral and good), voluntarism (everyone has the will to push their limits and be better) and more. Tyrš's lifelong passion for fine arts also influenced the very appearance and presentation of Sokol – above all, it was reflected in the members' uniform. It strongly resembled a military uniform and was inspired by various national clothes (Garibaldi's shirt, a Montenegrin cap, a Polish coat, ...) to artificially create something "typically Czech".

Thanks to great organization, Sokol became very popular over the years, as many of its members illegally fought in the Czechoslovak Legion (volunteer armed forces fighting on the side of the Entente powers) and, after World War I, they helped as "Czech national army" maintain public order in the chaotic time of the emergence of a new state. It was the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic that was the golden age of Sokol, when its membership reached one million members. It influenced not only sport, tourism, but also culture and art forever. In 80 years, some 1,300 Sokol gym buildings were built in the territory of today's Czech Republic, dozens of statues and memorials have been created in the public space, photographs and a huge number of applied art objects were created, as well as posters inviting people to slets – mass gymnastic rallies, which were several-day events in Prague where thousands of people exercised together.

The issue of Sokol is interdisciplinary, affecting not only (cultural) history, sociology, (kin) anthropology and philosophy, but also (soma) aesthetics, ethnology, and theater, gender and queer studies. Thousands of preserved works of art from the field of architecture, sculpture and painting, which Sokol produced, can now be interpreted using the methods of art history (formal analysis, iconography, critical theory, ideological criticism, semiotics, etc.). This will reveal how Sokol's identity gave birth to the identity of the Czech nation or how the cult of the Greek body influenced the definition of period masculinity. However, these art works must be seen in a wider cultural-social context, which has gradually changed and responded to both domestic and international events and conflicts – that is why I study not only the obligatory relationship between Czechs and Germans, but also Czechs and Poles or the acute relationship of Poland to Russia. Sokol unions were also established abroad, but only to a small extent. While the cult of the tragically deceased Miroslav Tyrš was being built in the Czech lands and the religious question was directed more towards the sphere of private morality, in religious Poland and Slovakia, only a few dozens of Sokol gym buildings were created. However, it is interesting to see how this Czech phenomenon, which was primarily supposed to refine the body and spirit refinement, transformed into dangerously nationalistic tendencies in Eastern Europe.

- What would be the nature of the Sokol architecture?
- What symbolism was chosen for the Sokol posters?
- How did Sokol differ in Poland and the Czech Republic?
- Since when could women exercise in Sokol? And what was their position?
- How did the secular organization work with the ecclesiastical rituals, religious symbolism and visuals?
- Why didn't the democratic Sokol stop the Communist coup in 1948 when its members were notorious for their resistance activities?