

FROM LONDON TO DUBAI - 171 YEARS OF NATIONAL BRANDING THROUGH WORLD EXPOS (1851-2022)

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Abstract:

This paper intends to chart throughout history the foundation and transformations experienced by world fairs – starting with the first-ever international exposition in London in 1851, and continuing up until the present day, with the Dubai 2020 world exposition having been rescheduled to run from October 2021 until March 2022, in order to analyse the role of this type of large-scale events. Special focus in this paper is on the Romanian participation at world fairs, starting from 1867 until today.

In analysing the purpose and evolution of world exhibitions this study applies the theory of constructivism in order to explore the images that state project when they participate at this particular type of event. At the same time, the research examines world expositions as part and parcel of any state's public diplomacy strategy for its own promotion on the global stage, as it contributes to national branding.

In terms of methodology, for the purpose of research, this paper relies mainly on document analysis, both from open sources and from archives, those of the International Exhibitions Bureau (BIE) and the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Regarding the focus of the analysis, and in order to offer a broader overview of this topic, some of the more famous world expositions from the past were selected and, in order to counterbalance, some of the more recent ones.

Key words

Constructivism; International Exhibitions Bureau; Ministry of foreign affairs; Public diplomacy; World fairs.

1.PREAMBLE

Beginning with the first World Exhibition, organized and held in 1851 London and hosting roughly 6 million visitors¹, up to and including the World Exhibition in Dubai (held actually between 1 October 2021- 31 March 2022, being postponed because of the Coronavirus pandemic), with more than 24 million visitors, world expositions have served as unique international platforms aimed at promoting the image of a country, showcasing its best, most innovative, and creative products.

Created at first to promote industrial progress (the concept of the London Expo was “the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations”) and, of course, attract visitors to the host city, international expositions gradually developed their own central themes, attractive visuals, designs, and frameworks, which continued to impress years after the closing of the event itself. One such example is the Eiffel Tower, a monumental construction, built on the occasion of the Universal Exposition of 1889 that took place in Paris. This icon has now become, more than 100 years later, the most visited paid monument in the world.

Similarly, having its own group of admirers, the Atomium was created for the 1958 World Exhibition held in Brussels, having become a true symbol of the city many years after the event.

¹ More details on World Exhibitions, from Expo 1851 London to Expo 2020 Dubai are provided by the International Exhibitions Bureau (BIE), available here: <https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/all-world-expos>.

Another relevant landmark – this time in Asia – the Big-O in Yeosu, South Korea, was created for the 2012 International Exhibition; and it remains an attraction for visitors from around the world, with its own media show featuring water and fire as well as light and sound effects.

These are just some of the most relevant exposition remnants that continue to captivate the public years after the closure of such amazing events.

2.THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE EMERGENCE AND ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS

2.1. A constructivist approach

In this analysis of the role of international exhibitions and its evolution over time, one theory that fits the description is **constructivism**, as introduced by Nicholas Onuf in 1989, in connection with the name of Alexander Wendt, one of its most visible exponents today.

As defined by Matthew Hoffmann, constructivism “...assumes a generic process of interaction between agents and social structures, rather than making assumptions about the ahistorical nature of particular constellations of actors or behavioral patterns. Specifically, mutual constitution of actors and their intersubjective context is the unexamined given in social constructivism.... World politics is conceived of as contingently unfolding through this given social process – world politics results from social construction” (2009, 241).

Following Nicholas Onuf’s definition, “constructivism is a way of studying social relations-any kind of social relations. While it draws from a variety of other ways of studying such a broad and complex subject, it stands on its own as a system of concepts and propositions... Constructivism holds that people make society, and society makes people. This is a continuous, two-way process” (Kubalkova, Onuf and Paul 1998, 58-59).

From this point of view, the meanings we attribute to the social world, including the international world, depend on the intersubjective understandings and expectations that we have regarding others, which are created by participating

in collective meanings and are the result of interactions between the agents, creating identities for us and the other (Wendt 1992, 397).

From Matthew Hoffmann's perspective, constructivism is a theory of process, being important in analysing how social life is socially constructed, through the interactions between actors and their social context (2009, 243-244).

Jeffrey Checkel also adds to this view, considering that: "For constructivists, agents (states) and structures (global norms) are inter-acting; they are mutually constituted" (1998, 327-328).

Nicholas Onuf also accentuates the importance of talk, of discourse, in creating the world and the reality we live in, as we are all part of, and participate in an intersubjective world.

From this perspective, the social interactions between international actors, the states in this case, coordinated in an organized framework, for a definite timeframe (three to six months), by BIE – the official international institution in charge of world expos – contribute to the projection of an image of political, economic, and technological power by the respective states.

Expositions offer one of the most important opportunities for bringing nations and countries together, for a specific period of time and space, thereby showcasing at a smaller level the state-to-state dynamics and interactions, taking into consideration that "the daily life of international politics is an on-going process of states taking identities in relation to Others, casting them into corresponding counter-identities, and playing out the result. These identities may be hard to change, but they are not carved in stone, and indeed sometimes are the only variable actors can manipulate in a situation. Managing this process is the basic practical problem of foreign policy, and its ethical dimension is the question of how we should treat the Other" (Wendt 1999, 21-22).

International exhibitions are, by their very nature, based a great deal on the symbols and the meanings we attribute to different countries. In this context, a successful exhibit is defined by the way they showcase their capacity to innovate, how they promote an attractive image through their cultural and public diplomacy program, and through a display of political power, contributing to the construction and consolidation of state identities within the framework offered by this type of event. The main purpose of participating at

world expositions is to impress, demonstrating in a symbolic manifestation the superiority, the power, influence, and capacity that a state has at the international level. Participation contributes to promoting the national interest, defined by Wendt: “as the objective interests of state-society complexes, consisting of four needs: physical survival, autonomy, economic well-being, and collective self-esteem” (1999, 198).

With ample communication instruments and strategies being put to use, international exhibitions have an incredible power to shape perceptions of nations and cultures, not least the image of the host country itself, by shaping and enhancing the nation’s image.

2.2. Branding a country through world expositions

Likewise, if one analyses the creation and development of these large-scale events – from the perspective that they serve the role of a public diplomacy tool for any state – it is relevant to mention here the concept of “soft power” as promoted by Joseph Nye. In his words, “traditionally the test of a great power was its strength in war. Today, however, the definition of power is losing its emphasis on military force and conquest that marked earlier eras. The factors of technology, education and economic growth are becoming more significant in international power, while geography, population, and raw materials are becoming somewhat less important” (Nye 1990, 154).

In the multipolar world that we now live in, Nye realizes that the power of states lies “not in the resources, but in the ability to change the behavior of states” (1990, 155).

Discussing about the changing nature of power, Nye makes the connection to public diplomacy by considering that the new trends in international relations “suggest a second, more attractive way of exercising power than traditional means. A state may achieve the outcomes it prefers in world politics because other states want to follow it or have agreed to a situation that produces such effects. In this sense, it is just as important to set the agenda and structure the situations in world politics as to get others to change in particular cases...This

second aspect of power – which occurs when one country gets other countries to want what it wants – might be called co-optive or soft power, in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants” (1990, 166). Referring to what he defines as soft power, he mentions that “soft co-optive power is just as important as hard command power. If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow” (1990, 167).

From this perspective, public diplomacy is one of the most important components of soft power.

2.3. World expositions as public diplomacy instruments

As defined by Snow, “Public diplomacy refers to statecraft activities and engagements beyond traditional diplomacy, predominantly cultural and informational, that are designed to inform, influence, and engage global publics in support of foreign policy objectives tied to national interests” (Snow 2020).

From Snow’s perspective, some of the advantages that accrue to a country via its soft-power actions are related to its access to multiple communication channels that influence how it is presented in the global media, and when a country’s credibility is increased by its internal and international behaviour (Snow and Cull 2020, 5).

Public diplomacy methods contribute to the efforts of nation branding by any given state, for the purpose of creating a favorable image for the relevant public (i.e., other states, international organizations, foreign public, etc.), which is very much the case of large-scale events such as these ones.

From this perspective, as mentioned by Ilan Manor, “public diplomacy activities focus on the promotion of a nation’s cultural and intellectual achievements, as is evident in World Expos, the architectural design of new embassies, and networks of cultural institutions, such as the Institute Français” (2019, 183).

3. THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

As mentioned at the beginning of the paper, in order to offer a comprehensive overview of the subject of world expositions, this paper uses a qualitative methodology – focused on document analysis from public records, both from open sources (the official website and the websites dedicated to specific expositions) and from the archive of the International Exhibitions Bureau (BIE), the intergovernmental organization created in Paris in 1928 for the purpose of managing all international exhibitions.

At the same time, for the purpose of corroborating the results and in order to accurately illustrate Romania's participation at world fairs, this paper draws both on publicly available information on the official website and on those sites created especially for showcasing Romania's participation at specific expositions; and on official documents from the archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Additionally, in order to obtain further background information so as to properly contextualize the study, papers and articles that addressed this topic were consulted.

4. A BIT OF HISTORY

Since their creation in 1851, International Expositions have helped to promote the latest technological discoveries and innovations of their time, as well as encourage world cooperation. At a time when countries were not accustomed to collaborating and to getting together under the same roof for various common goals, world expositions offered the perfect framework for attracting countries from all over the world – and uniting them under the umbrella of a shared idea or a general topic, in order to showcase their best innovative work and foster progress together.

At the same time, Expositions offered a one-of-a-kind experience to the general public, attracting millions of visitors worldwide. From this perspective, world expositions represent major instruments used by any state as part of its public

diplomacy toolkit for national branding. In this respect, world fairs offer the perfect opportunity for promoting tourism and business for each country, including through the cultural program that any specific country organizes for the duration of an exposition. This program covers the celebration of the National Day¹, probably the most visible event, as demonstrated by the extensive media coverage.

In terms of architectural structure, world fairs have, from the very beginning, been used as an occasion for celebrating modernity and innovation – with each country’s pavilion being designed so as to showcase the very best that a country had to offer towards global technological progress.

Ever since 1928, with the creation in Paris of the International Exhibitions Bureau (in French: Bureau International des Expositions/BIE) and the entering into force of the Convention Relating to International Exhibitions, it has been the responsibility of this intergovernmental organization to manage international exhibitions. In effect, this institution has served as the international sanctioning body in charge of all world fairs.

Conventions and Bureaus aside, world fairs are quite interesting and entertaining. One hundred seventy years ago, such events were one of the very few opportunities for people to learn about the world around them. The general public would get to wonder at what it considered to be exotic treasures brought from across colonial empires, and marvel at the latest steam engines on display. Countries would showcase their own technological achievements through a kind of friendly competition and, in true spirit of those times, try to outshine each other, all the while projecting images of political power and international strength.

¹ Every country celebrates its so-called “national day” during the international exposition, on a chosen date which is different from the official national day. The former usually includes many cultural events, officials, and press delegations while also attracting a large number of visitors.

In order to analyse this phenomenon through the right lens, it should be borne in mind that, in 1851, a fair with two dozen pavilions would cover most of the known world (taking into consideration the colonial empires of the time). Those were the days when a 15-story building would be called a skyscraper and the elevator was an innovative (and dangerous) invention. Today, with over 190 states existing across the globe, of which 170 are members of BIE, a world fair represents a serious business. No longer a village of two dozen huts, the fair has become a metropolis in its own right.

Speaking of visitors, just for the sake of the example, during 1889 a respectable number of more than 32 million people visited the Paris fair, which represents almost half of the population of France today. Many were, unsurprisingly, French citizens – with some of them being quite upset about all of the noise and what they considered to be hideous buildings, such as the Eiffel Tower, which the fair had brought to their fair city.

For a long time, the inherent difficulties of international travel, be they technical or political, meant that a world fair was, in many cases, a rather local event. Today, the number of visitors at a single world fair edition would easily populate a country. For instance, in 2010, Expo Shanghai broke all records with 73 million visitors, according to the BIE site.

In terms of innovation, countries compete during a World Exposition to display to the international public their best high-tech creations. To mention just some of the most interesting throughout history: the first telephone – and many years later the first cell phone, the microphone, diesel engines, the elevator, escalators, the commercial typewriter, Edison's phonograph, a soft drink maker, a predecessor of the solar panel, the X-ray machine, the first live TV broadcast, etc.

5.A TAXONOMY OF WORLD FAIRS

As for the official definition and purpose of a World Expo, Article of 1st the Protocol amending the Convention signed at Paris on the 22nd of November 1928, relating to international exhibitions mentions that: "An exhibition is a display which, whatever its title, has as its principal purpose the education of

the public: it may exhibit the means at man's disposal for meeting the needs of civilisation, or demonstrate the progress achieved in one or more branches of human endeavour, or show prospects for the future. An exhibition is international when more than one State takes part in it. "

As stated in Article 11 from the Paris Convention, the country organizing the exposition communicates through diplomatic channels - the ministries of foreign affairs - to other states on the organization of an expo; and often it is the ministry of foreign affairs, together with other official institutions, that coordinates the participation of its respective country at the exposition.

At the same time, according to the Paris Convention (art. 12, 13, 17), every country participating at the exposition should appoint a Commissioner-General of the Exhibition, with that person being authorized to represent the government of that country in all matters concerning the exhibition.

Another important aspect, according to the BIE rules, is the type of fair: international, specialized, horticultural expos and the Milan Triennial exhibition of Decorative Arts and Modern Architecture. Each type has a specific duration and frequency, on average lasting from three weeks to six months.

The types that are of interest for this paper and are being analysed here are the world and specialized expositions.

On the one hand, World Expos, officially named International Registered Exhibitions, take place every five years, last up to six months, and are not limited in size; participants (countries and international organizations) can build their own pavilion, while the general theme has to be of universal concern.

On the other hand, Specialised Expos, officially titled International Recognised Exhibitions, are organized between two consecutive World Expos. According to Article 4 of the Paris Convention, they are limited to 25 ha, can last up to 3 months, and are centered around a narrow theme; with the hosts providing participants with space inside a pavilion. They were created in order to limit the organizational expenses on the part of hosts and participant countries.

6.HOW DID WORLD EXPOS COME INTO EXISTENCE?

Major economic and cultural events, world fairs first developed at the dawn of the industrial revolution, just as cities boomed in population, thereby offering one of the best opportunities for promoting the respective city and attracting visitors and buyers from abroad. At the beginning, their main purpose was promoting national products, showcasing industrial progress, and praising the image of the large nation state. Later in history, they acquired an important cultural and educational mission, while gaining an incredible ability to attract the public from all over the world with the new technological and communication developments (railways, airplanes, etc.) which allowed for faster transportation to the fair.

It is surely no surprise that for more than 100 years since the first world expo took place, Europe – especially France and Belgium – has been the favored continent for host such type of events.

Though their initial role was one of promoting industry, world exhibitions have since become a means of seeking rapprochement and sharing knowledge amongst states; as well as a space for collaboration in promoting the latest technological developments, where states contribute to general societal progress.

Nowadays, with the exception of the Olympic Games, only world fairs have the capacity to bring, under the same roof, representatives from so many states, and such an impressive number of visitors.

7.DEVELOPING A CONCEPT FOR THE THEME OF THE EXPOSITION

The general theme of any exposition is at the very core of the event. From “the Industry of all Nations” theme at the 1851 Expo London all the way to the “Connecting Minds, Creating the Future” theme at the 2020 Expo Dubai, ideas promoted by the participating national pavilions at an exposition are usually

generated via a national brainstorming process – bringing together various experts, representatives from academia, civil society, media, etc.

Considering the focus of the themes chosen for the most recent world expositions and the official information provided by BIE it results that, over time, the main objective behind modern world fairs developed into addressing global challenges, with a focus on the idea of sustainability, very much in line with the UN Sustainable Development Agenda¹. Particular interest and special attention are given to respecting nature and the environment and promoting national solutions so as to properly address the fundamental global challenges in today's interconnected world.

At the same time, the strong emphasis on innovative architecture and the latest technology used in designing and organizing the host site; the state-of-the-art interactive exhibitions that every pavilion is trying to promote; the interesting and entertaining cultural program in place for the whole duration of the exposition, all generate a very engaging and attractive experience for visitors worldwide.

All such ideas centered around the theme of the exposition are usually gathered at the end of the event in a policy document. This declaration is the result of dialogue between the countries and international organizations that participate at this large-scale event.

8.ACROSS TIME - WORLD FAIRS TO REMEMBER

London 1851

The first-ever international exhibition was hosted by London in Hyde Park in a custom-built Crystal Palace, between May and October 1851. It was dedicated to industrialization, titled “The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations”.

¹ More information on the “UN Sustainable Development Agenda” on the UN site, accessed on 26 November 2021, available here: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>

On the role of the world expo, Patrick Beaver mentions that: "Industrial exhibitions were the natural outcome of the Industrial Revolution. The enormous increase of manufactured goods that followed the harnessing of steam-power brought about the problems of mass marketing and the need for national shop windows... For centuries Europe had worshipped the sword. Here was an opportunity to exalt the creative rather than the destructive, through the presentation of the quiet industry of the craftsman" (2001, 12).

According to Jeffrey Auerbach, given the success of trade fairs and regional markets, some European countries already contemplated the idea of organizing large-scale exhibitions years before the world exposition in London took place. Referring to the specific atmosphere, Auerbach writes that "these fairs were extraordinary gatherings, mobilizing the inhabitants and economies of entire regions. There was entertainment in the form of plays, jugglers, and fortune-tellers; there were processions and displays of power and authority; and, of course, there were economic exchanges, settling of accounts and display of new products, combining business and pleasure" (1999, 12).

Following the French model of national exhibitions – its main economic competitor – and successfully resolving the tension between nationalism and internationalism, Great Britain used its position as "the first industrial nation" in order to organize the first world exposition. One of the main reasons for deciding to hold an international exhibition was the anticipation of an influx of visitors to London. At the same time, Britain needed to develop a bigger platform for displaying its products, in order to attract foreign investors and consumers as well as promote its British identity.

Communicating the idea to the British people, "the organizers promoted the exhibition as a tribute to peace, progress, and prosperity; to social integration, to internationalism, to voluntarism, and to laissez-faire economics" (Auerbach 1999, 230). As expected, according to papers of that time, the idea was first received with objections from London citizens, who were scared of the possible health epidemics that the large number of foreign tourists might bring. Nevertheless, the exposition had great success and has remained in history as one of the most amazing experiences of that time.

Paris 1937

One of the most successful expositions of its time, it took place from May to November 1937 in Paris, France. It was organized under the theme of "Arts and Technology in Modern Life" and attracted more than 31 million tourists. The exposition's scope included contemporary science, industry, commerce, and art; it was held in the Place de Trocadero all the way to Champs-de-Mars, which included the Eiffel Tower.

France had chosen that year in order to celebrate the memory of the most profound idea to which it gave birth, i.e. three hundred years since the famous *Discours sur la Méthode / Discourse on Method* by Descartes first appeared.

As mentioned in the event's brochure, "its object is to constitute a manifestation of concord and peace, striving to increase among peoples not only economic exchanges, but also the exchange of ideas and sympathies.... It will therefore establish the result of the universal civilization" (Georges, 1).

New York City 1939-1940

Organized at a very delicate moment in time, after the 1929 stock market crash and at the beginning of World War II, New York city's World's Fair, dedicated to Building the "World of Tomorrow", was also important for celebrating the 150th anniversary of George Washington's inauguration as President of the United States. It had an important impact on the transformation of the city while preparing to host the expo.

The difficult international environment acted as a limit on foreign participation, under the effects of World War II. Some states did not continue participating at the exposition during the year 1940, while the Soviet Union withdrew from the exposition (Weglein, Scheir, Peterson, Malsbury and Schwartz 2008).

Regardless, with approximately 45 million visitors, it was one of the most remarkable expositions ever organized in the United States.

Brussels 1958

The Brussels 1958 World Exhibition took place from April to October, under the heading of "A World View: A New Humanism". Symbolically, this world

exposition in Brussels – recently elected as capital of the European Economic Community – was the first one to be organized after the end of World War II.

Regarding the theme of the exposition, “taking into account that Belgium, at the crossroads of history and the great currents of Western civilization, is also at a geographical crossroads open to all exchanges, the promoters of the Exhibition wanted the themes to be also realistic, as possible” (Lambilliotte 1961, 19).

The 1954 message from the General Commissary of the Government, Baron Moens de Fernig, focusing on the idea of international interdependence and solidarity, seems relevant even today¹: “Global collaboration is becoming an obligation... The first task of the Brussels Exhibition will therefore be to increase the opportunities and means of such knowledge. This will cover all aspects of human activity – the Exhibition is universal – on religious, moral, philosophical questions, on everything that touches on the scientific, artistic, economic and social progress of our time... Our generation has the duty to be concerned with the problems posed by the demographic growth, which will multiply considerably in a few decades, the population of the planet. It is imperative to meet the needs of this increased population.”

For an illustration of the great power politics of that time, which very much reflects the theory of constructivism, one only needs to read a guide found in today’s Atomium museum and on its official site: “With its national and commercial pavilions, Expo 58 literally presented a state of the world. Despite its message of peace and fraternity among nations, the great celebration of 58 was not spared Cold War tensions. At the foot of the Atomium, the Soviet Union (now Russia and the other Central European countries) and the United States of American mocked each other in a symbolic confrontation. Both attracted a curious and seduced crowd, the Soviet pavilion, with Sputnik at the centre, the first satellite in space, showcased the achievements of the communist society.

¹ Archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fond Brussels 1958, Vol. 687, message from the General Commissary of the Government, Baron Moens de Fernig to the Brussels Expo 1958, part of the official brochure dedicated to EXPO 1958.

Opposite, the American pavilion summarised the American Dream, consumer society and a certain comfort in life..."¹

9. ROMANIA'S PARTICIPATION AT WORLD EXPOSITIONS

Romania first participated at a world exposition during the 1867 Paris world exposition, and is one of the founding members of BIE.² It first joined the BIE Executive Committee in 2005.

Official information on Romania's participation at world expositions is provided by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on its site or from its archives, as this institution was charged with organizing Romania's pavilion for this type of event, or otherwise providing services to the organizing Romanian institution.

Similar to many other countries, Romania's participation at international expositions has always had a significant public diplomacy component, followed by economic diplomacy. As mentioned by the Romanian MFA, the main purpose behind participating was to present a real and authentic picture of the country, by promoting Romania's cultural, historical, and innovative heritage.

As for the main purpose of participating at this type of event, the appeal made by the general commissioner of the Romanian pavilion at the 1937 Paris exposition – shortly after the Great Union of 1918 and after the traumatic experience of the First World War, when the main purpose behind taking part at this type of exposition was promoting the national identity of Romania as a sovereign state – reflects the political relevance of participating: "...All the peoples hasten to be present at this commemoration and each to overtake the other. It is, for them, a welcome opportunity to meet and to get closer..."

¹ From the Atomium official site, accessed on 24 January 2022, available here: <https://atomium.be/expo58>.

² More details on Romania's participation at World Expo are provided by the Romanian MFA, available here: <https://romaniaexpo2020.ro/expozitia/?lang=en#romania-la-world-expo>; *Istoricul participării României la expoziții mondiale în perioada 1867-1937* | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (mae.ro).

Romania's participation in the International Exhibition in Paris in 1937 is a serious test for us, post-war Romania must prove that it constitutes here, in the East, in its new form a creative power of value, worthy of measuring itself with all other peoples. The stranger awaits us and we must awaken confidence and appreciation there.”¹

From the angle of public diplomacy, presenting a country's most interesting and appealing products, including its cuisine², was imperative when participating at a world exposition, including for Romania.

At the same time, the cultural program organized for the duration of the exposition also represented an opportunity for promoting any given country abroad.

10. THE MOST RECENT WORLD EXPOSITIONS

As for Romania's participation at the most recent World Expositions, the country has always sought to promote a picture of modernity, ever since the main purpose of modern expositions became national branding. This has meant highlighting innovation, interest in United Nations agenda topics, as well as its support of international collaboration at regional and international levels.

Shanghai 2010

The general theme of the expo was “Better City, Better Life”.

The central theme of the Romanian pavilion was Greenopolis “Green Mega Polis”, symbolized by a fruit – the apple – symbolizing health, knowledge, freshness, temptation, eternity, and regeneration. The outdoor space was integrated inside and featured the main elements found in nature (the meadow, the hill, rivers, grass).

¹ Archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fond Paris 1920-1944, International expo in Paris from 1937, Vol. 287, *Appel du Commissaire Générale du Pavillon Roumain*, p.4.

² Every pavilion featured a restaurant packed with national, traditional dishes.

The apple structure was divided into two sections: the main body from which a slice of the secondary body emerged. The interior architectural design offered a generous multifunctional space, organized on 5 levels, with access to Greenopolis via a natural route that allowed access to all the modules.

For the whole duration of the exhibition, which attracted a record number of at least 73 million people, the Romanian pavilion organized numerous cultural events. These included art exhibitions, design and multimedia events, as well as seminars and conferences focused on the development of economic, scientific, touristic exchanges.

Expo Yeosu 2012

The general theme of this specialized exposition was “The Living Ocean and Coast”.

The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as coordinator of Romania's participation at EXPO 2012, imagined the pavilion as a trip through the Danube Delta, with visitors having access to interactive information on tourism as well as economic and cultural opportunities. The state-of-the-art architectural design, based on innovative technologies – such as augmented reality or Kinect applications – made the Romanian pavilion particularly attractive to the public.

Expo Milano 2015

The general theme of this international exposition was “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life”.

The Romanian pavilion was built around the slogan of “In Harmony with Nature”. Its message was that of a country in which space creates harmony between nature and humanity; that of a welcoming house in harmony with the elements of nature; and that of a modern home with a lot of creative potential.

Given this interpretation, the pavilion was a modern take on a traditional Romanian house. Built mainly of glass and wood, the pavilion's roof was made of reeds, with a plant garden upstairs around a traditional Romanian restaurant. Images of Romania were shown through interactive video content, showcasing sustainable agriculture and the preservation of Romanian traditions. Visitors

were also presented with visuals of biodiversity, protected nature, rich harvests of fruits and vegetables, and picturesque landscapes.

Expo Astana 2017

This was a specialized exposition, created under the theme of “Future Energy”. The Romanian pavilion was developed under the heading of “Energy of Light – A Journey into the Future”. The central element was the presentation of the ELI-NP project, implemented by the National Institute of Physics and Nuclear Engineering – Horia Hulubei (IFIN-HH), from Măgurele.

The Romanian pavilion highlighted Romania's contribution to European and international scientific and technological research, with an emphasis on Romanian innovation. The visitor was invited to discover what Romania means: from its geographical position, traditions, culture, and history, all the way to technological research, innovation, and its human potential. The pavilion also contributed to shaping Romania's profile as a future-oriented country characterized by energy and optimism.

Expo Dubai 2020

This was the first world expo organized in the Middle East. The general theme of the exposition was “Connecting Minds, Creating the Future”.

Romania participated with a pavilion developed around the concept of “New Nature”, suggesting the idea of the fragile balance between nature and technology and intending to bring public attention to the cultural and scientific history of Romania's relationship to nature. At the same time, the pavilion was highly interactive, offering numerous opportunities for visitors to connect, through digital tools and applications, with Romania's diverse natural and cultural heritage.

Romania's participation at Expo 2020 Dubai was structured around three pillars: technology, environment, and culture. The goal was to demonstrate the close relationship between humanity and nature, a relationship that promotes sustainable economic development and scientific innovation. The pavilion symbolically illustrated the works of Romanian creators in the fields of art and

scientific research, such as Constantin Brâncuși, George Enescu, Grigore Antipa and Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen.

11. CONCLUSIONS

World expositions are unique global events which have evolved over time in terms of role and content from stimulating industrial progress and commerce to promoting innovation with an emphasis on addressing global challenges. From this perspective their main purpose today, as mentioned by BIE, is the bringing together of the best and most innovative products that countries around the world have to offer, all centered around one theme of global interest with a focus on sustainability.

Examining the evolution of world expositions through the analysis of official documents both from the sites and the archives of the International Exhibitions Bureau/BIE and of those of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including diplomatic correspondence, we find that they have long played a significant role in the public diplomacy campaigns, developing innovating communication tools through their soft power capability, by promoting an innovative and modern image of those states on the international arena.

Starting with the first great exhibition organized in London in 1851, with 25 participating states, which had as its main purpose the promotion of industry in order to attract consumers, up to and including the most recent and current one, hosted by Dubai, with 192 participating states, world expositions have become global events connecting various cultures. Initially organized in Europe at the initiative of a host country/city, as it is the case of the original expos, later hosted by large cities all over the world, after being elected as a host country, following the BIE procedure.

They present the most modern and innovative national products from various fields – economic, cultural, political, etc. – in order to attract tourists from around the world and make use of public diplomacy tools in order to promote their respective countries.

At the same time, international exhibitions represent a unique type of event, combining entertainment with public diplomacy so as to offer the international public a one-of-a-kind experience, both enjoyable and educational.

For the countries and cities hosting this type of event it represents an exceptional opportunity to develop, by using the process of creating the necessary exhibition infrastructure, attracting tourists and raising the country's international profile. This is the reason for the growing number of candidate countries looking to host future expositions, not to mention the ever more demanding competition among the candidate cities looking to outbid each other for the prize of being the future host.

For the purpose of this article, reference to constructivism was established, mentioning also public diplomacy as a tool of national branding. This was illustrated by referring to some of the most important world exhibitions in history and using Romania as the prime example of state participation at international expositions. Its own experience can help to better explain both the attraction by the international public to expositions in general, and the interest shown from countries worldwide for hosting future expositions.

No matter which lens one applies for analysing them, world expositions remain a magical, entertaining destination for visitors. More importantly, these expositions are a most valuable opportunity for countries to showcase their modern technologies, and promote their national brand by highlighting only their very best economic, cultural, touristic attractions to the interested public.

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