

## Sub-Saharan Africa at EXPO 2015: Diversity or stereotypes?

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The article considers standardized pavilions of Sub-Saharan African countries at the 2015 Milan Universal Exposition from the standpoint of differentiation from the existing common image. Uniform perception of a group of countries seriously undermines the attraction of each member both for visitors and investors. Analyzed were both exterior and interior of expositions - the only opportunity to showcase country's uniqueness - as well as memorial stamps of participant nations and national days' celebrations at the EXPO. Declared by countries on the EXPO's site values and participation reasons are compared with the realities discovered on site. Assessment is provided to employed exhibiting and positioning strategies; successful and less so differentiation attempts are reviewed.

*Keywords:* world expositions, country image, territory branding, Sub-Saharan Africa

Many countries put a lot of efforts into creation of an appealing image. Presently with the increase of world tourism and its revenues as well as economical and other ties among the nations, and thanks to ever increasing globalization and integration, more and more funds and attention is dedicated to the question of image. At times extra efforts are applied in order to dispel existing unfavorable view of a country or to create state's image from scratch, as it happens in the case of newly formed countries.

*In the public eye* in spite of their multiplicity/multitude Sub-Saharan African countries appear homogeneous, which serves badly to their tourism and investment potential. *Безусловно*, vivid *exemptions* do exist – states that have acquired recognizable names – Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa – yet the names of the vast majority still don't ring a bell.

Except for spending on direct advertising, PR-agencies and tourism ministries' initiatives there exist several opportunities that allow to announce oneself on the world scene. One of those are so called mega events, migrating across continents and attracting attention of millions of viewers and tourists, chief among whose are sporting – Olympics, FIFA World Cups and some others. Among non-sporting World Expositions

(EXPOs) could be singled out, which are showcasing latest technological achievements of participant nations. Their relative rarity (in 2000-2020 there will be only four of them), prestige and scope make them especially attractive for visitors. Contrary to sporting events limited by weeks, EXPOs last half a year. Participation in EXPO offers a unique chance to tell the world about itself and be liked by the potential visitors and investors. Shanghai's 2010 Exhibition was attended by more than 73 mil. people<sup>\*</sup>, while the one at Milan in 2015 by 20 mil. (FIFA World Cup's games in 2014 in Brazil were attended by approximately 3,5 mil., while 2012 London Olympics by an even smaller number of people).

Present study set itself a task of analyzing of expositions of Sub-Saharan African nations in order to see how successfully they managed to stand out and appear truly interesting and attractive destinations.

### **World Expositions and «The Third World»**

History of World Expositions counts more than a century and has its founding year in 1851, when The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations lasting half a year was held in London. Apart from industrial produce and inventions (i.e. daguerreotype, Colt's pistol) visitors' attention was drawn to artifacts brought from colonies. Unique Crystal Palace – a first metal and glass structure of such dimensions – was the distinctive feature of the first Exhibition. Later pavilions' distinct design became a red thread passing through the EXPOs – pavilion's exterior could add to the image of the country that built it. It could be an ideological declaration (USSR's and Nazi Germany's pavilions at Paris 1937 Exposition), futuristic installation (Atomium – Belgium'58, Soviet one in Montreal'67) or structures built in the traditions of national architecture. «Third World countries» historically gravitated precisely towards the last form<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>\*</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/03/world/asia/03shanghai.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/03/world/asia/03shanghai.html?_r=0)

Andrea Rober<sup>3</sup> claims that Paris 1878 Universal Exhibition founded the tradition of culturally stipulated pavilion design. So called «Rue des Nations» became an important innovation in the «genre» of EXPO, signifying itself a marked transfer from the demonstration of fruits of industrial development to the demonstration of culture per se. At 1889 EXPO, held again in Paris, for the creation of authenticity aura «aboriginal villages» (*village indigène*) were erected, where for the demonstration of «traditions» dancers and artisans were brought from the colonies, who reprised scenes from «everyday life», as if torn from the other age<sup>4</sup>.

Interestingly with the eclipse of colonialism the situation had changed, albeit in form, not in substance. Hence at the first post-War EXPO in Brussels in 1958 in spite of the collapse of European hegemony, imperialistic views on colonies and ex-colonies remained plain to see<sup>56</sup>. As before African culture was presented as backward and primitive, which was stressed by the surrounding futuristic architecture, by the Atomium in particular. Display of *village indigène*, in Stanard's view, continued Exhibitions' tradition of humiliating and degrading of colonies' subjects exposing them to the onlookers to gawk. Stanard<sup>7</sup>, in particular, comes to conclusion that representation of Congo was not only «a shocking throwback years after the defeat of biological racism», but also an inability to deal with colonialism's sins. It's most vivid illustration became a bust of Leopold II at the entrance of Palais du Congo, which effectively negated millions of Congolese tortured and maimed during his reign.

Analyzing Seville's Expo'92 Penny Harvey<sup>89</sup> pays attention to the role of technologies in reproduction of culture as a national brand. Her works demonstrate use of information technologies such as electronic displays as a major factor in creation of hierarchies of nations. Unlike technological innovations demonstrated in the XIX and in the beginning of XX century, this electronic technologies don't share any new knowledge; quite the contrary, they benefit sensation, presenting cultures in a form of visual collag-

es<sup>10</sup>. Presentation of images in such a new semiotic way is possible only to «advanced» nations. Those who still present material culture of handicrafts, cloths etc. (majority of Asian and African pavilions), keep tied to «verbatim» representation and unenviable consistency of cultural self-expression.

In XXI century situation for ex-colonies started to straighten in a way. A number of Asian countries at EXPO 2010 in Shanghai, especially South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia (as well Japan that never been a colony), exhibited a «blend» of technological achievements and celebration of their «unique heritage», cultural and natural. Thus, central hall of Malaysian pavilion displayed a 8-meter high replica of the famous Petronas Towers skyscraper located next to expositions of Melaka and Penang, cities put recently onto the UNESCO World Heritage List. Unlike them some countries, for example, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam couldn't offer anything versus their more technically advanced neighbors and concentrated on the past.

African situation at the 2010 EXPO turned out to be much the same. A giant Joint Pavilion Africa was erected for 42 African states, largest of the Exhibition. It featured big bazaars, and countries were represented by something very much reminding market stalls, which sold jewelry, artwork and handicrafts made from wood and metal. Generally, when it comes to pavilion design, developing countries of Asia and Africa with their direct and literal allusions to their own culture are starkly contrasted with metaphorical manner in which France, Italy, Great Britain, Denmark and the USA present their own heritage. Design of these countries' pavilions is more abstract, quite often trying to deliver some particular idea or message rather than serving an embodiment of a national architectural «style».

T. Winter stresses that modernism wasn't "helped" by the fact that in the Joint African Pavilion "associations with pre-history were apparent in a scrolling electronic display, along which unfurled the words: 'African smile: shining from ancient to modern

times. Human civilization, radiating from Africa to the world' . It was also reported that one of these faces, situated opposite the pavilion entrance to greet visitors, was of 'Lucy' (Australopithecus), a pre-human hominid.... Clearly here we once again see an imagining of a homogenous, timeless Africa, imbued with innocence and immutability; characteristics, that, as Pratt<sup>11</sup> identified, took central stage in a European colonial narrative<sup>12</sup> (Ibid. p.85).

In P.Greenhalgh opinion<sup>13</sup> (Greenhalgh, 2011), source of constant reiteration of certain representations and narratives could be identified in a significant cohort of professionals – "designers, architects and consultants, a network that provides world's fairs with a vital 'institutional memory' as the genre moves around the world event by event. To design pavilions, experience and personal connections are critical in the securing of tenders, commissions and contracts. It is a situation that has certainly contributed to the reproduction of particular representations and narratives over the decades". T.Winter, discussing «self-exoticism» of some participant nations is certain that they could be considered as conscious policy, which serves a competitive advantage from the stand point of highly lucrative tourism business<sup>14</sup>. In our opinion, such suggestion should be accepted with reservations. Present study of EXPO 2015 demonstrated a certain limitation of such an approach.

### **EXPO 2015 in Milan, Italy**

2015 EXPO's motto was «Feeding the Planet. Energy for Life». Accordingly it was expected of the participating nations to tell the world about the way in which they deal with the questions of nutrition, food production, use of technologies (especially «green» and environmentally friendly ones), inclusion of various groups of population as well as the vision of their future and that of our planet from the stand point of nutrition. As the previous Universal Exposition in Shanghai, it lasted six months (from May

1 to October 31). Attendance as reported by organizers stood at 22 mil visitors (in 2010 the figure was in excess of 73 million).

Participant nation could either built their own pavilion or be placed in pavilions constructed by the organizers and segregated into nine thematic clusters: Spices; Rice; Cacao & Chocolate; Coffee; Fruits and Legumes; Cereals and Tubers; Islands, Sea, Food; Arid Zones; Bio-Mediterranean. African states were represented in all clusters, however Sub-Saharan nations obviously were not featured in latter. Moreover, in all clusters, but Rice, Sub-Saharan countries constituted significant share. Below is a breakdown of African participants and their relative shares (total number of states in clusters is stated in parentheses):

Coffee (10):

Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda – 50% of participants

Fruits and Legumes (9):

Benin, DR Congo, Eq. Guinea, The Gambia, Guinea, Zambia – 66% of participants

Arid Zones (8)

Djibouti, Eritrea, Mauretania, Mali, Senegal, Somali – 75% of participants

Cereals and Tubers (7):

Congo, Mozambique, Togo, Zimbabwe – 57% of participants

Cacao and Chocolate (6):

Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Ghana, Sao-Tome and Principe – 83% of participants

Islands, Sea, Food (6):

Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar – 50% of participants. Cabo-Verde although announced its participation, failed to be present.

Rice (5):

Sierra-Leone – 20% of participants

Spices (4):

Tanzania – 25% of participants

Hence, the scope of the present study includes 31 African states. Not all Sub-Saharan states took part in the EXPO 2015. However, the absence of such countries as Chad and Malawi wasn't conspicuous, non arrival of such significant states as Nigeria and South Africa was clearly a disappointment. As it turned out, there was a definitive lack of countries capable of showcasing the face of modern and developing Africa in Milan. Yet it should be noted that even such an emerging giant of global economy as India ignored the Exhibition too.

EXPO's official web-site had a section encouraging visits to certain outstanding pavilions, calling them «unmissable». Only free-standing African pavilions could have been found there – Angola, Morocco and Sudan. However, the Sudanese pavilion even with ample space demonstrated level of informational and cultural density compared with far smaller pavilions, provided by organizers.

Study of pavilions and their expositions was conducted in two sessions – two days in June and September. Visits were accompanied by taking of pictures, filling in a questionnaire and interviewing of pavilion employees. Before visiting EXPO's official web-page was analyzed to glean participant-states reasons for participation and their expectations, to learn what they had to say about themselves and especially about the situation with production and consumption of food. Their opinions on being part of such-and-such cluster were also noted as well as their interpretations of EXPO's theme

(«Feeding the Planet. Energy for Life») and explanations of their pavilions' design and interior. Information listed on the site was followed by participation motto (frequently very abstract). For example Mozambique chose «From Tradition to Innovation: Feeding Lives and Nurturing Dreams», Benin – «At the Heart of Benin's Cuisine, Nutrition for a Life Bursting with Energy», while Congo – «Science and Technology in the Service of Safety and Food Quality».

Descriptions of design and interior suggested itself promising in terms of focusing on potentially interesting parts of expositions. Thus, Ivory Coast promised to demonstrate «a virtual museum of sorts» of the various stages of coffee production, as well as some other unconventional products made of it. Visitors of Sierra Leone pavilion should have received «full experience of a «smart farm»». Gabon announced a meter, calculating volume of oxygen, produced by its equatorial forests during the EXPO 2015 – not an uncanny attention to environment from such a large oil producing nation. Other countries declared their adherence to some currently fashionable principles and ideas sustainability, diversification (for example, escape from monocultures trap), involvement and appreciation of the role of women in agriculture etc.

These mottos, descriptions of interior design as well as some other clues (keywords from participation declarations; peculiarities of geography, ecology and demographics, which were specifically highlighted) were included into the check list of visual examination in order to match observed with declared. Results of examination were photographed, notes and comments were recorded. Analysis of countries' images with the help of visual examination of interiors appeared to be most efficient since this type of contact was visitors' only chance to get impression of a country. For another rare opportunity they should had arrived at the Exhibition during a National Day of a certain country. These celebrations weren't held daily, hence it's unlikely that visitors planned their trips to coincide with them. Yet EXPO's National Days are worth elaborating.





Figure 1. Ugandan dancers during their country's National Day at EXPO.

Normally, during the National Days EXPO and pavilion of a celebrated country were visited by high-profile authorities (Russian pavilion was visited by President Putin), who made a short speech, signed welcome book and Milan Charter (that underlined right for nutrition as a part of UNO's Hums Rights Declaration). More accessible and informative for regular visitors was a part, consisting of a parade in national dresses to the accompaniment of traditional music along Exhibition's main thoroughfare (see *fig.1*). It should be said however that only one of four days of inspection happened to be a National Day (Ethiopia) and it wasn't quite pronounced among EXPO's other mundane activities. Yet an example of successful use of such opportunity to make a statement did exist, and it will be discussed later.

### **Results of pavilions' inspection**

Decent pavilion should appear pleasingly both during day- and nighttimes. This however is not generally applicable to the reviewed countries – they lacked opportunities for creative illumination either due to the limitation of standardized pavilions or to the lack of enthusiasm. Bonuses of attractively illuminated buildings became obvious at the sight of increased flows of visitors. Angola and Morocco, which had separately standing structures literally enchanted passerby, appearing fantastical castles, which stood in stark contrast with regular light rectangles of entrances of other African nations.

In African pavilions visitors were met by real Africans, which added to the authenticity of contact between a tourist and «hosts». Such situation is by no means standard: due to different reasons opportunity to encounter «locals» in pavilions was not a certainty, which led to cognitive dissonance, when, for example, in Bolivian pavilion you were greeted by a Russian and Ukrainian hostesses. Indigenous music should be also mentioned, as it was on play in nearly all pavilions – not only folk tunes, but modern pop and rock too.

It should be mentioned that there were hardly any queues to enter Sub-Saharan expositions. Crowds did assembled at big pavilions of Angola and Morocco (not objects of the study), which by all means were worth attending due to the richness of interiors and other attractions – live performances by artists and dancers, exotic cuisine and popular products on sale (i.e. argan oil cosmetics in Moroccan building). Of African expositions exhibited in cluster pavilions Zimbabwean one proved to be most attractive due to its burgers made of exotic meats (crocodile, zebra, python) and promoted among others by Wikipedia in its article on EXPO 2015\* (*fig.2*).

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\* <http://www.expo2015.org/en/news/after-the-crocoburger--the-zebraburger--at-the-zimbabwe-pavilion>



Figure 2. People queuing for exotic burgers outside Zimbabwean pavilion.

At the previous Shanghai EXPO the Chinese visitors accounted for more than 94% of all visitors<sup>\*\*</sup>. Judging by our own impression the Italians were core guests of the 2015th iteration of the megaevent, certainly exceeding a 90% mark. Visual observation is corroborated by the study of guest books, available in many pavilions: the vast majority of signees was from Italy. In this regard we can infer that countries from «Coffee» cluster had some advantage over the others, giving a known predilection of the Italians for the drink. In Kenyan and Burundian pavilions people lined up for espresso, visitors more actively took pictures of coffee pavilions and made posts in social networks. Significant interest was also generated by the nearby «Cacao and Chocolate» cluster. Italian ice-cream manufacturer that had a joint next to it, offered chocolate ice cream from the beans grown in Sao-Tome & Principe or Gabon.

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<sup>\*\*</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/03/world/asia/03shanghai.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/03/world/asia/03shanghai.html?_r=0)

When it comes to social networks our analysis shown that not all pavilions had an Internet support from the onset, if at all. Interestingly, a number of those were launched just before a visit of senior government officials, coming to open a national day of their country. Thus, created only a week before country's President's visita in August (e.g. when the EXPO was already halfway through), Ivory Coast's Facebook page counted 6 500 «likes», which was a very solid achievement. To put in perspective: highly popular pavilions of Japan, China and Russia had 13 500, 14 125 and 20 000 fans respectively, while a gigantic beautifully made pavilion of Angola enjoyed support of only 1 700. In general this indicator for Sub-Saharan «cluster» pavilions fluctuated between tens and hundreds of these expressions of web-sympathy and was a specific indicator of the level of country's promotional efforts (above mentioned Ivoirian case is most likely an example of either special technologies of driving up the numbers or application of administrative resources). Ever seeing «Chief» was always around and watching, embodied by portraits in practically every African pavilion.





Figure 3. Give-away information from EXPO pavilions.

Informational materials available for the audience differed both in the quality and quantity (*fig. 3*). Some pavilions apparently miscalculated the demand and their information stalls stood bare, while other exceeded all expectations (Djibouti, Ghana). By and large the materials were provided by tourism ministries (Burundi had a special National Tourism Office stand «Discover Burundi – Heart of Africa»; Zambia), yet a significant share of booklets and leaflets was courtesy of tourist agencies, aiming mostly at the Italian audience (and having offices in Italy). A separate group was comprised of



countries whose overall attitude to participation in EXPO was lukewarm at best: many just distributed cards with their cluster's symbols that were printed for them by the organizers (i.e. similar for all nations of any given cluster), which differed only by country's name in the corner (fig. 4).



Figure 4. Standard cards provided by organizers.

Food was another vital important of getting literally the "taste" of a country. Not all pavilions undertook it to feed their guests. Moreover a number of countries out-



sourced this function: in particular, Equatorial Guinea and Mauretania sold South-Asian fares, suspiciously present in other pavilions (equipped with Kyrgyz sales force). Yet whenever authentic food did appear it always was diverse and of supreme quality (Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Kenya, Togo), especially Ethiopian, Eritrean and, as mentioned above, Zimbabwean (*fig. 5*)



Figure 5. Catering point in Eritrean pavilion.

Convincing disclosure of declared mottos or keywords in practice was an exception rather than rule. Presentation of information very often left much to be desired. On the one hand space limits prevented a country from «making the international community aware of the wealth of knowledge that revolves around its typical agricultural products» (Togo), or expounding «unique flavors» of Gambia, generating cluttering both of exhibits and people, which significantly reduced comprehension (*fig. 6*). Zimbabwe's declaration that «a key feature is the cultivation of different varieties of the potato» in

reality appeared a veritable parade of most diverse crops rather than a celebration of that particular tuber.



Figure 6. Inside Guinea and DR Congo pavilion.

On the other hand experiments with pure minimalism didn't always yield advantageous impression either. Thus Spartan looking half of Somali's pavilion, shared with Djibouti, even though it demonstrated a mini art exhibition themed «Children and War», still failed to promote «...*a different perception of Somalia, a country rich of opportunities that needs the help of the World to recover from its past sufferings and to start its own path to peace and prosperity*» (fig. 7). The pavilion, which was assumed to include «... *education in the form of thematic itineraries: incense, pastoralism, sesame seeds and fisheries... arid and sunny Northern regions, as well as its luxurious and intriguing Southern regions. The pavilion welcomes guests with the heavenly fragrance of*



*incense.»* was devoid both of fragrances and education (as well as of many other announced things).



Figure 7. Somali's and Djibouti's joint pavilion.

Mozambique and Kenya could serve good examples of accurate, while not excessively rich expositions. It's worth stopping on Kenya's as it was one of the few rare successful attempts to differentiate among all the nations in question. Highlighting two prominent elements – coffee and sport (its legendary runners), and not saving on design and PR, Kenya as a result obtained a very pleasing presentation of the country. The pavilion was stylishly decorated inside with the colors of national flag and with country's tourist brand logo. Carefully selected and positioned posters, screens and exhibits didn't clutter space and didn't generate visual cacophony. Consequently a visitor received a crisp country image – both above mentioned elements plus African nature as an attractive background. If the coffee theme was elaborated via the sale of the drink and roasted beans (*fig. 8*), legendary sportsmen motive was underscored with photo wallpapers, videos and souvenirs, official runners' kit included. Moreover, Kenya was perhaps the only

EXPO participant organizing a sporting event. In the framework of a whole «Kenya Week» a «Run with champions» race was held, in which everyone could challenge Olympic champions along the route across the territory, main promenade included. Compared to National Days this event was widely promoted and was rather noticeable. Kenya customized entrance to its pavilion, contrasting it with those of its neighbors. Inside the pavilion its employees were welcoming and eager to answer all questions. It's worth adding that in Milan proper, in the vicinity of Central Station a Kenya House was functioning, dealing with questions of investments, tours, sale of unique goods, etc. The Kenyans also didn't miss a chance to make a case for themselves at a separately held International Coffee Day at the EXPO. As suggested above such dedicated approach was corroborated by visitors' reactions: lines after coffee, more than solid Facebook followership (4665) and a significant amount of pictures on the Web.



Figure 8. Queuing after coffee at the Kenyan Pavilion.

In opposition to minimalism there existed a «bazaar» school of thought, since it's hard to choose a word better describing exposition of a certain number of countries. Par-

ticipant states that chose such model put emphasis on universality and practicality: their exposition could be used for any occasion - be it a World EXPO or a regional forum, paying virtually no attention to event's main theme. Bazaar existed in both light and realistic versions. In light version pavilions' interiors were filled with exhibits more or less pertaining to EXPO's theme (with examples of food and drinks not being for sale) and crowded with wooden statues in traditional African style of varying degrees of artistic merit (and prices having very little in common with reality).

Realistic version could have been easily confused with real markets: stalls piled with cheap souvenirs and trinkets occupied nearly all horizontal surfaces. Vertical space was dominated with costumes and dresses for sale, masks and pictures. What was depressing is that «traditional handicrafts» were suspiciously similar both in Western and Eastern African countries. Some nations didn't shy away from selling unsold souvenirs from the previous Shanghai EXPO 2010 (Benin, Guinea Bissau). Guinea and DR Congo, Guinea Bissau and Comoros, Liberia and Central African Republic were all employing that «bazaar» approach (*fig. 9*).





Figure 9. Inside Tanzania pavilion.

As a result of such approach it became practically impossible to determine which agricultural cluster the visited country represents, which are its core crops and how they determine its being. Ivory Coast that set up liquid chocolate fountains and demonstrated an inside of a cocoa-bean at the pavilion's entrance probably had shown where its priorities lie more markedly than the others..

Touching upon well executed examples it is worth pausing at Gabon. It's a fairly prosperous by African standards oil-producing nation. Yet unlike its peer Angola, which built a pavilion of its own, Gabon had shown how it is possible on a limited space, equal to that of its fellow cluster-dwellers, to create something really memorable. The pavilion indeed featured a meter, counting oxygen generated by country's forests, indicating by EXPO's end an impressive 129 988 709 tons. From the visual view point its interior was

harmonic and stylish: darkened movie theatre-like space was dominated by ceiling high gigantic screens *a-la* IMAX, which offered imagery of country's natural beauties (fig. 10). The story of Gabon's responsible treatment of its unique flora and fauna was continued at the eye level by interactive displays. Man made part of the exposition was low-key, yet nonetheless informative. Thus a mask on the wall wasn't just another mass-produced Chinese ware, but a copy of Fang people art that inspired Picasso's cubist experiences at the beginning of the XX century, whose originals now cost up to a million of Euros. At the National Day the country was represented, besides its President, a chocolatière Julie Nyangui, who held a workshop for EXPO's guests. Little wonder that Gabon won a prize among «cluster» pavilions in the category «Best Interior and Exhibition Design» (i.e. of 84 nations from 9 clusters Gabon was third). 634 000 EXPO visitors were received in the pavilion.



Figure 10. Inside of the Gabonese pavilion.

Employees of tiny Sao Tome and Principe merit a separate praise for the enthusiasm in their stories of the country's tourist attractions and the puppet collection on dis-

play. Without their help it won't be possible to guess that the figurines represent an interesting carnival tradition, whose chief protagonist is none other than Charlemagne, black, but crowned. At the same time hosts at the Malian pavilion expressed little interest in educating visitors about the concept of «togoda», country's traditional dwelling, upon which their entire exposition concept rested, a fact specifically highlighted on the EXPO's site. However even a passive presence of traditionally dressed Mauritian dames outside their country's pavilion left larger impression than all amateurish interior exhibition area together with the Vietnamese spring rolls, being sold there. It could be said that personnel's enthusiasm was one of the success factors in the business of awareness rising among the guests as very few visitors actually stopped to read exhibition stands with fine print or to turn pages on the interactive screens.

Probably that was exactly what Mozambique's decent exposition lacked to become truly memorable. Decently designed space (i.e. bean-shaped showcases referring to the title crop of the cluster), accessible visual aids, including interactive ones, excellent, given its purposes, web site<sup>\*</sup>, mobile apps, activity in social networks (Facebook group «Discover Mozambique» counted 5000 likes), a singularly beautiful stamp (see below) and even massive xylophone-timbila that generated a lot of interest, – all that offered ample space and opportunities for an exciting story about the country. Alas, no such story followed, yet even in this situation Mozambique looked advantageously as a breath of fresh air in comparison to the bazaars surrounding it.

Of other impressions inability to implement the declared was one of the most disappointing. The Burundian pavilion didn't leave a feeling of being in rugo, a traditional dwelling; in the Beninese one, allegedly segregated into four functional zones (inconspicuous), zone, dedicated to the Whydah culinary tradition, wasn't identified even following most close investigation. Almost everywhere many of the meals and drinks ear-

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\* <http://www.mozambicoexpo2015.com/>

marked for sampling were presented only in the shape of pictures, replicas and examples «not for sale». «...[T]he fundamental role of women in Equatorial Guinea in the preparation of food...along with its commitment to the passing down of traditional knowledge to new generations» in Equatorial Guinea was apparently embodied by stalls with cheap bijouterie and trinkets. It was impossible to find even photos of the women in question. Thus the task of expounding of not only abstract mottos, but even rather concrete realities appeared at times insurmountable. Then again, quite often where all announced peculiarities were realized they didn't leave a lasting impression and contributed very little to country's image – replica of Mauritanian shadoof well, Senegalese baobab.

Spreading out visits over a several months helped to identify a certain dynamics in expositions. Number one is people. Torrent of visitors noticeably increased from the second half of the Exhibition, which tellingly reflected on the on employees, of which African pavilions were never in excess. It should be noted that negative moments of self-representation and organization were, evidently, registered not only by the author, but by the visitors at large, who voted with their feet – increase in their flow visually didn't correlate with EXPO's average. Nevertheless employees of many pavilions became far more apathetic, even in situations of direct interaction with guests (see Souvenir stamps).

Second noticeable moment was a certain interexchange of ideas as per how a proper exposition of African pavilion should look like, which resulted in many pavilions being heretofore uncluttered with African paraphernalia and exotica, turning precisely into such, acquiring masks, statues of giraffes, etc. This echoes with Winter's «auto-exoticism» – it appears that some countries, which didn't stress their «africanness» from the onset, were later alarmed apparently by incongruity with some expectations and stereotypes, and started to compensate many times over. That, alas, not always led to a better impression, and rather regressing them to the mean.

## **Souvenir stamps**

Just like at the previous Shanghai EXPO visitors were invited to collect «signature» stamps (Fig. 11) in countries' pavilions. A special passport was offered for the task (5 Euro apiece), actively promoted at EXPO's area. Regular announcements were aired to remind in three languages to compete in the number of stamps collected. This measure evidently employed to increase a number of pavilions per visit (especially those located far from the popular routes) proved to be counterproductive in a way.

According to employees, for the vast majority of visitors attending of pavilions boiled down to get their passport stamped as soon as possible and leave for the next. Upon entering people started to look for the coveted stamps. Such superficial attention, or rather its absence, to the interior and exhibits hardly contributed to employees enthusiasm. It should be noted that passport contained only 24 pages, which taking into account more than 150 participating nations and organizations, made a purchase of additional passports inevitable.





Figure 11. Page of EXPO passport with stamps.

From the point of view of artistic execution stamps of Tanzania, Mozambique and Burundi are among the most interesting. However, no direct correlation was identified between quality of exposition and pavilion and stamps design. Yet of one correlation could be convincingly ascertained: countries that didn't put a lot of effort into their participation, failed to impress in this area of self-representation either, offering simple and ascetic stamps (Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, DR Congo).

### Conclusion

African states mostly failed to convey and elaborate on the created (most likely by Western veteran marketers) loud and abstract sounding mottos announced at the EXPO 2015 site. These abstract (and generally indicative of high-tech future) slogans could, possibly, been explored, but only with the help of latest audio-visual technologies

and truly abstract design. Alas, the vast majority of continent's states cannot afford such luxuries. Moreover, as it happens, sheer size is not always enough (Sudan with its large primely located pavilion is the case in point), and well-thought approach can yield sizeable results with less (Kenya, Gabon<sup>\*</sup>).

Winter's «auto-exoticism» shouldn't be considered a conscious choice of EXPO strategy for Sub-Saharan countries. It's their default option. However, since same choice is made by such a significant number of states, its major plus - exoticism per se - turns this choir into image «mass grave». «Mass grave» is not their exclusive problem – both Gulf countries and Eastern European states strive to stick out from outwardly homogeneous mental geography. Ditto for Latin American «banana republics», and for many others. Judging by EXPO 2015 results it could be confidently stated that such approach doesn't work for Africa. Even the author of the present study, who focused specifically on nuances, took notes and pictures, can vividly recall only several expositions of Sub-Saharan states.

Present work's scope didn't include identification of success or failure of participation in the EXPO, since for that to become possible success criteria should be selected: number of pavilion visitors? number of tourists, visited the country during and after the Exhibition? number of searches if search-engines? how important it was not to let down existing stereotypes, and will a certain generic Sub-Saharan state appear attractive without gorillas and lions with giraffes? We are not convinced that unequivocal answers and criteria exist already today.

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\* Expo's organizers awarded Gabon the third prize in the category «Best Interior and Exhibition Design» among pavilions up to 2.000 square meters. Angola came second in the category «Best realization of the Theme of EXPO 2015» among pavilions larger than 2.000 square meters. <http://www.expo-news.net/best-pavilions-awarded-at-expo-2015-milano/?lang=en>

Study however demonstrates that all other things being equal precisely organization provides a slight edge and helps to stand out. Only a handful of states left a positive impression. On the other hand presence of several African nations in the way they did it only begs a question "what for"? From the image creation standpoint Central African Republic, which was in Milan, acquired as much as neighboring Chad, which skipped the EXPO altogether. Evidently the answer to this question should be sought elsewhere.

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<sup>2</sup> Çelik Z. Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Roeber A. Paris 1878. // Findling JE, Pelle KD (eds) Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. 2008. pp. 59–64.

<sup>4</sup> Swift A. Paris 1889 // Findling JE, Pelle KD (eds) Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. 2008. pp. 100–107.

<sup>5</sup> Stanard M. et al. Selling the Empire between the wars: Colonial expositions in Belgium, 1920–1940 // French Colonial History. 2005. №6. pp. 159–178.

<sup>6</sup> Stanard M 'Bilan du monde pour un monde plus deshumanisé': The 1958 Brussels World's Fair and Belgian perceptions of the Congo // European History Quarterly. 2005. № 35(2). pp. 267–298.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 282

<sup>8</sup> Harvey P. Hybrids of Modernity: Anthropology, the National State and the Universal Exhibition. London: Routledge. 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Harvey P. Nations on display: Technology and culture in Expo' 92// Science As Culture. 1995. № 5(1). pp. 85–105.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 101-104.

<sup>11</sup> Pratt M.L. Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation. London: Routledge. 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Winter, T. 'Auto-Exoticism: cultural display at the Shanghai Expo' // Journal of Material Culture. 2012. № 18(1): pp. 69-90.

<sup>13</sup> Greenhalgh P. Fair world: A history of world's fairs and expositions, from London to Shanghai, 1851–2010. Winterbourne, Berks: Papadakis. 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Winter T. Op. cit., pp. 87-88.