



Fragments

Cultural Cooperation between the African Continent and the States of Central and Eastern Europe

Socio-Historical Context, Mapping of Existing Projects and Obstacles

The project was funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed however are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

NIK publication number 829

AUTHORS

Barbora Novotná and
Pavla Hivert

REVIEWER

Ing. Martin Zelený, Ph.D.

TRANSLATION

Becka McFadden

CC

Creative Commons licence

ISBN

978-80-7008-519-6

NIK



DECONFINING
Arts, Culture & Policies
in Europe & Africa



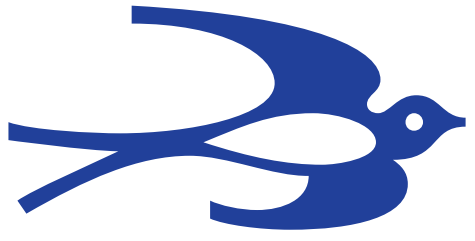
Co-funded by
the European Union

Contents

Forward: Africa? Which Africa?	5
Research Methodology	7
Summary of Key Findings	9
• <i>Barriers to Cooperation</i>	10
• <i>Examples of Good Practice</i>	10
• <i>Recommendations for Supporting Cooperation</i>	10
Opening Essays	11
• <i>Africa in the Contemporary Czech Cultural Environment</i>	12
• <i>The Czech Lands in the Web of Europe's Colonial Past</i>	15
The African Continent and the Cultural Policy of the States of Central and Eastern Europe	19
• <i>The Strategic Infrastructure of Bilateral Relations between the Czech Republic and Africa</i>	20
• <i>The Situation in Other Countries</i>	22
Twenty Years of the Festival Tvůrčí Afrika aneb Všichni jsme Afričani (Creative Africa, or We Are All Africans)	27
Africa in Cultural Events and Projects in the CR	33
• <i>Angela Nwagbo: Confluence / Angela Nwagbo and Siaka Toure</i>	34
• <i>Barbora Příhodová and Adam Svoboda: Prague Quadrennial</i>	36
• <i>Filip Košťálek: Colours of Ostrava Festival</i>	38
• <i>Klára Trsková: Afrofilmes Festival</i>	39
• <i>Pavel Štorek: 4+4 Days in Motion International Festival of Contemporary Art</i>	40
• <i>Petr Husička: Hit, Tell the Difference / Cirque La Putyka</i>	41
• <i>Radovan Auer: International Book Fair and Literary Festival Svět knihy</i>	43
• <i>Yvona Kreuzmannová: Tanec Praha Festival</i>	44
References	46
Respondents	47
The Authors of the Study	49
About the Project <i>DECONFINING Arts, Culture & Policies in Europe & Africa</i>	50







Africa?

Which Africa?

Barbora Novotná and Pavla Hivert

NIK¹ is one of twelve partners in the project [DECONFINING arts, culture and policies in Europe and Africa](#), financed by the programme Creative Europe – Culture 2022 – 2026, the ambition of which is no less than identifying and eliminating the obstacles to intercontinental cooperation between Europe and Africa. The thematic frame is the (social, environmental, spatial) *deconfining* of relationships, which we understand as the disruption of paternalistic and colonialist patterns in favour of a stronger, participative approach and an equitable approach to co-creation.

Over the course of the project, we conducted many formal and informal interviews about Africa and cultural cooperation with the Czech Republic. Most often, the first reaction we encountered was astonishment. Why Africa? After all, it's nothing to do with the Czech Republic, we don't have anything in common with Africa, we don't know anything about it, Africans don't live here, and no cultural cooperation exists. On the other hand, partner organisations and colleagues from Western countries wonder how it is possible that the presence of Africa² in the Czech cultural environment (similarly to other countries of the former Eastern bloc) is so small as to be almost invisible.³ Even we ourselves wanted to name and understand it.

In view of the fact that details and previous research concerning the Czech Republic and cultural exchange with Africa are absent, this study

provides an opportunity to describe the (historical) context and evolution in the Czech Republic and across the entire region. We strove to research aspects of cultural exchange and artistic mobility between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe with regard to the specific concept of (post)colonial trauma and to map current trends in collaboration, with the Czech cultural landscape serving as a means of identifying common traits of cultural exchange with Africa throughout our region.

The NIK study is also part of a broader research project; it is one of three studies focusing on three directions of cultural cooperation: Western Europe – the African continent / Eastern Europe – the African continent / artistic mobility within the African continent. The study coordinated by the organisation [On the Move](#) (Western Europe – the African continent) focuses specifically on the question of cultural mobility, with particular emphasis on African diasporic communities in the countries of Western Europe, given that the topics of diaspora and cultural mobility have become even more important at both the practical and political levels.

Additional studies already published by *On the Move* are also worthy of attention. The first is devoted to the greatest systemic barrier to equitable cooperation – visa requirements – and is accessible online in English and French: [Schengen Visa Code and Cultural Mobility: Latest Insights with a Focus on Artists and Culture Professionals from the African Continent](#). In the second, essay-style text, [An Invitation to Transform Your Vision of the Cultural Mobility Ethic from an African Perspective](#), South African curator Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu formulates “an invitation to change our mindsets, particularly for those of us in the more privileged Global North, and to transform our ideas and assumptions about the reality of cultural mobility when rooted in an African context” (On the Move), embedding terms such as solidarity, care, hospitality and justice in mobility in the discussion.

Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu was also one of the participants in [PO Talks on the topic of Artists' Mobility in / Connected to Africa](#), organised by ATI as part of the Prague Quadrennial in 2023; the recording remains available for those interested.

The term “fragments” in this publication's title references the general nature of cultural dialogue between the African continent and the nations of Central and Eastern Europe. Our research has shown that such dialogue primarily concerns

1 The Arts and Theatre Institute, a state contributory organisation, has changed its name to the Czech Cultural Institute (abbreviated as NIK), with effect from 1 July 2025. The study was written in 2024 and 2025; it has been published in 2026.

2 We are conscious that (not only) in the Czech Republic, we speak about “Africa,” even though it is a continent comprising 54 states (Faloyin, 2024).

3 In *African Diasporic Narratives from the Czech Republic*, Rudwick states that of the 595,881 migrants living in the Czech Republic, only 3,088 were of African origin. Nigerians formed the largest group in the CR (Rudwick, 2023).



initiatives coming from determined individuals, who create and deliver projects and collaborations despite systemic barriers, widespread apathy⁴ and the absence of continual financial support; a long-lasting, functional and independent ecosystem for cooperation does not exist. At the same time, the scope of a single country's (or rather, a European region's) cooperation with an entire continent cannot be covered in a summarising text by a single expert. Accordingly, we decided to divide this study into various parts, thus creating a mosaic whose segments combine to create a general picture of the current situation.

We open the study and embed it in the Czech and European cultural-historical context with the essays "Africa in the Contemporary Czech Cultural Environment" by the dramaturg and artistic director of the Creative Africa Festival, Lucie Němečková (separate space is devoted to her overview of twenty years spent organising the festival) and "The Czech Lands in the Web of Europe's Colonial Past" by African Studies scholar Vojtěch Šarše. We learned how Africa features in the programming of Czech cultural events through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. In collaboration with Michaela Žídková from the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, we also summarised how cultural cooperation with Africa is (or rather, is not) supported at the level of cultural policy and other strategic documents. Questionnaires circulated amongst the partners of the Deconfining project, as well as the conclusions reached at the international roundtable we organised for the purpose of comparing our data, revealed that the situation is almost identical in other Central and Eastern European states. This gave rise to a summary of obstacles and recommendations for improving the existing situation, which we also present here.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed their valuable experience and devoted their precious time to the study *Fragments: Cultural Cooperation between the African Continent and the Nations of Central and Eastern Europe*. We firmly believe that it has not been in vain.

4 Lucie Němečková spoke about Czech society's disinterest in other cultures at the symposium [20 let kulturní rozmanitosti: Úmluva UNESCO z různých úhlů](#) [20 Years of Cultural Diversity: The UNESCO Convention from Various Angles], organised by ATI on 21 May 2025 at the Václav Havel Library in Prague. A recording is [available online](#).



Research Methodology

Qualitative research was carried out through the analysis of secondary and primary data. Secondary data was obtained by researching available sources on the given topic as part of the mapping of the chosen topic. The mapping took place over the first half of 2024. From June to December 2024, three case studies on the Czech Republic were also produced:

- Vojtěch Šarše: “The Czech Lands in the Web of Europe’s Colonial Past”
- Lucie Němečková: “Africa in the Contemporary Czech Cultural Environment”
- Michaela Žídková and Pavla Hivert: “The Strategic Infrastructure of Bilateral Relations between the Czech Republic and Africa”

Based on the initial research outputs and case studies, a subsequent part of the research, primarily focused on the analysis of primary data, was organised.

Primary data was obtained via a combination of qualitative questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and a roundtable (focus group).

The questionnaires targeted the Central and Eastern European partners of the Deconfining project (Hungary, Lithuania, Croatia, Poland, and Slovenia) and were implemented from July to September 2024.

Interviews were carried out with representatives of eight selected events⁵ and festivals in the Czech Republic, and took place from January to March 2025. The selection did not focus solely on organisers who have been developing

collaborations with the African continent for a long time or have direct experience of coproductions with African partners; we were also interested in the position of African artists in festivals that have a generally international (or worldwide) scope. Interviews took place online based on a previously established set of questions that built on the findings of the initial mapping. The following respondents took part:

- Angela Nwagbo (of the dance-music performance *Confluence*),
- Barbora Příhodová and Adam Svoboda (Prague Quadrennial),
- Filip Košťálek (Colours of Ostrava international music festival),
- Klára Trsková (AfroFilmes festival of contemporary African films)⁶
- Pavel Štorek (4+4 Days in Motion Festival of Contemporary Art),
- Petr Husička (of the production *Hit, Tell the Difference*, Cirk La Putyka)
- Radovan Auer (International Book Fair and Literary Festival *Svět knihy*),
- Yvona Kreuzmannová (Tanec Praha International Festival).

A separate space was dedicated to the festival Creative Africa, or We Are All Africans. The festival’s artistic director, Lucie Němečková, has also contributed a text to this study that looks back at its twenty years of existence.

A roundtable (focus group) took place online on 11 March 2025 with the participation of representatives from Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, Germany, and the Czech Republic, along with relevant partners from the Deconfining project. The roundtable participants were chosen to span both strategic thinking at the state level and the practical level, i.e. creation and research.

5 The text is not an exhaustive inventory of all Czech cultural projects involving Africa. During the research, we discovered other collaborations that are worthy of attention but outside the current capacity of this study (examples include Ridina Ahmedová, Spitfire Company, Monika Rebcová, the National Gallery in Prague and many others).

6 We have sourced information about the AfroFilmes festival from answers to a supplementary survey published on the Culturenet website on 18 February 2025 and subsequent communication with the festival curator.



Participants:

- Felix Sodemann,
Touring Artists, ITI, Germany
- Karolina Bieniek,
Director, ART TRANSPARENT, Poland
- Marie Le Sourd,
Secretary General, On the Move
- Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu,
Founder and Head Curator of
makwande.republic, a residency
centre in the rural Eastern Cape
district, Republic of South Africa
- Sara Božanić,
Director of the Institute for
Transmedia Design, Slovenia
- Andrej Berginc,
Directorate for Economic and Public
Diplomacy, Division of Bilateral
Economic Cooperation, Slovenia
- Anna Masłoń-Oracz,
Rector's Representative for Africa,
Warsaw Economic University, Poland
- Dea Vidović,
Department for Culture and
Communication, Institute for
Development and International
Relations, Croatia
- Joanna Matyjasiak,
Adviser on the International
Conservation of Tangible Heritage,
Ministry of Culture and National
Heritage of the Republic of Poland
- Michaela Židková,
International Relations and European
Union Department, Ministry
of Culture, Czech Republic
- Pavla Hivert and Barbora Novotná,
NIK

Partial research findings were presented by the authors and discussed at the [Beyond Horizons](#) conference, which took place in April 2025 in Dakar, Senegal.



Summary of Key Findings

The *Fragments* study explores the relationships between Central and Eastern European countries and the African continent from the perspective of cultural cooperation. The research involved an analysis of case studies, interviews with cultural sector stakeholders, policy documents, and strategies, as well as the structure of support in individual countries within the region. The result is a mosaic of experiences, strategies, obstacles, and opportunities that reveal not only the strengths but also the blind spots of the current approach to cultural exchange beyond the European Union.

The study shows that although isolated examples of support for cultural mobility with Africa exist in some countries in the region, a long-term, independently functioning system of cooperation in this direction is virtually absent. Significant findings include the facts that most Central European nations do not develop their own strategies for cultural cooperation with African countries, have limited diplomatic representation on the African continent, and possess almost no cultural infrastructure there; thus, cultural actors in former Eastern Bloc countries are reliant on the networks and contacts of countries like France, the United Kingdom, or Germany, and their physical presence in Africa.

Interviews with cultural professionals and institutional representatives from the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, and Germany confirm that creative collaboration is possible, but often encounters complex barriers. In addition to the fundamental issue of visas and administrative hurdles (including double taxation and complicated contract conditions), there are also challenges related to representation, power, and historical imbalances. Some respondents openly speak about structural racism, which manifests both in administrative systems and access to funding. Except

for Germany, there are no active financial mechanisms in Central and Eastern Europe to support cultural cooperation with Africa. Furthermore, major grant programmes such as Creative Europe (including Culture Moves Europe) and Erasmus+ are largely inapplicable to African countries.

Many of the initiatives described arise from the grassroots level: from personal motivation, contacts, and the artistic or activist interests of individuals. These individual experiences form the core of this study and demonstrate that truly effective intercontinental cooperation emerges *despite* systemic shortcomings.

At the same time, respondents indicate that Central and Eastern European countries have the potential to approach cooperation with African partners differently than former colonial powers. The absence of a colonial past can be an advantage, but only if it does not lead to the neglect of historical context or the unreflective imitation of Western European models. The lack of historical ties has resulted in small African diasporas in the former Eastern Bloc and general indifference toward topics related to the African continent, which, due to an information vacuum, often appears too distant or uninteresting to the majority population (including within cultural spheres).

Ultimately, the text highlights the need for long-term engagement, reciprocity, solidarity, and international dialogue that goes beyond one-off outcomes and enables the creation of equitable partnerships. Cultural mobility and cooperation with African actors should not be viewed as a marginal or exotic supplement to cultural policy but rather as an opportunity to redefine the concept of “European” in a cultural context.



Barriers to Cooperation

- **Visa issues** (including heavy administrative burden, double taxation, difficulties in contract negotiation).
- **Insufficient funding** for cultural mobility.
- **Passive forms of support** (without the active involvement of African partners).
- **Focus of European programmes** (Creative Europe, including Culture Moves Europe, Erasmus+) primarily on the EU or the diaspora in Western Europe.
- **Low participation of African artists** in key networking events (e.g., Womex).
- **Language barriers.**
- **Lack of information** and general awareness about the African cultural scene.
- **Weak visibility** of African initiatives in the European cultural space.
- **Missing up-to-date contacts** and understanding of the situation in individual African countries.

Examples of Good Practice

- **Dakar Music Expo** as a model of international exchange.
- **ONDA** and **Institut français** programmes focused on sustainable touring, information and networking support.
- Informal sharing of contacts, recommendations, and tools (e.g., **ARNIE toolkit**).
- **Co-productions** as an egalitarian tool of collaboration.
- **Active role of curators** and artistic directors (e.g., Ibrahim Mahama – Biennale in Ljubljana, Prof. Dr. Ndikung – Haus der Kulturen der Welt).
- Development of **bilateral partnerships** and long-term relationships based on reciprocity (e.g., **PQ 2023** – invitation of Asimwe Kawe to Prague and subsequently to the festival in Kampala).
- Polish **university programmes** for African students (4,000 students from Nigeria, Ghana, and Zimbabwe; the active role of Vice-Rector Anna Masłoń-Oracz).

Recommendations for Supporting Cooperation

- Address visa obstacles and create clear **administrative manuals**.
- Provide **up-to-date information** about the cultural and creative sectors in Africa.
- Include Africa in the **media coverage** of European cultural outlets.
- **Use local-level support** instead of relying solely on national policy.
- **Integrate African history and culture into school curricula.**
- Strengthen **cultural diplomacy in Africa.**
- Include Africa in **European funding programs.**
- Apply the **UNESCO 2005 Convention (including preferential treatment clauses).**
- Introduce **targeted grant schemes** to support cultural cooperation.



Opening Essays



Africa in the Contemporary Czech Cultural Environment

Lucie Němečková

The Specifics and Formation of the Current Relationship

The Czech relationship with Africa is a bit like a glass that appears full from one angle and empty from another. It is a question that evokes unexpected and contradictory feelings. In many ways, it is personal. For Czechs, there is no single Africa but many, all at once, including imaginary ones, and thus it is sometimes difficult to reach a consensus, all the more so because each person views “their” Africa as the only one that exists.

To be frank, Africa is not and never has been a focal point for the country’s representatives or for the majority of its citizens. For Czechs, Africa was and remains something far-off, exotic, underdeveloped, disadvantaged, incomprehensible, disease-ridden... Even worse, we are often indifferent to Africa. Today, it represents a far greater threat to us due to refugees, terrorism, and the flirtations of some countries with Putin’s Russia. Particularly after the death of George Floyd, Africa and the “Black experience” have become an arena for various clashes between progressives and “reactionaries.” Linguistic (hyper)correctness and legitimacy, along with Central Europe’s contribution to colonialism and slavery, have become bones of contention. With ample help from the media, these delicate topics have been taken to extremes; reasonable debate has been rendered impossible. Still, Africa is dear to the Czechs. Many set out to explore its natural beauty, on a mission to save the environment and human lives, anxious to improve

the lives of the local people with humanitarian aid. They try to learn about Africa by reading books, listening to music, watching films, and piecing together a picture of events in contemporary theatre. They have African partners, friends...

To understand the complex situation of the inhabitants of a small, largely homogeneous Central European nation facing a massive and diverse continent, one can look to the past, when the current relationship was formed. Let us trace it through a few myths that I believe to be foundational in this regard.

- **The Myth of Holub** – From 1876 to 1879 and 1883 to 1887, physician and explorer Emil Holub made two journeys to South Africa. He brought a young lady, Bella, back with him from Botswana, and she became a sensation at that time. This appears to have been the Czechs’ first encounter with a person from Africa. Adventure, exoticism, anthropology – for many, these remain synonymous with Africa. It is as if we were intellectually frozen at the end of the 19th century when this legendary explorer discovered Africa for us, for Czechs, once and for all.

- **The Myth of Hanzelka and Zikmund** – With time, the myth of two Czech engineers, Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund, attached itself to the related Holub myth. In 1947, when they first set out for Africa in a Tatra 97 (traversing Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, the Belgian Congo, and South Africa, and later travelling to South America), the legend of Africa as a training ground for “golden Czech hands” was born. Czechs have a pragmatic mindset; they are usually only interested in something that transcends them if the thing in question is somehow closely related to them, if they can project themselves into it in a certain way. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge is generally rather foreign to us.

- **The Myth of Biafra** – Biafra and the civil war in Nigeria in the late 1960s were closely followed by the media of then-Czechoslovakia. In particular, the photographs of starving children made an extremely emotional impression on our citizens, giving rise to the image of Africa as a continent of poverty and war that needs our help and compassion.

- **The Myth of Czech-African Socialist Friendship** – In the normalisation era, the Communist Party strengthened its relationships with socialist African countries. At first glance, it



could seem that the regime of the day possessed a greater understanding of Africa than we do today. The story of the “Namibian Czechs,” recently brought to light by African Studies scholar Kateřina Mildernová, demonstrates, however, that this relationship was dictated solely by ideology, as opposed to actual interest in establishing close ties. Both the former regime and the nascent democracy had a hand in this tragedy. Let’s recount the story in a nutshell. As part of solidarity with the African peoples, several hundred children from Namibia found themselves in former Czechoslovakia in 1985, where they were to be brought up and educated in the spirit of socialism. This reeducation attempt failed, and, after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the children were deported and sent back to Namibia. The quotas of young people from “advanced countries” in Africa, who overwhelmingly studied subjects related to engineering and the natural sciences at Czech universities, were a typical expression of “fraternal cooperation” under socialism. Some of them entered interracial marriages and put down roots. Czechs slowly had to get used to the growing diversity of their nation.

• **The Myth of a Country that Never Colonised Anyone and Played No Part in Slavery** – There is a Czech saying that goes “Don’t blame me, I’m just a musician.” It is a precise illustration of our conviction that the current debate around decolonisation has nothing to do with us because the Czechs never colonised anyone – in fact, it was the opposite. They did not contribute directly to the transatlantic slave trade, and so they do not need to accept any responsibility resulting from it, nor reevaluate their history. This fact even serves as an alibi for our ignorance of Africa. In short, we have nothing to do with it. Why would we be interested? Let the superpowers do it for us: France, England, the United States... When the Oriental Institute was founded in Prague in 1922 with the support of the first president, T. G. Masaryk, Africa was not represented within it. This only came about in the 1960s, when interest in Africa grew under the influence of liberation movements. Czech African Studies emerged not as part of the Oriental Institute, but as an up-and-coming field in the Faculty of Arts. The year 2010, however, saw a crisis of faith in its future. This was a crucial year for the withdrawal of Czech interests in Africa, a time marked by a reduction in scholarly and study positions within Charles University

and the Academy of Sciences, along with roles in our embassies and consulates. This deep wound remains unhealed to this day. We lack continuity, context, a long-term student base, and educated professionals to bolster the idea of meaningful Czech-African ties at the broadest levels of professional and civic life, and in the cultural sphere... As a result, those who are seriously interested today lack dedicated domestic support, both moral and financial, and equal partnerships within related foreign networks.

But let’s go back a hundred years. The Oriental Institute, our window on the world outside of Europe, was formed at a time when the new republic, having only recently extricated itself from the Habsburg yoke and desirous of elevation to the level of a European power, dreamed of its own colony. There were a few countries in play, including Togo. It remained a dream, a chimaera that was unreal even at the time, but it survives to this day as an anecdote, and a call for reflection as to why the Czechs, although they never colonised anyone, identify conceptually with colonial prejudices and racism to this day. (In 2021, the theme of the alleged Czechoslovak colonisation project inspired the production *Vzpomínky na Togoland* [Memories of Togoland] by the independent theatre company Handa Gote research & development.) In the 1990s, we could still make the excuse that we had lived in isolation for many years, that we lacked information, knowledge, experience... In 2024, no one falls for such excuses anymore – the world is losing faith in us on this point, and we are drifting away from it.

But let’s not take a dim view of everything. In the early 21st century, a number of cultural initiatives aiming for closer ties with Africa were adopted. In the field of theatre, these included the 2001 festival *Tvůrčí Afrika aneb Všichni jsme Afričani* (Creative Africa, or We Are All Africans). Traditional and modern forms of African dance found support, especially thanks to Monika Rebcová and the BaToCu ensemble, and Yvonna Kreuzmannová and the Tanec Praha festival. The Prague Quadrennial, the world’s largest showcase of theatre scenography and design, has expressed interest in closer relations with Africa. Archa Theatre has made an effort to collaborate with South African theatre makers. Other important milestones include the 2019 establishment of Charles University’s Centre for African Studies,



the organiser of the academic conference Viva Africa, and, in the same year, the launch of dekolonizace.cz, a student movement for decolonisation at Charles University's Faculty of Arts.

Contact Points with Africa and Suggestions for an Improved Position

Working with contemporary African theatre and dramaturgy in the heart of Europe is enormously adventurous, enriching, and internally fulfilling work – praiseworthy, exciting, full of surprises, essential, and irreplaceable. But it is also enormously lonely, quixotic, thankless, exhausting, undervalued, and constantly treated with suspicion. Still, there can be no question of its meaningfulness and urgent necessity. We have much more in common with Africa than we often think.

We share similar experiences with unfreedom, whether it is called slavery, colonisation, fascist occupation or “assistance” from the allied armies of the Warsaw Pact. Thanks to this, we also have a similarly evolved sense of “marronage.” The term “négre marron” was used to designate an enslaved person who had run away from a plantation, been pursued and often captured and cruelly punished. Such people did not give up, however, and found many other ways to preserve their inner freedom, humanity, and dignity in an atmosphere of external unfreedom. This calls to mind our internal emigration prior to 1989; the secret language of enslaved people is very similar to our normalisation-era ability to “read between the lines.” The musical styles sega, maloya, and jazz originally played an analogous role to samizdat or apartment theatre in our context. There are many such points of contact, and it is up to us whether moments less tragic than those mentioned will be added to them.

With that in mind, I would like to offer a few suggestions on how to support the current situation:

- Appeal to the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport to act in accordance with the European Parliament of 26 March 2019 concerning the fundamental rights of people of African origin in Europe, to adopt special measures to support the artistic work and cultural inclusion of persons of African background living in the Czech Republic, and to support the expansion of schooling and education with themes connected to African history, culture and contemporary life.
- Appeal to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to strengthen the importance of cultural diplomacy.
- Appeal to the European Union and international institutions such as the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie to devote special attention to supporting the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to establish cultural contacts with Africa.
- Make African cultural topics a regular and natural part of the media environment.
- Strengthen financial and moral support for individuals and associations active in the field of developing cultural ties with Africa.



The Czech Lands in the Web of Europe's Colonial Past

Vojtěch Šarše

The Trauma of the Colonisation of the African Continent

For both the coloniser and the colonised, colonial history is an existential burden that most likely cannot be fully dealt with or acknowledged. The celebrated Martinican poet and thinker Aimé Césaire (1913–2008) wrote the following in his essay “Discours sur le colonialisme”: “No human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production. My turn to state an equation: colonization = thing-ification.”⁷ It is an indisputable truth that the colonisation of the African continent by European powers was based exclusively on power, alienation, destruction, and a systematic process of imposing Western values, and, ultimately, concepts. That civilising mission – so extolled, for example, by the English writer Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) in the poem “The White Man’s Burden”⁸ – is nothing other than a propagandistic pretext for dehumanising colonialist practices and policies. Generations of post-colonial thinkers have been describing, theorising, and problematising this often-distorted truth in their works since the 1950s.

Such a reality is not merely double-edged, however; on one sharp edge stand the dominators – the residents of one of the colonising powers – and, on the other, stand the dominated, i.e., the second-class residents of a legitimately occupied, or rather absolutistically governed space deprived of its original form and corresponding particularities.

Inevitably, all European states intervened in this space of fatally inequitable conflicts of power to a greater or lesser extent,⁹ whether by financially supporting individual expeditions of conquest, or through physical representation within the colonialist expansion, i.e. serving in the military or missionary ranks. Czech ethnographers and explorers, as well as scientists, took part in this “discovery” of the African continent, which was really predominantly a project of extraction via the use of force. Of course, it is entirely appropriate to put the widely used term “European exploratory journeys” into perspective. From a purely Eurocentric point of view, hired travellers appropriated places that belonged to other civilisations; we will return to this distortion of terminology. The existence, humanity, development, and diversity of all the nations of the territories conquered by self-proclaimed explorers were deliberately mutilated, stereotyped, and stigmatised. Inevitably, this colonial depiction of dominated nations became embedded in broadly accepted ideas about this part of the world and became an integral part of understanding the world as a whole.

Countries Without a Colonial Past?

The quite clearly delineated differentiation between the dominating and the dominated created space for countries and nations without colonies, who found (and still find) themselves in a kind of vacuum that appears purifying at first glance. Many of these “countries without colonies” proclaim their untarnished record in the face of colonialism. As an example, we present an official document par excellence, *Engaging in Africa: Czechia’s Strategy*, created by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. Freely accessible and in effect from

7 Césaire, A. (1972), *Discourse on Colonialism*. Trans Joan Pinkham. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, p. 6.

8 Kipling, R. (1899), “The White Man’s Burden,” in *The New York Sun*, 1 Feb, LXVI (154), p. 6.

9 Falk, F., Lüthi, B., Purtschert, P. (2016), “Colonialism without Colonies: Examining Blank Spaces in Colonial Studies,” in *National Identities*, 18(1), p. 1–9.



2024, this document reflects the official position of Czechia towards the African continent as a nation and an institution.¹⁰ It is emphasised three times within this relatively comprehensible, explanatory, and descriptive document that Czechia is a country unencumbered by a colonial history: “African countries perceive us as a friend without a colonial past, [...] who understands their economic and security needs.”¹¹ The fact that Czechia never directly colonised another territory automatically makes it the ideal partner for African nations. Here we have the obvious case of an uninterrogated and undifferentiated approach to the past, which we simplistically perceive as shared. It continues in a similar vein: “Our advantage is that the relationship [with Africa] is not burdened with a colonial past. We are perceived as a country that [...] builds mutual relations as equal partnerships devoid of neo-colonial ambitions.”¹² Here, the absence of colonial possessions in our past automatically implies that we thus possess such values as equality, honesty, and impartiality. The causality here is neither substantiated nor proven; it is merely uncritically inferred. And finally: “Another example of the added value we may bring [...] is that African countries perceive us as an impartial partner without the burden of a colonial past. In the longer run, this may help to further our role in conflict prevention and peaceful settlement.”¹³ Here, its self-proclaimed unencumbered history nearly even turns the Czech Republic into a peacemaker. Thus, it seems that Czechia’s official bodies consider our national values, free from the stamp of imperialism, morally superior.

The opposite is true, however – although the absence of the historical ownership of a colonial empire deprives the state of one aspect of a dominating and ruling entity, European states without colonies, of course, were, and still are, in closer proximity to the position of power than (ex)colonies. They do not have access to colonising or imperialist power itself, but they profited from its geopolitical, sociocultural and, above all, financial outcomes, and continue to do so to this day. Such

indirect participation is termed colonial complicity, and this state of inequality and injustice has led not just the Western world into the modern era.¹⁴ Today, it is simply indisputable that colonial powers – particularly on the African continent – systematically extracted natural resources of all kinds and continue to do so today under the guise of supranational cooperation, and, moreover, generally with the stamp of a legitimate agreement in hand. Labour has been exploited to a similar extent. Many colonial architectural successes – the building of bridges, roads, railways, etc. – were achieved with the strength of colonised hands.¹⁵ Thus, the acquired prestige was a colonial yoke for several hundred thousand people, forcibly compelled to work. Of course, state institutions that brandish the attribute of having no colonial history also benefited from this prestige (through trade, tourism, etc.).

Stereotypical Representations of Africa in Children’s Literature

Institutions also take part in the ongoing embedding of epistemic violence and in maintaining the status quo represented by the modern European civilisation that is constantly compared with “underdeveloped” or “developing” countries, in many cases, former colonies. Their underdevelopedness and the process of development are always defined in contrast to the Western world as a whole, composed of many clearly defined nations operating at the highest civilisational level. At the same time, “countries without colonies” often feel that the terminological obstacles and historically informed restrictions denoted by political correctness do not concern them. They easily fall back on stereotypical images or depictions of previously colonised nations that correspond to colonial, racist narratives, without the sense that they are facing a moral dilemma or compromising their moral integrity. Let

10 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, *Engaging in Africa: Czechia’s Strategy* (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2022), available at https://mzv.gov.cz/file/4922484/AFR_Engaging_in_Africa_Czechia_s_Strategy_FINAL.pdf, accessed 3 June 2025.

11 Ibid., p. 2.

12 Ibid., p. 4.

13 Ibid., p. 18.

14 U. Vuorela, “Colonial Complicity: The ‘Postcolonial’ in a Nordic Context,” in S. Keskinen (ed.), *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 19–33.

15 B. Fall and R. L. Roberts, “Forced Labour,” in S. Bellucci and A. Eckert (eds.), *General Labour History of Africa: Workers, Employers and Governments, 20th–21st Centuries* (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), p. 77–116.



us take two examples from the Czech educational context at the lower primary school level – i.e., a space tasked with creating the first pictures of society. These early experiences become models for understanding and, above all, grasping the context in which an individual finds themselves, which they are somehow supposed to articulate.

We intentionally selected two school textbooks from two different academic subjects: national studies (combining history and geography) and the Czech language.¹⁶ First, let us consider *Obrázková encyklopedie Země* (An Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Earth), which, at the time of publishing, was recommended by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of the Czech Republic for children aged 9 to 12 (i.e., at the transition between the first and second stages of primary school).¹⁷ Not only has illustrator Gabriel Filčík (1946) used the most stereotypical characteristics of sub-Saharan Africans in the illustrations (nudity, exaggerated facial features, and primitive dwellings),¹⁸ but the author of the publication has used phrases such as “the darkest Africans,” “looking like overgrown dwarves,” “the most under-developed Africans,” or “Black Bantus” in the captions accompanying the illustrations.¹⁹ All of these phrases or comparisons are based on an essentialist conception of people of the coarsest and most primitive grain. Nor, of course, is a comparison with the non-African world lacking: “[...] almost 20 megacities, which are beginning to resemble metropolises in other continents.”²⁰ From the description, it is evident that, over thirty years after decolonisation, the African continent is catching up with the modern world. Thus, there cannot be any questions concerning authenticity or an Afrocentric view of the world. On the contrary, Africa is still understood

through a purely Eurocentric vision of the world; of course, via this tactic of degrading the other, we approach the position of the former colonial powers, who were the first to deploy it at the state level.

The second example is *Šmalcova abeceda* (Šmalec’s Alphabet), a primer for beginning readers.²¹ Problematic terms like “Eskimo” or “Indian” are thoughtlessly employed in the book absent any contextualisation.²² Moreover, when children learning their ABCs arrive at the letter G, they see a picture of a gorilla dressed in a military uniform and decorated with a number of medals. This humanised gorilla is sitting on a couch looking at a globe showing the African continent. Nevertheless, the short poem that accompanies this illustration mentions other places around the world: “Rio” and “Greenland.” Not a single mentioned location is visible on the globe as positioned, however. The impression conveyed by the primer’s double-page spread is inevitably suspect in its automatic connection of a depiction of a humanised ape with the African continent. Whether a conscious transmission of stereotypes or an unconscious usage rooted in imagination, it is a problematic depiction of thought processes based on distorted imagination and a propagandistic representation of colonised sub-Saharan nations. In the context of research into “scientific racism,” sub-Saharan ethnic groups have long been spoken about as the missing genetic link between the great apes and humans.

The Problematic Perspective of Development Aid

In “countries without colonial pasts,” the opposition to political correctness, which attempts to systematically and institutionally limit distorted depictions of the other, is captured by the term “cancel culture” – a modern form of direct intervention in reality that seeks to modify, censor, or boycott it. Opponents of political correctness thus

16 As an aside, let’s add one more example from a completely different field: cinematography. In 2023, the animated film *The Super Mario Bros* was released. In one part of this fictional world there exists a territory translated into Czech as *Království Kongů* (Kingdom of the Kongs). It is occupied by humanised animals resembling gorillas. At first glance, it is an innocent reference to King Kong, but behind this reference is a dehumanising reference to one of the greatest pre-colonial empires of the African kingdom, which bore the same name as the one in the children’s animated film. Comparing its inhabitants to animated gorillas is disparaging and references the colonial narrative.

17 E. Klímová, *Obrázková encyklopedie Země* (Prague: Kartografie, 1992).

18 *Ibid.*, p. 50–51.

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*

21 P. Šmalec, *Šmalcova abeceda* (Prague: Baobab, 2005). A second edition was published in 2010. Neither edition is paginated.

22 These terms primarily associated with the colonisation of the American continent have been criticised for many years due to their origin, imprecision and their generalising character. They were replaced several decades ago with the following terms: Inuits and First Nations.



openly fight against limitations to freedom of expression, which, in their interpretation, is mistaken for the uncritical acceptance of racist terminology. Clearly, it is difficult to build any type of collaboration on such foundations. As soon as the question of inequality and/or racism is inserted into an interpersonal exchange (verbal, relational, social, economic, military, etc.), relations between the participating sides are based on dominance, superiority, and inferiority, i.e., on some form of suppressing basic human freedom.

From this inherited – or rather, seized – position of superiority arises yet another fundamental challenge to healthy cooperation, initially framed as a seemingly enriching transfer of values, but gradually transforming into their imposition. This amounts to a late adoption of the aforementioned white man's burden and the internal conviction of the need to civilise. Let us once more borrow an example from *Engaging in Africa: Czechia's Strategy*: "The Czech Republic will contribute to the development of a stable, prosperous, healthy, and educated Africa."²³ Such an arrogant approach to Africa in the guise of assistance and humanitarian development is a very dangerous weapon, not only for Western countries, which thus solidify their leading position as global sheriff, but also for countries without colonies. They pretend to be historically unencumbered, but their actions nevertheless lead to profit and a strengthened position in a constantly reshuffling world order. This approach to collaboration firmly maintains the given world order by constantly casting formerly colonised nations as developing states that have a long way to go to catch up with the rest of the world in many developmental aspects. Thus, the image of modern European society is shaped.

In the context of this transmission of values, countries seemingly outside of the colonial sphere – those overshadowed within the EU, i.e., the former satellite blocs of the Soviet Union – take on the role of civiliser and succumb to the complex that postcolonial and decolonial theorists refer to as the white saviour complex.²⁴ After the period of decolonisa-

tion and the pursuit of autonomy – whether genuine or leading to the neocolonisation of African nations – the former colonial powers continued to perceive themselves as justified in spreading their conception of humanity and the world as universal, and they maintained their position at the centre of the globalised world. Over decades, this feeling transformed into a complex that determined these former powers' behaviour towards their former subjects. Countries that did not directly participate in colonial dominance have inherited this complex, thanks to which they seek to catch up retrospectively with their Western neighbours.

Genuine, mutually beneficial collaboration should be founded on mutual respect for shared, but distinct values, i.e., on similarity, as well as difference. An equitable exchange of knowledge, cultural heritage, or artistic artefacts must not rely on the idea that one of the participating parties is insufficient, nor be founded on prejudices that fundamentally weaken one participant's position to benefit the other. On the contrary, all of today's collaborations – whether institutionally established, or of a civic or other nature – should automatically tend towards mutual understanding and appreciation. Likewise, it is necessary to move away from power tensions within the framework of collaborations that are not focused on cooperation as such, but rather on the relative positions within the collaboration, which thus becomes hierarchical. Moreover, it is now very difficult to take a neutral view of the other without recourse to the ingrained, prejudiced images, often based on historical events, that have modelled relationships between individual parts of the world. The adoption of a neutral, unbiased, and unencumbered understanding of individuals, groups, and societies alike would open new possibilities for collaboration, freed from the webs of the past, a source of many grievances, and hostilities.

23 *Engaging in Africa: Czechia's Strategy*, p. 8. There are several sentences based on a similar declarative foundation: relating to the upholding of human rights (p. 4), democratic state governance (p. 4), sustainability (p. 4), modernisation (p. 14), and general development (p. 15).

24 M. Hughey, *The White Savior Film: Content, Critics, and Consumption* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014).



The African Continent and the Cultural Policy of the States of Central and Eastern Europe



The Strategic Infrastructure of Bilateral Relations between the Czech Republic and Africa

Michaela Židková and Pavla Hivert

Historical Context

Prior to 1989, Czechoslovakia established a number of bilateral relationships with individual decolonised African nations; these dated from the 1950s and occurred in the context of their decolonisation. However, intense contact with African political organisations active in individual African countries was established even prior to their decolonisation. Culture and cultural diplomacy were firmly embedded in these ties from the beginning (MZV, 2004).

In the early 1960s, these connections were part of an ambitious African concept in a context that further deepened previously established ties and quickly established diplomatic missions. Further bilateral agreements continued to be made at the same pace.

Cultural diplomacy was part of the “soft power” that paved the way for further economic and military cooperation. Czechoslovak cultural diplomacy was built on the principle of bilateral cultural agreements (most often an agreement combining education, culture, and science) and made use of many strategies, including the distribution of Czechoslovak films, the organisation

of exhibitions, and promotional tours featuring athletes, scientists, filmmakers, and musicians. Beginning in 1960, Czechoslovak Radio’s foreign broadcast, *Rádio Praha*, prepared a special programme for African listeners (Pešta, Korda, 2020). Other tools included *Dny Afriky* (African Days) and educational and cultural exchanges.

The Present

The negotiation of international treaties is an integral part of the foreign policy of the Czech Republic. Within the scope of the Ministry of Culture, it is primarily cultural agreements (Agreements on Cooperation in the fields of culture, education, science, etc.) that are negotiated. These agreements are governmental in nature and serve as the fundamental framework for implementing cooperation within the areas of culture and education.

The responsible authority (the entity in charge of negotiating the agreements) is, in accordance with Government Directive No. 131/2004, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which ensures that the negotiations are carried out. The resulting negotiations are approved by the government. Currently, there are a total of 27 cultural agreements in force between the Czech Republic and countries in Africa.

Implementation documents, also known as operational agreements, are negotiated in connection with cultural agreements on an as needed basis. These documents can be either governmental or sector-specific in nature. They establish the priorities for mutual cooperation over a specific period (typically three years) and define the organisational and financial rules governing the exchange.

Regarding agreements with African countries, it is important to note that, although there is a relatively high number of valid bilateral agreements, all of them were concluded under the former regime, from the 1960s to the 1980s. With the single exception of Egypt, there are no valid implementation documents containing specific commitments.

The implementation of these agreements varies depending on the current level of cooperation. They are utilised in a range of cultural projects, including artistic endeavours, as well as initiatives related to cultural heritage, e.g., collaborative projects involving the National Museum in Prague.



Strategic and Financial Support

The Czech Republic's cultural collaboration with African countries is not systematically supported and often relies on the individual initiatives of diplomats or cultural institutions.

The sole strategic document at the state level is [Engaging in Africa: Czechia's Strategy](#), a document prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and approved by the government on 26 September 2022. It responds to the heightened (global) need to establish partnerships and communication with African states. It focuses primarily on the development of relationships with Africa in the areas of security, the fight against terrorism, hybrid threats, and disinformation. A key overarching goal is the promotion of Czech public diplomacy activities in Africa, including efforts to present a balanced image of Africa to the Czech public, and foster discussion about activities in Africa across Czech governmental agencies. Other consistent priorities are general support for Czechia as a reliable partner, and the promotion of the country's good reputation.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also organises regular events such as Den Afriky (Africa Day) to coincide with International Africa Day (e.g., in 2024, the theme was the 30th anniversary of events from 1994: the end of apartheid in South Africa and the genocide in Rwanda. The event included the screening of a short video about the end of apartheid in South Africa and the film *Peti Pays*.) Another event is [Cool Czechia – Young African Leaders Study Trip](#), a strategic communication project, in which 20 young African leaders (successful, respected individuals in their countries from the fields of civil society, NGOs, media, and academia) travel to the Czech Republic at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The aim is to introduce the participants, selected in collaboration with Czech diplomatic missions from various African countries, to the Central European perspective on major global political, security, and economic issues, and to present Czechia as an open, democratic country with values that reflect its own recent history. A significant number of projects are carried out through Czech diplomatic missions in Africa, often thanks to the efforts of specific individuals at these offices. Their dedication plays a key role in fostering cultural and diplomatic initiatives between Czechia and African countries.

According to a statement by Michaela Žídková from the International Relations and European Union Department of the Ministry of Culture (Michaela Žídková, 2024), the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic does not target specific countries and regions in the area of international cultural cooperation. This suggests that cultural cooperation with African countries has not been specifically addressed or prioritised within the support frameworks offered by the Ministry of Culture to stakeholders in the cultural and creative sectors.

In grant selection processes for the support of cultural projects sent abroad (Department of International Relations and the EU) or received in Czechia (Department of Arts, Libraries, and Creative Industries), collaborative projects regularly appear across all fields. Examples include Monika Rebcová's Contemporary Dance Between Europe and Africa (in collaboration with Ghana), Czech participation in Dak'Art, the Biennale of Contemporary African Art in Dakar, Senegal (MeetFactory), and projects by the international contemporary dance festival Tanec Praha (various countries).

The Ministry also supported several translations of Czech literature, e.g. by the Egyptian publishing houses Al Arabi Publishing and Distributing, Mahrousa Center for Publishing, Sefsa Publishing and Elles Publishing, and Hohe Publisher in Ethiopia. In the field of literature, the International Book Fair and Literary Festival *Svět knihy* and the Czech Literary Centre took part in the book fair in Cairo, Egypt. This is linked to the position of the field of Czech Studies in Cairo.

There is strong collaboration in the area of cultural heritage, e.g., collaboration between the [National Museum in Prague](#) and the National Museum of Ethiopia on an exhibition project, the implementation of a project offering technical assistance to Algeria's National Museum (2023), financed by the Program of Activities to Support Source Countries of Migration (2020-2022), and archaeological research in Wad ban Naqa (2023, 2024, a regular activity in Sudan).

In the wider central European context, it is also necessary to cite the example of the [International Visegrad Fund](#), which often issues territorially targeted open calls and is very active in our region. Thus far, however, it has not initiated any special calls for collaboration with Africa, so systematic support is also absent from the regional level.



The Situation in Other Countries

The situation is similar in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This is due to a shared historical experience and, to a certain extent, the same evolution after 1990, when the political systems in these countries underwent transformations.

The single exception is the Federal Republic of Germany. The union of its two parts in 1990 led to the gradual adoption of the experience of then-West Germany, including both the reinforcement of an infrastructure for cooperating with Africa, and a general ethos of solidarity and fairness in this cooperation. Unequivocally, this was influenced by Germany's colonial history,²⁵ even though German colonial expansion began at a later stage in comparison with other European colonialist countries, German colonies were less extensive as a result.

We were able to collect initial data through a qualitative survey of Deconfining partners in individual countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Above all, these findings are based on the input and presentations of the participants in the roundtable, which provided an opportunity to present current national situations, along with the outputs of other research conducted in this area. The data obtained was supplemented by individual interviews, which served to clarify some details.

Summary of the Survey Carried Out with Partners of the Deconfining Project

In the summer of 2024, a survey was circulated amongst the Deconfining project partners from Eastern Europe – specifically, from Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovenia. The aim was to map the existing experience of cultural cooperation with African countries and create a foundation for preparing a roundtable on the topic. By the end of September, three countries had provided their replies: Poland, Slovenia, and Lithuania.

One of the research questions posed concerned whether the relevant ministries had defined priority African countries. While Poland mentioned Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda and Lithuania cited Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Mali, Slovenia had no defined priorities. However, the Slovenian representative, Andrej Berginc, admitted that defining priority countries is becoming increasingly relevant:

“Recently, it is necessary to define them, because we are too small to engage with the whole of Africa... our already limited resources are spread too thinly.”

To the question of whether or not an official strategy for cooperation with Africa exists, Poland responded with the historical context, including 1960s agreements with Guinea-Conakry and Angola. Lithuania described its development of cooperation to date as sporadic and fragmented, and presented concrete examples of implemented projects – such as anti-corruption education in the RSA and solar energy projects in Mali and Nigeria. Slovenia, on the contrary, stated that it currently has no cultural agreements with African countries.

In the area of independent initiatives, the situation differs. Several organisations operating in Poland invite artists from the Global South, such as the AFRIKAMERA, AfroBeats, and Lelenfant festivals, but, according to respondents, an emphasis on reciprocity is lacking. Lithuania noted, for example, that cooperation with African partners was initiated by the National Dramatic Theatre in Kaunas only thanks to the Deconfining project. Slovenia, on the contrary, has other projects taking place outside the context of Deconfining, such as Share or Starts4Africa.

25 The German Empire had colonies in Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries and these gradually expanded. German colonies in Africa included German South West Africa (today's Namibia), German East Africa (today's Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi), Togoland, and Cameroon (Preslová, 2015).



To the request for examples of inspiring cultural projects, Poland mentioned an extensive collaboration between the city of Wrocław (UNESCO World Book Capital) and Conakry, Guinea, which includes the supply of over 100,000 books for children. Slovenia and Lithuania designated Deconfining as their most interesting project, with Slovenia also including the above-mentioned initiatives Share and Starts4Africa. The Polish organisation Art Transparent also recalled its research into historical projects of cultural exchange between Poland and Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, which has produced catalogues and publications.

The respondents also provided contacts and recommendations of researchers and cultural specialists who systematically engage with Africa. These tips were further utilised in preparing the programme for the roundtable.

Roundtable – 11 March 2025

The roundtable, which took place online, was organised with the aim of trying to map the situation in other countries – Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, and Germany – at a deeper level. The Czech Republic was also an important part of the discussion. The participants in the roundtable included both strategic players at the state level and specialists whose expertise is grounded in research or artistic activities with various African countries.

Participants:

- Felix Sodemann,
Touring Artists, ITI, Germany
- Karolina Bieniek,
Director, ART TRANSPARENT, Poland
- Marie Le Sourd,
Secretary General, On the Move
- Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu,
Founder and Head Curator of makwande.republic, a residency centre in the rural Eastern Cape district, Republic of South Africa
- Sara Božanić,
Director of the Institute for Transmedia Design, Slovenia
- Andrej Berginc,
Directorate for Economic and Public Diplomacy, Division of Bilateral Economic Cooperation, Slovenia
- Anna Masłoń-Oracz,
Rector's Representative for Africa, Warsaw Economic University, Poland
- Dea Vidović,
Department for Culture and Communication, Institute for Development and International Relations, Croatia
- Joanna Matyjasiak,
Adviser on the International Conservation of Tangible Heritage, Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland
- Michaela Židková,
International Relations and European Union Department, Ministry of Culture, Czech Republic
- Pavla Hivert and Barbora Novotná,
NIK



Major Conclusions of the Roundtable

Historical Context

In contrast to the other countries in the discussion, Germany has a specific history linked to its colonial heritage. However, the Eastern Bloc also had strong cultural relations with a number of African countries (Guinea, then-Zaire, Ethiopia) in the last century. Moreover, Croatia and other countries of the former Yugoslavia had very strong ties with Africa prior to 1990, during the period of the Non-Aligned Movement.²⁶ Mirroring the situation in the Czech Republic, it can also be observed in other countries that bilateral cultural agreements, the primary means of cooperation prior to 1990, are often outdated (by 20 to 50 years) and lack corresponding financial resources.

Strategic and Financial Context

A majority of the countries (Slovenia, Poland, Croatia, the Czech Republic) lack a specific strategy for cultural cooperation with Africa. Again, Germany is unique in having a more concrete approach. In general, insufficient interest and financing at the national level persist. Specialised funds are lacking (with the exception of some German programmes). A number of projects focused on cooperation with African countries (e.g., the AFRIKAMERA festival in Poland) are insufficiently

funded in comparison with events targeting other countries and regions. Another important common finding is that official policies often have a minimal real impact on practical cooperation.

Structural Problems

The participants agreed that the problems include the fragmentation of financing at the federal, state, and municipal level (especially in Germany), along with limited diplomatic presence (Poland, for example, has just 10 embassies for 56 African states).

For the most part, cultural exchange takes place in the context of broader socio-political and historical structures on the basis of activities carried out by individual cultural or educational institutions and organisations, as well as individuals.

Visa problems are a major obstacle to cooperation. In many cases, it is possible to speak of institutional racism concerning visas and mobility.

Current Positive Trends

On the other hand, some positive trends were mentioned, such as the growing significance of African and Afro-European diasporas (particularly in the last 15 years). The initiation of a restitution process for stolen cultural artefacts (in Germany) was also cited; in other countries, however, this debate remains in an initial phase. Interpersonal relationships as a driving force for practical cultural cooperation are also a major trend. Regularly recurring actions, such as Slovenia's annual African Days, are also viewed positively. In 2024, a panel about cultural collaboration with Africa was organised with guests such as Samba Yonga from Zambia and Vydia Tamby from Senegal.

²⁶ The Non-Aligned Movement was created in 1961 and is active to this day. The purpose of the organisation is expressed by the Havana Declaration of 1979: "to ensure the national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of non-aligned countries" in their "struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and all forms of foreign aggression, occupation, domination, interference or hegemony as well as against great power and bloc politics" (Vychodil, 1987).



A Comparison of Germany and the Remaining Central and Eastern European Countries

With the exception of Germany, the other Central and Eastern European countries exhibit similar symptoms in their cooperation with Africa:

- Absence of strategic documents for cultural cooperation; where such documents do exist, they are typically limited to development assistance.
- Lack of specific support tools; so-called “passive funding” mechanisms prevail.
- The African diaspora in these countries is small and largely invisible. For example, in the Czech Republic in 2019, there were only 3,088 Africans out of a total of 595,881 foreigners in a population of 11 million.
- Very limited presence of these countries in Africa, including a low number of diplomatic missions and, in the Czech case, only one Czech Centre (in Cairo, Egypt).
- Activities in individual countries are developed primarily thanks to the work of individuals within diplomatic missions and their collaborators.
- A comprehensive restitution process concerning cultural heritage has not yet begun; the discussion remains fragmented.

In contrast, Germany, the largest country in Central Europe with 83 million inhabitants, was divided into two completely different states after World War II. West Germany (FRG) developed as a democratic market economy under the influence of the Western allies. East Germany (GDR) developed as a socialist state under Soviet influence, as a result of which its starting point was similar to the other countries in this study. Although the barrier between the two states remained impermeable until 1990, East Germany rapidly modernised after reunification and gradually adopted the institutional and cultural models of the former West Germany.

According to the outcomes of the roundtable discussion, this historical divergence is also reflected in their respective approaches to cooperation with Africa:

- Since 2000, there has been significant overlap between German and African cultural spheres, particularly due to the activities of diasporic and Afro-German communities.
- In the past 15 years, this cooperation has deepened significantly, with African artists becoming regular participants in international festivals and cultural programmes in Germany.
- The growing diaspora actively supports cultural cooperation with Africa and is an integral part of Germany’s cultural scene (e.g. as curators or leaders of cultural institutions).
- Strategies for cooperation with Africa exist at multiple levels, from federal states to municipalities.
- Funding is provided through active mechanisms, including concrete support programmes in the field of culture.
- Germany also plays a strong role on the African continent itself, primarily through the targeted support of a network of Goethe-Institut branches.
- The restitution process began in 2022 with the return of the first items to Nigeria; however, progress has been very slow – less than 1% of all looted objects have been returned. In the case of Cameroon alone, an estimated 40,000 artworks are held in the storage facilities of German museums.



Major Recommendations

The roundtable participants also offered some recommendations and proposals for improving the situation, which can be divided into the following subgroups:

Systemic Measures

1. The creation of a **single platform** for sharing information about cultural projects.
2. **Simplifying the visa process** for African artists.
3. The systematising of cooperation (transitioning from individual initiatives to an **institutional approach**).
4. Increasing **dedicated financing** for cultural cooperation with Africa.
5. Support for **academic programmes** (African Studies at European universities).
6. **Better coordination** among European countries.
7. More advocacy for **preferential agreement** under the 2005 UNESCO Convention.

Practical Steps for Cultural Institutions

1. **Build collaborations on the basis of successful existing initiatives:**
 - Festivals (AFRIKAMERA in Poland)
 - Residency programs
 - Combining culture and economics
 - Support for long-term projects (Creative Africa in the Czech Republic, the activities of Humanitas Africa).
2. Utilisation of **diplomatic events** (e.g., the panel on cultural cooperation during Africa Day).
3. Creating a lexicon for **explaining artists' working conditions** to officials making decisions on visas.
4. Analysis of the role of **African diasporic communities in Europe**.
5. Partnerships **outside of the cultural sector** (e.g., cooperation with Foreign Ministries).
6. **Interdepartmental cooperation** (the Czech-Ethiopian example – National Museums).
7. **Efficient use of European Union funds** (the European Spaces programme, EUNIC).

Principles of Just and Solidary Collaboration

1. **Deeper research** into the history of cultural relationships.
2. Involving African colleagues and diplomats for a **two-way perspective**.
3. Applying an **intersectional approach** to forms of oppression and prejudice.
4. Advocating for **justice in mobility** when addressing sustainability issues.
5. Practicing genuine **solidarity** (going above and beyond one's own interests).
6. Creating **iterative processes** (learning as you go, adapting).
7. Involving local **African artists and specialists in the curation** of cultural programmes in European countries.



Twenty Years of the Festival Tvůrčí Afrika aneb Všichni jsme Afričani (Creative Africa, or We Are All Africans)

Lucie Němečková



The Origins of the Project

It is said that remarkable events are born without great fanfare and from very little. This is how the first edition of a Czech theatre festival focusing on Africa and the African diaspora saw the light of day in 2000. Seemingly the only festival of its kind in Central and Eastern Europe, it was founded by two women, theatre makers with a vision of theatre without borders: dramaturg and journalist Lucie Němečková, the festival's current director and the author of this text, and Frederika Smetanová, a French actress and principle of the Francophone theatre Divadlo na voru, who was then based in Prague. The festival's founder, Lucie Němečková, felt the initial impulse at the theatre La Chapelle du Verbe Incarné, which presented Caribbean and African dramaturgy as part of the off-programme at the world-famous Avignon Festival. Creative Africa's first allies and partners on Czech soil were the the Arts and Theatre Institute, the Institut Français in Prague and the network of Alliances françaises in the Czech Republic, because the festival also toured outside of the capital city. The predominantly Francophone slant in recognising and promoting sub-Saharan dramaturgies and theatres logically emerged from the organisers' personal areas of expertise, the collaborating partner institutions, and the broader context of Francophonie Month, of which the first ten years of the festival were a part. It was also the case that French-speaking Africa was much less well-known in the Czech Republic than English-speaking Africa. After a pause from 2012 to 2014, and due to the late deadline for announcing grant results, the 2015 festival was moved to the end of May, thus coinciding with International Africa Day. At the same time, the festival expanded its programme to include Anglophone countries and also began to focus on the Caribbean diaspora for the first time.

Why Czech Theatre and Africa?

Do not expect any noble motives. The truth is, there was a lack of awareness at the beginning, as well as, perhaps, a number of preconceptions. What was important, though, was the desire and resolve to do something about it. To get under the surface of the clichés, discover the unknown and not keep those discoveries to ourselves. In the

process, it gradually became clear that not only would this involve a degree of personal cultivation, along with the cultivation of the entire Czech cultural environment, but that essential work needed to be done, namely to lay the foundations for systematic recognition of contemporary African and, later, Caribbean dramaturgies and theatres. The terrain in which we first operated was reminiscent of a desert; there was not much to build on or rely upon. On the other hand, there was also a certain intellectual drought, a natural curiosity. At the same time, the desert was a minefield. The open racism of society in the 1990s was still resonant; a lack of trust and suspicion was palpable even amongst more open people and institutions. Few people truly grasped the importance and scale of our project. We had to endlessly explain everything and constantly justify our existence.

Africa as the Guest of Honour at Svět knihy (Book World) Prague

An important moment of African emancipation in the Czech cultural environment came in 2003, when the enlightened then-director of the International Book Fair and Literary Festival *Svět knihy*, Dana Kalinová, designated Africa the guest of honour. She invited many African writers to Prague, enlivening the festival and awakening interest in Africa. This wave also strengthened the second edition of Creative Africa. Thanks to this synergy, the festival's guest, playwright Caya Makhele, has grown so fond of the Czech Republic that he has been regularly returning here for twenty years. Some of his works have been inspired by Prague and the Czech Republic, such as the novel *Prague Morning* or the drama *Spellbound*, inspired by Dvořák's *Rusalka*. The encouraging Czech interest in Africa soon dissipated, however. The Czechs were apparently of the opinion that they had met a few authors and that was enough for them; there was no need to meet and know more. By the third edition of Creative Africa, it was as if we were back at the beginning.



An African Theatre Library

One of the festival's main goals was to expand the dramaturgical offer of available plays. The total number of theatrical texts by African authors (note that we are speaking here only of male authors) published in Czech prior to 2000 could be counted on the fingers of a single hand. Only two Anglophone authors, Wole Soyinka of Nigeria and Athol Fugard from South Africa, had entered the consciousness of spectators, or specialist readers. Thus, beginning in 2002, almost three decades after the publication of the last African play in Czech, Creative Africa initiated the creation and publication of new translations by contemporary male and female playwrights from Africa and the diaspora. The festival's collaboration with the Arts and Theatre Institute and its pioneering series *Současných her* (Contemporary Plays) was key to this project. By 2011, it had published the first ten plays by dramatists such as Kofi Kwahoulé, Caya Makhele, José Pliya, Kossi Efoui, Léandre Alain Baker, Sony Labou Tansi, Koulsy Lamko, Gustave Akakpo, Rodrigue Norman, and Slimane Benaïssa. This initiative finally wound down, however, taking with it the real possibility of publishing plays by the invited authors, as there was no publisher in the Czech Republic interested in publishing these kinds of theatrical texts. The plays remained with the translators, or theatrical agencies, but the average person had no chance to access them. Dramaturgs rarely seek them out; theatre managers are concerned that they will be less attractive and unintelligible, which will be reflected in lower attendance. The lifespan of these plays is unfortunately minimal. Although a few excellent staging achievements have emerged (particularly of Koffi Kwahoulé's *Nestyda* [The Little Stain] at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in 2003 or Caya Makhele's *Bajka o lásce, pekle a márnici* [The Fable of Love, Hell and the Morgue] at Prague's Theatre Na Prádle in 2004) most of the published plays went no further than the staged readings held during the festival.

No less valuable, if short-lived, was a collaboration with Czech Radio's Vltava station, where, primarily thanks to dramaturg Jana Paterová, a number of noteworthy productions emerged from 2003 to 2010: Caya Makhele's *Bajka o lásce, pekle a márnici* (The Fable of Love, Hell and the Morgue), Kossi Efoui's *Převozníkův malý bratr* (The Rower's

Little Brother), José Pliya's *Maska Siky* (The Mask of Sika) and Koulsy Lamko's *Žena z Haiti* (The Woman from Haiti). "To be interested in African dramaturgy means to step out of the crowd, not to be a slave to consumerism. Czechs need to seek out these other perspectives, and not just because we were closed off by socialism for so long. If we don't search for these perspectives from elsewhere, we are very easily prey to manipulation," stated Michal Lázňovský, the translator of the first ten plays, in a conversation with French theatre scholar Sylvie Chalaye.

Since 2015, and in the second phase of its existence, the festival has reflected the work of young authors (Sédjro Houansou, Aristide Tarnagda, Penda Diouf, Laura Sheïlla Inangoma), begun to look at work from the islands (Soeuf Elbadawi from Comoros), and, above all, continued long-term collaboration with the association ETC_Caraïbe from Martinique (Alfred Alexandre, Bernard Lagier, Daniely Francisque, Alexandra Déglise, Veronique Kanor, Alibabar Kenjah, Adeline Flaun, Steffy Glissant, Ina Boulanger and Marie-Thérèse Picard). In 2019, it established a project of mutual exchange of authors between the Czech Republic and Martinique titled *Ostrov a kontinenty* (Islands and Continents). This remarkable project has repeatedly failed to find support in the Czech environment and is threatened with cancellation.

In contrast, a newly established collaboration with the Prague Municipal Library and the UNESCO programme Prague – City of Literature, which offers residencies for writers, is thriving: in 2023, Bernard Lagier of Martinique wrote the play *Cham* in Prague, connecting the Martinique Carnival with the Velvet Revolution. In 2024, Laura Sheïlla Inangoma wrote a play in Prague inspired by the Czech feminist Františka Plamínková.

The total number of plays by African and Caribbean authors reached 30 in 2024. Apart from the festival, however, there is the absence of a platform where these remarkable texts might receive a second life. They are awaiting their chance; I believe that they have not spoken their last word, and that the younger generation will still discover them in the future.



Divadlo Bez Hranic (Theatre Without Borders) – Theatre by Czech Africans

In addition to presenting African dramatic work, the festival also focuses on the presentation of Czech Africans on the domestic cultural scene. Each year, Czech Africans are represented in music, song, and dance, but, increasingly, also in theatre or literature. Since 2017, initially as part of African Night at Theatre Na Prádle, a tradition of open-air programmes has begun in mythical Prague locations, such as Václav Havel Square near the National Theatre, and Mariánské Square in front of the Municipal Library and City Hall. Generally, however, the prevailing opinion in Czechia is that there are no actors with African roots here. This is mistaken, however. There are not many of them, but they are here. Still, with a few exceptions, Czech theatre makers are incapable of working with them on an equal footing. Their “exoticism” is usually emphasised in productions and they tend to be used more as part of the scenery. This is not a purely artistic problem, but a society-wide issue, the question of a new sensitivity and the blending of cultures.

Divadlo Bez Hranic (Theatre Without Borders) is an independent Prague theatre company made up of international artists, predominantly Africans permanently based in Prague, biracial people with African heritage, and Czechs inspired by Africa. The ensemble first performed in Prague with the production *Capoeira aneb z Afriky a Brazílie do Prahy* (Capoeira, or From Africa and Brazil to Prague), directed by Tomáš Zizka. In 2008, in collaboration with director Zoja Mikotová, they staged a puppet production for children, *Pohádka ptáka Afrikána* (Fairytale of the African Bird), followed two years later by *Pavoučení* (Spidering) with Jiří Jelínek. The Czech-African Theatre Without Borders was not unique at the time. Around the same time, the theatre ensemble TukuTiko was active in Pilsen, led by Jan Bashaijha Mwesigwa under the aegis of the Cultura Africa association.

While it did not become the theatrical event of the season, *Capoeira* is worthy of our attention primarily because it is the first play in the history of Czech theatre written and staged by an African playwright in Czech. Although the result is a

collective work, the main author is the actor Paul American, who came to Czechia from Angola. The play, featuring a foreword by the former Czech ambassador to Angola, Jaroslav Olša, Jr. and an afterword by Lucie Němečková, was published by the Větrné mlýny publishing house as part of the series *Současná česká hra* (The Contemporary Czech Play) in 2008. Among others, the first, and, until recently, the only, professional actress of Afro-European heritage, Eliška Mesfin Boušková took part in the creation of the performance. In the production, she spoke openly for the first time about stereotypes in casting, emphasis on skin colour at the expense of acting ability, the untactfulness of colleagues, undignified situations in theatre practice, and the search for her own identity in an environment full of misunderstanding, pseudo-witty remarks, and open racism. The younger generation is more cosmopolitan in orientation; they are also more confident and determined. It is far from an ideal state. Still, there are artists like actress and dancer Angela Nwagbo, a recent graduate of DAMU, who consistently question their identity and present themselves in an emancipated and determined manner, representing the future of Czech theatre.

The Future of the Project?

After twenty editions, the festival Creative Africa, or We Are All Africans is ending. It no longer can – and does not wish to – stand up to the unbearable pressures to which it has long been consistently exposed. Such pressures are intensifying and multiplying with the changing times. This is not merely due to the systematic underfinancing of the project, the insufficient donations from municipal and state institutions and foreign partners, which show no inclination to change, and thus limit the possibility of achieving greater ambitions and fully realised work that is unparalleled in the Czech Republic. The decision also relates to the exorbitant increase in prices, particularly of plane tickets and accommodation, but also the rental of theatres, even friendly ones, and cultural venues in general. The fees demanded, particularly by young artists, are also on the rise. This is related to a disproportionate growth in bureaucracy that is overwhelming and suffocating for small festivals that function on a non-professional basis when



it comes to employment relationships and pay. It is related to worsening travel conditions in the sense of obtaining visas. The unbearable nature of the situation is further influenced by the opinions of grant committees, who, under the guise of ecology and economic difficulty, deny projects involving far-off destinations. Nor is the situation helped by the xenophobic moods in society towards any migrants not from Ukraine. This double standard is literally driving out all non-European applicants, who would otherwise be willing to settle here, despite climatic adversity, and linguistic, cultural, or religious differences. There is a lack of non-commercial partners from the ranks of Czech theatres and like-minded festivals, and of institutions that would be interested in long-term collaboration without demanding financial or other types of expediency, as was possible at the beginning with partners such as Svět Knihy, the Arts and Theatre Institute, Czech Radio and the International Festival of Theatre of European Regions in Hradec Králové. And, last but not least, there is a lack of unrelenting enthusiasts willing to go above and beyond the limits of the possible.

EDITORIAL NOTE: The text was written in 2024. Despite its pessimistic outlook, the festival took place again in both 2025 and 2026.





Africa in Cultural Events and Projects in the Czech Republic

This chapter presents summaries of interviews conducted in the first quarter of 2025 with representatives from the Czech cultural scene. Full transcripts are available in the ATI archive.



Angela Nwagbo: *Confluence* / Angela Nwagbo and Siaka Toure

Angela Nwagbo is a performer and author of Nigerian descent, born and currently based in the Czech Republic. Her artistic work consistently explores identity and the relationship between African and European cultural roots. Her experiences with international cooperation, particularly with Senegal, highlight a number of the obstacles that accompany Czech-African projects.

Angela created *Confluence*, a performance exploring the “merging” of her Czech and African identities. She collaborated on the project with Senegalese musician Siaka Toure, whom she met during a dance residency at the renowned École des Sables. This experience, she recalls, offered a powerful shift in perspective: “For the first time, I was in a place where the African part of me felt completely normal... and the Czech part incredibly exotic. It was eye-opening.”

Angela managed the entire project herself, handling visa applications, arranging accommodation for the guest artist, and securing funding. The financial aspect proved to be a major obstacle. Although she received support through the PerformCzech CONNECT call (ATI), each additional performance faces high costs related to the travel and stay of a non-European artist in the Czech Republic: “I thought creating the show would be the hardest part. But it turned out that performing it again is just as hard – maybe even harder. Festivals aren’t prepared for someone coming from Africa.”

In addition to visa and logistical demands, Angela points to structural shortcomings in the grant system. Many mobility programmes are inaccessible to artists from non-European countries, and grants often only support European collaboration. Grant schemes that focus on cooperation between Europe and Africa exist in Western Europe, often targeting the African diaspora there, but no such support exists in Central and Eastern

Europe. Moreover, Angela notes a lack of foundational contact networks or “cultural bridges” between Czech and African institutions: “Even if it’s not direct financial support, at least building bridges between institutions would help a lot. If you’re going to a Francophone country and don’t know it, how are you supposed to find the right centre or partner?”

Language also proved to be a significant barrier. In her collaboration with Senegal, Angela encountered the widespread use of French and local languages such as Wolof. Speaking Czech and English, she learned basic Wolof and French to communicate with colleagues: “I first learned Wolof, then French. But most textbooks are French-Wolof – there’s no simple path. And it’s the native languages that express people’s true identity.” She emphasises that learning only colonial languages is insufficient; European cultural institutions should better reflect Africa’s linguistic diversity and the importance of indigenous languages for deeper understanding and cultural respect.

Despite the obstacles, Angela continues her collaboration through dance workshops and a new solo performance. Yet without institutional support, funding, and international connections, Czech-African cooperation remains driven by individuals, often working without adequate resources. Angela believes systemic support could make a difference: “If there were institutional backing, people would use it more. A lot of people are afraid to go to Africa because they simply don’t know what to expect.”

Angela also critiques the outdated ways African art is often presented in the Czech Republic: as folklore or exoticism. She points to the absence of a contemporary, dynamic image of African culture in the Czech context, and the lack of interest in current African or Afro-European creators: “This isn’t theatre of today. It’s either a museum piece, an act of adoration, or a stereotype. What’s missing is someone who engages with Africa because it’s a culturally and philosophically compelling topic.”

She contrasts this with how African themes are approached in countries like France, Germany, or the Netherlands, where contemporary, aesthetically developed, and thematically relevant projects are being produced: “What I enjoy about collaborations I see elsewhere is that they treat African themes like it’s the year 2025. It’s not some



museum show, it's not about traditional Africa – it's fresh, it's relevant.”

While African authors and artists are often integrated into cultural production in Western Europe, Angela notes a lack of broader awareness or interest in African philosophies, creators, or contemporary cultural trends in the Czech Republic. As a result, African culture is often reduced to stereotypes or folklore. The interview also revealed the broader marginalisation of African themes in education and cultural discourse. Angela, for example, notes that during her studies at DAMU, she encountered no course on African or diasporic theatre. Knowledge of the cultural context of African countries remains minimal in the Czech setting, creating a fertile ground for stereotyping.

Angela has also long addressed the issue of casting non-majority actors in Czech theatre. She explains that most acting offers she receives are defined by her ethnicity – often roles of stereotypically “African” characters. She recalls being offered a role where she was to play the mother of a white character “because it would be funny,” which she refused. In this context, she mentions a recent public discussion initiated by the new leadership at DAMU²⁷: “The fact that DAMU started this conversation means something. It carries weight in Czech theatre. And speaking openly about ethnic casting and representation might trigger change.”

Still, she notes that systemic change is slow, and her personal experience has not significantly improved; she continues to receive roles based primarily on her skin colour. She has also explored themes of Afro-Czech identity^{28, 29} in collaboration with linguistic anthropologist Stephanie Inge Rudwick from the University of Hradec Králové.

27 [Panel discussion: Etnická rozmanitost na DAMU a v Českém divadle](#) [Ethnic Diversity at DAMU and in Czech Theatre], 26 June 2024, Theatre Faculty at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (DAMU).

28 A. Nwagbo and S. I. Rudwick, ‘Restricted Affiliation: The Costs of Otherness among Afroczechs’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 47, no. 15 (2024), pp. 3259–3279, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2024.2303365> (accessed 16 June 2025).

29 A. Nwagbo and S. I. Rudwick, ‘Black Czech Arts in the Making? Disrupting Racial Profiling’, in A. Průchová Hrůzová (ed.), *Public Narratives of Decolonization and Racial (In)Justice in Central and Southeast Europe: Enemies and Colonies, Patriots and Riots* [forthcoming].



Barbora Příhodová and Adam Svoboda: Prague Quadrennial

The interview with Barbora Příhodová, Artistic Director of PQ 2027, and Adam Svoboda, the project's Executive Manager, focused on experiences and challenges in cultural cooperation between the Prague Quadrennial (PQ) and African partners. Although Africa was already represented by Tunisia in the first PQ, held in 1967, systematic research or long-term strategic cooperation with African countries has yet to be undertaken.

Historically, the countries most frequently represented in the main exhibition have been Egypt and South Africa (five times each). In the two most recent editions, Morocco, Cameroon, and, in 2019, a consortium of six African countries also participated. In 2023, South Africa, along with Canada, received an award in the Exhibition of Theatre Space category for the project *Theatre in the Backyard*.

This category is often chosen by African countries as it allows for a strong visual presentation without requiring the entire team to be present on-site. In 2023, this included:

- *Documenting the Windybrow Arts Centre Now* (South Africa),
- *Haduwa Pata* (Ghana),
- *New Theatre*, a collaborative project by Uganda, the United Kingdom, and Greece,
- and a presentation by the Ubumuntu Arts Festival (Rwanda).

In contrast, two projects from Burkina Faso submitted to the Performance section could not be realised due to visa complications, highlighting a systemic issue that repeatedly emerges as a key barrier.

The thematic section PQ Talks, curated by Barbora Příhodová in 2023, included a sub-section

on the decolonisation of scenography and was aimed at creating space for perspectives that challenge dominant Western scenographic discourse. Speakers included the Nigerian scholar Babatunde Allen Bakare, Napo Masheane from South Africa, and scenography theorist Nkululeko Sibanda from Zimbabwe, who was ultimately unable to attend in person due to visa issues.

A highlight was the participation of Asiimwe Kawe, Artistic Director of the Kampala International Theatre Festival, who presented at PQ Talks 2023: "...she approached it in a very performative way... demonstrating that in Uganda, storytelling is a traditional theatrical form, where the storyteller actively engages with the audience." The presentation was well received and led to further collaboration, with the PQ team later attending the festival in Kampala. Such moments demonstrate the importance of personal encounters and their potential to foster long-term relationships: "It may seem like small things or small steps, but it's the only viable path. Step by step, slowly, because the obstacles are large and systemic."

Given the challenges of bringing full national teams, PQ more often invites individual artists and theorists. For example, the Kenyan architectural collective *Cave Bureau* served as keynote speakers at the 2022 PQ Symposium, and Asiimwe Kawe returned as a jury member for PQ 2023.

The most critical barriers identified were visa policies and a lack of financial support: "At the last PQ, most participants couldn't attend in person because of visa issues – they had to join online. And things are clearly getting worse."

Visas are a systemic issue affecting not only artists but also theorists and cultural workers. According to Příhodová, the video-based format of the Theatre Space section is one reason why African countries are more frequently represented there: "There's more representation in the Theatre Space section because it was mostly about presenting via video."

In addition to visas, limited financial access for non-European countries was also noted. Substantial help came from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which covered travel costs for some speakers in 2022 and 2023. However, most European funding programmes remain closed to countries outside of Europe – except for a few partner states such as Tunisia, within the Creative Europe and Erasmus+ frameworks.



The PQ team sees promising avenues for support in tools such as UNESCO's International Fund for Cultural Diversity (2005), where PQ could act as the project guarantor while the official application would be submitted by a local African organisation. They also point to the broader possibilities available in Western Europe, such as collaborations between art schools in Hamburg and a university in Kampala.

Recommendations include building bilateral relationships and expanding practical mobility tools (e.g. CzechMobility.Info) with user-friendly manuals and guides for artists and organisers: "When to apply for visas, what documents to prepare, what to look out for – it should be clearly and accessibly available."

Looking ahead to PQ 2027, which will mark the 60th anniversary of the event, the team plans to dedicate more space to themes and regions that have been historically underrepresented – including the African continent as a whole. According to Barbora Příhodová, it is essential to strengthen direct bilateral ties and build trust gradually, rather than relying solely on large-scale international calls. Africa is currently perceived within PQ as a "blank spot" on the map of cultural cooperation – and that is precisely what the team intends to change.



Filip Košťálek: Colours of Ostrava Festival

The Colours of Ostrava festival has long positioned itself within the Czech music scene as a multicultural event, with an emphasis on genre diversity and the geographic variety of its performers. Africa – as the cradle of world music – has been present in the festival programme from the very beginning, although its current representation is declining. “In the past, there used to be quite a few African bands – around four or five. That number has definitely decreased,” notes the artistic director of the festival, Filip Košťálek.

According to Košťálek, African music generally receives a positive response from Czech audiences, especially in the context of Colours, where people expect music from across the globe. Nonetheless, the festival currently faces several key obstacles when programming African acts, ranging from visa issues and rising travel costs to shifts in the global music market. As he explains: “Africa doesn’t receive the same level of support; it’s less institutionalised, and it’s often very difficult to bring these artists to Europe. We’ve had several cases where artists couldn’t come because they didn’t get visas.”

The festival’s curatorial vision also plays a crucial role. Košťálek emphasises originality and musical innovation – qualities he believes are sometimes lacking in African projects. “Nowadays, if a band comes from Congo, they do exactly what bands did ten years ago: recycled instruments and so on. We’re always looking for something new, something the European audience hasn’t already seen.”

Although the Colours team tries to attend events in Africa – such as the Dakar Music Expo – most artist selection still takes place through European agents and networks. Showcases like WOMEX are becoming less accessible for African bands due to a lack of financial support: “They have to pay everything themselves, which is impossible for emerging bands. If they don’t have a strong agent willing to invest, they won’t make it to Europe.”

Direct communication with African artists is often complicated by differences in work culture. Košťálek notes that it can be difficult to receive materials on time and to plan and organise professional productions: “They perceive time differently, tasks differently. That complicates cooperation and communication, for small and large bands alike.” He recalls, for instance, the last-minute cancellation of a performance by Nigerian star Burna Boy, without a clear explanation.

Despite these challenges, interest in African music and collaboration remains strong, thanks in part to the personal commitment of curators and connections with promoters and programmers. Košťálek cites Dakar Music Expo as an inspiring example of how the West African scene connects to the international music infrastructure. “It’s a phase of building knowledge, and that has to happen in cooperation with people who are already part of the European or American music industry.”

Košťálek also highlights the lack of systemic support for the export of African music and the need to establish a framework to help bands navigate the global music business. He believes African music offers a valuable perspective on “our Europeanness” but reminds us that Czech organisers – unlike those in France or Belgium – lack historical ties and institutional infrastructure that would make such cooperation easier.



Klára Trsková: AfroFilmes Festival

Klára Trsková has long fostered cooperation with cultural actors from Portuguese-speaking African countries, primarily through the AfroFilmes festival, held annually since 2023 at the Ponrepo cinema in Prague. The festival focuses on films from sub-Saharan African states and their diasporas in Latin America and Europe.

In addition to curating the festival, Trsková publishes interviews with filmmakers and writers, translates works by Lusophone African authors, writes academic texts on historical relations with Czechoslovakia, and actively participates in international conferences. She has conducted research in Maputo (Mozambique), where she lectured at Eduardo Mondlane University, and has spent time in Bissau, Accra, Praia, and São Tomé. She collaborates long-term with the CCM Mindelo cultural centre and the art school M_EIA on the Cape Verde Islands.

Despite the breadth of her activities, she faces ongoing issues with funding and the lack of long-term support schemes. Regarding financing for collaboration with African nations, she states that she relies primarily on her own resources: “I do most of this in my free time – combining vacations with research and so on.” She has been able to secure partial funding from the National Film Archive (where she is employed), the Camões Institute in Prague, the Czech Association of Portuguese Studies, and embassies that typically offer PR support or assist with film rights. In 2025, the festival received support from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ “Africa Programme” for the years 2023–2025.

When organising events on the African continent, funding remains the main obstacle: “What is considered a ‘small’ screening fee for a Czech institution like the NFA (e.g. €50 for a Czech film) is a very large amount for a Cape Verdean educational institution, which they often can’t afford.”

One factor that does facilitate cooperation with African partners is a “network of personal

relationships, contacts, and recommendations. Without that, it’s very difficult to conduct research or plan cultural events in these countries. It makes sense, because in my opinion, European institutions often make empty promises of collaboration that never materialise. For local intellectuals and artists, it’s not worth investing their time if they’re not sure the project will actually happen.”

Visa formalities have not been a major barrier for Trsková so far. She describes obtaining visas for most African countries without difficulties; for instance, she received a visa for Guinea-Bissau on the spot, thanks to a personal contact at the embassy whose staff remembered studying in Czechoslovakia. The only exception was Mozambique, for which she had to travel to another EU country. Festival guests usually receive visas, especially when applications are supported by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the status of the National Film Archive as a state-funded cultural institution. Still, problematic cases do occur. For example, the South African filmmaker Phumi Morare received a visa for the Czech Republic, but was later denied a UK visa, extending her stay in Prague by an extra week. This required ad hoc programming outside the original festival framework. In another case, the participation of Mozambican director Lara Sousa likely only went smoothly because she holds Portuguese citizenship, without which conditions might have been far more difficult.

Such experiences highlight the uneven and unpredictable nature of mobility between Africa and Europe – not only due to bureaucracy, but also because of broader cultural and political dynamics.



Pavel Štorek: 4+4 Days in Motion International Festival of Contemporary Art

Africa has only recently become part of the festival's programming. Of the roughly 250 international productions presented over the past 29 years, only six were "purely African," according to director Pavel Štorek. "We've hosted many artists of African origin, but most of them live in Europe," he explains. A more systematic engagement with the African continent began after 2017, when the festival featured artists such as choreographer Taoufiq Izzeddiou from Morocco and Nadia Beugré from Côte d'Ivoire.

Projects from Africa are typically selected through personal contacts and partner festivals in Europe. Showcases like *Kunstenfestivaldesarts* in Brussels or *Spielart* in Munich play a key role, as they regularly present artists from the Global South. "I've seen all of the 'African-origin' productions at international festivals in Europe," admits Štorek. He also points to the lack of direct contacts with African organisations: "I see the path to more lasting cooperation through intermediaries in France who know the local context."

The main barriers to cooperation are not primarily financial or administrative, though visas and travel costs certainly matter. The key limitation, according to Štorek, is a lack of information and awareness about contemporary African art. "My main problem is ignorance along with poor orientation in the region," he states candidly. His comment reflects a broader challenge in

the cultural scene of Central and Eastern Europe, where African art still faces significant invisibility.

When asked whether the situation is changing, Štorek replies: "In our part of the world, there is very little awareness of African art, especially compared to countries where it forms part of a historical minority." He believes the issue lies not only in the absence of historical experience, but also in the lack of political will to build long-term cultural partnerships. The 2015 migration crisis, he adds, exposed deeper societal attitudes: "We lack historical experience with other cultures and societies."

Still, Štorek sees potential for change in gaining a better understanding of regional contexts and in actively seeking new contacts. "I think the beginning of any search for 'talent' lies in exploring the history of a given region – understanding its culture, politics, context, local challenges, and joys," he concludes.



Petr Husička: Hit, Tell the Difference / Cirque La Putyka

The project *Hit, Tell the Difference*, created in a collaboration between the Czech contemporary circus ensemble Cirque La Putyka and a group of Rwandan street acrobats, is an example of Czech-African cultural cooperation supported by inter-ministerial collaboration between the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture. The initiative originated in the film industry – specifically from director Michal Varga and cinematographer Jakub Jelen of Xova Films: “The project wasn’t our idea. It was our regular cameraman, Jakub Jelen, who brought it. He was in Rwanda with Michal Varga and discovered a group of boys doing circus in the streets. Many of them even live on the street,” says Husička. Around the same time, a similar tip came from Czech Radio’s Ondřej Suchan. The aim was to create a joint performance that would be simultaneously captured in a documentary film. The initial trip to Rwanda served to select performers and assess what was realistically feasible given the local conditions, such as the absence of circus equipment.

From the interview with Petr Husička, it is clear that Rwanda lacks any infrastructure for contemporary circus as understood in the European context. For instance, performers use a tyre instead of a trampoline, as standard equipment is unavailable. Despite this, there is strong motivation and talent among individuals often working in the street or in improvised settings.

Husička doesn’t explicitly discuss the genre’s prevalence, but compares the experience in Rwanda to that of the Moroccan group Groupe Acrobatique de Tanger, which, according to him, “functions like a European troupe.” This suggests that some African countries have more stable

circus collectives with professional backgrounds, while in others, such as Rwanda, acrobatics exists more as spontaneous, community-based forms without institutional or educational support.

The project faced major challenges from the outset. Performers were selected from among dozens of young people with diverse backgrounds, many of whom lacked documentation, permanent residence, or even a known birthdate. “Some of them lived on the street, most were minors, and many were without parents,” Husička recalls. Securing visas, passports, and travel documents was among the most demanding aspects: “The fact that Michal Sikora managed to get them here was unbelievable. It was coordinated with our Foreign Ministry, at the EU level, and with the Belgian embassy.”

The Rwandan performers’ first trip to the Czech Republic was more exploratory; the main portion occurred during rehearsals and performances at the Letní Letná festival. “There were about ten performances, and even though we didn’t know whether it would work at all, it turned out to be a huge success. Some audience members came back five times,” says Husička. The Rwandan performers impressed both on and off stage with their spontaneity and inexhaustible positive energy.

Funding was complex and mostly covered by the ensemble’s own resources. The project received CZK 180,000 from the Ministry of Culture and CZK 100,000 from the Prague City Hall. Additional support came from Xova Films and their film budget. The total cost was around CZK 3 million. “Out of those 3 million, we received only about 280,000 directly for the project; the rest was covered from our annual operations,” Husička states. Honoraria were aligned with local standards: “They received the same fees as Czech acrobats.”

The project’s administrative burden was extraordinary; in addition to routine visa processing, it involved obtaining basic documents, including passports, for minors with no formal background. “I think the administrative workload can exceed the capacity of any organiser. If we didn’t have an experienced producer with a film background, the project probably wouldn’t have happened,” notes Husička.

Nevertheless, the collaboration extended beyond a single summer. Thanks to the strong personal commitment and positive audience response, the project was repeated the following year at Jatka78, this time without institutional support. “We funded it ourselves, but we just wanted to do



it again. They were so spontaneous and incredible to work with. The hardest part was letting the project go and sending them back.”

The project’s conclusion also came with complications: two participants decided to remain in Europe after the tour ended, which placed the organisers in a difficult position. “We dealt with it, but it had no legal consequences for us,” Husička comments.

Asked whether Cirque La Putyka plans to return to Africa, he responds with cautious scepticism. *Hit, Tell the Difference*, he says, was the unique result of circumstances, personal contacts, and excellent production work. “Now we’re heading in a different direction,” he says, while also affirming the value of Czech-African cooperation: “Showing another culture is always worthwhile.”

He also highlights differences among African partners. For example, the Moroccan troupe Groupe Acrobatique de Tanger, recently hosted in the Czech Republic, operates on par with European troupes, whereas with Rwanda, knowledge transfer and shared experience were key. “It was hugely important for them to see how things are done here. And for us, it was amazing to experience their approach, enthusiasm, courage, and energy.”

In terms of systemic support, he sees the greatest need in legislative and organisational assistance: “Funding is always an issue, but once someone commits their energy, they mostly need help with administration. That’s where state or EU support could make a real difference.”



Radovan Auer: International Book Fair and Literary Festival *Svět knihy*

The International Book Fair and Literary Festival *Svět knihy* is the most prominent platform in the Czech Republic for connecting authors, publishers, and readers from around the world. Despite its ambition to reflect global literary developments, the presence of African authors in its programme remains minimal. As its director, Radovan Auer puts it: “Representation is sporadic. Each year, it ranges from one or two authors to sometimes none.”

A notable exception occurred in 2005, when Africa was the official guest of honour. This thematic framework enabled a broader presentation of African authors and literatures, primarily through collaboration with African embassies and cultural institutions. However, it was a one-time initiative that did not lead to any lasting, systematic support for African literature in the Czech market.

Another exceptional case came in 2021, when the headline guest was Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. According to Auer, she is “to a large extent a global citizen, naturalised in the US,” a fact that reflects a common pattern among African authors present in the Czech context: they are often internationally recognised figures or are associated with former colonial metropolises. Leïla Slimani, a guest at the previous edition of the fair, is originally from Morocco but “again, is primarily part of the French literary scene.”

The publishing of African authors in the Czech Republic is rare and unsystematic. There are no publishers focused specifically on this field. “It’s a very small group, and I don’t really know of any publishers who engage with African literature in a targeted way,” Auer notes. African authors typically reach Czech readers either through prestigious awards – as in the case of Nobel laureate

Abdulrazak Gurnah – or through other literary circles, especially the Francophone.

Although it may seem that the low representation is due to a lack of reader interest, Auer believes the issue is primarily structural. There is not only a lack of translation capacity, but also a lack of institutions and partners who would actively promote cultural exchange between the Czech Republic and African countries. “It always depends on an active approach – on whether there is a partner to talk to and plan with. And we don’t have such a partner on the African continent,” he explains.

This situation directly affects the festival’s programming. The selection of guests depends on a combination of factors: interest from Czech publishers, the activities of cultural institutes or embassies, the availability of the author, and, of course, the festival’s own curatorial direction. If “these vectors intersect in time and space,” an author is invited. But generally, African authors without a Czech translation are not considered.

Still, Auer acknowledges that deeper cooperation could develop – if a concrete initiative were to emerge. “Honestly, I currently don’t see space for such activities. But everything could change quickly if an active entity or individual appears,” he admits.



Yvona Kreuzmannová: *Tanec Praha* Festival

Yvona Kreuzmannová, the founder and long-time director of the *Tanec Praha* festival, has had a long-standing connection with the African continent, rooted in her family: her father worked in Africa professionally. From the very start of her own career, she has seen African art as both culturally and personally inspiring: “Africa has enormous potential, a connection to tradition and nature.”

Over the years, she has visited countries including South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, and Mozambique. A personal turning point came in the early 1990s with inspiration from Senegalese artist Germaine Acogny, whose work drew on tradition, natural movement, and a connection to the land. This experience influenced other festival collaborators as well, such as Monika Rebcová.

Tanec Praha has regularly invited African artists; most of the festival’s 36 editions have included performers from Africa. This year, the programme is launching a project by Idia Chichava from Mozambique. Still, Kreuzmannová points out that there are no dedicated funding tools for systematic work with African themes, and such collaborations often depend on personal commitment and networks.

She emphasises the continent’s diversity: “In our region, we often perceive Africa as a single culture, but countries in Africa differ enormously... Ghana alone has around 40 regional cultures, and that’s a relatively small country in West Africa.”

She describes differences in dance forms – for example, the bouncing dance of the Maasai in Kenya contrasts with the grounded dances of other cultures. These distinctions are reflected not only in movement but in deeper philosophies of motion and expression.

From a practical standpoint, cooperation with African artists is significantly complicated by visa policies, lack of work permits, and taxation. “It’s extremely difficult to pay fees if they don’t have

the right work visa for Europe. So most of them come here on per diems.” This workaround avoids the need for work permits while enabling cultural exchange during the festival.

Cooperation with other European festivals also plays a key role – helping to share the costs of travel and accommodation. A specific challenge, however, is the limited possibility of reciprocal movement: projects initiated in the Czech Republic are rarely presented in African countries, as no targeted funding exists for such activities. Kreuzmannová cites the example of a collaboration by Yana Reutová with artists from Burkina Faso, which ran into precisely this structural imbalance.

In addition to visas, major limitations include access to information and a lack of clarity on how to support African art or whom to approach. Useful roles are played by institutions such as the Institut français or ONDA in Paris, which launched a tool for coordinating tours of African companies. The Goethe-Institut is also helpful, although, according to Kreuzmannová, it often circulates information within a closed network.

Within the Czech cultural scene, she notes progress since the 1990s, but believes prejudices persist: “I don’t feel that people expect the same quality from African companies as they do from top European ones. And yet it’s there – and in abundance.” She stresses the importance of sending Czech artists to Africa – not just for exchange, but as a way of deepening mutual understanding: “You might learn something from us, but we also want to learn a lot from you.”

She also notes that in contemporary dance, there are practically no African managers or agents, so much of the work is handled by choreographic centres or individuals in Europe, such as Tanzhaus in Germany. This work is often supplementary and voluntary.

Kreuzmannová identifies another obstacle in the stance of Czech foreign policy, which views Africa as a region of no strategic interest: “Where a country has no economic interests, it’s very hard to push through cultural cooperation.”

At the European level, she highlights the untapped potential of programmes such as Creative Europe or Erasmus+, which she says offer almost no support for cooperation with the African continent. “The EU should pay more attention to Africa. There is no single programme that supports mutual cooperation in the same way as within Europe.”





References

- Amann, S., *Toolkit – A Handbook to Support Local Stakeholders for Better Relations Between Africa and EU/rope and Beyond* (Deconfining, 2025), available at: <https://deconfining.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Toolkit.pdf>.
- Césaire, A., 'Discourse on Colonialism', trans. Joan Pinkham (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 6
- Ellingsworth, J., *Schengen Visa Code and Cultural Mobility: Latest Insights with a Focus on Artists and Culture Professionals from the African Continent* (Brussels: On the Move, 2023), available at: <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/schengen-visa-code-and-cultural-mobility-latest-insights-focus-artists-and>.
- European Festivals Association – Pearle – Live Performance Europe, *The Ultimate Cookbook for Cultural Managers: Visas for Third-Country National Artists Travelling to the Schengen Area* (Brussels: EFA & Pearle*, 2024), available at: <https://www.pearle.eu/publication/the-ultimate-cookbook-for-cultural-managers-visas-for-third-country-national-artists-travelling-to-the-schengen-area>.
- Falk, F., Lüthi, B. and Purtscher, P., 'Colonialism without Colonies: Examining Blank Spaces in Colonial Studies', *National Identities*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2016), pp. 1–9.
- Fall, B. and Roberts, R. L., 'Forced Labour', in S. Bellucci and A. Eckert (eds), *General Labour History of Africa: Workers, Employers and Governments, 20th–21st Centuries* (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), pp. 77–116.
- Faloyin, D., *Afrika Přece Není Stát: Překonávání Stereotypů o Moderní Africe*, trans. O. Horník (Prague: N media, 2024).
- Hughey, M., *The White Savior Film: Content, Critics, and Consumption* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014).
- Kipling, R., 'The White Man's Burden', *The New York Sun*, 1 February 1899, vol. LXVI, no. 154, p. 6.
- Klímová, E., *Obrázková Encyklopedie Země* (Prague: Kartografie, 1992).
- Koura, J. and Pešta, M., *Československo a Studená Válka v Africe* (2020), available at: https://www.ustrcr.cz/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/PD_3_20_s3-13.pdf.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, *Engaging in Africa: Czechia's Strategy* (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2022), available at: https://mzv.gov.cz/file/4922484/AFR_Engaging_in_Africa_Czechia_s_Strategy_FINAL.pdf
- Mlandu, U. N., *An Invitation to Transform Your Vision of the Cultural Mobility Ethic from an African Perspective* (Brussels: On the Move, 2023), available at: <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/invitation-transform-your-vision-cultural-mobility-ethic-african-perspective>.
- Nwagbo, A. and Rudwick, S. I., 'Black Czech Arts in the Making? Disrupting Racial Profiling', in A. Průchová Hřůzová (ed.), *Public Narratives of Decolonization and Racial (In)Justice in Central and Southeast Europe: Enemies and Colonies, Patriots and Riots* [forthcoming].
- Nwagbo, A. and Rudwick, S. I., 'Restricted Affiliation: The Costs of Otherness among Afroczechs', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 47, no. 15 (2024), pp. 3259–3279, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2024.2303365>.
- On the Move, *Mobility Funding Guide to Africa* (Brussels: On the Move), available at: <https://onthemove.org/resources/funding/mobility-funding-guide-africa>.
- Preslová, J., *Německá Východní Afrika 1884–1914: Kolonialismus a Rezistence*, Bachelor's thesis (Plzeň: Západočeská univerzita v Plzni, 2015), available at: <https://dspace.zcu.cz/bitstream/11025/19380/1/bakalarska%20prace%207.pdf>.
- Rudwick, S. and Simuziya, N. J., 'African Diasporic Narratives from the Czech Republic: Focus on Language and Race', *Diaspora Studies*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2023), pp. 264–286, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1163/09763457-bja10057>.
- Šmalec, P., *Šmalcova Abeceda* (Prague: Baobab, 2005; 2nd edn, 2010).
- Vuorela, U., 'Colonial Complicity: The "Postcolonial" in a Nordic Context', in S. Keskinen (ed.), *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 19–33.
- Vychodil, F., *Hnutí Nezúčastněných Zemí – Vlivná Síla Světové Politiky* (Prague: Svoboda, 1987).
- Žídková, M., *Podkladový Materiál za Zahraniční Oddělení Ministerstva Kultury ČR* (Prague: MKČR, 2024).



Respondents

Lucie Němečková — Radio and theatre dramaturge, journalist, and translator. Founder of the Creative Africa festival, focusing on Francophone African countries, and the Middle Eastern culture festival Under the Crescent Above Prague. Collaborates with Czech theatres, festivals, and cultural media. Currently works as a dramaturge at Czech Radio and is dedicated to promoting intercultural dialogue.

Mgr. Vojtěch Šarše, Ph.D. — Literary scholar and lecturer at the Department of Romance Studies, Faculty of Arts, Charles University. Teaches French, Belgian, and Francophone literature as well as literary and postcolonial theory. His research focuses on sub-Saharan Francophone literatures, colonial history, propaganda, and the “white saviour” phenomenon in cinema.

Angela Nwagbo and Siaka Toure: Confluence

Confluence moves between the genres of physical theatre, dance, documentary, and anthropological performance, charting the self-discovery journey of a Czech woman of mixed heritage. Through music, fashion, and a distinctive physical language blending African and Slavic folklore, the work addresses themes of ethnic identity and interculturalism, evoking for many the still-utopian vision of harmony between African and European cultures.

Angela Nwagbo — Actress and dancer of Czech-Nigerian descent. A graduate of DAMU and a versatile performer, she works professionally in acting, dance, and authorial projects. Active in stage and screen productions, as well as in contemporary, urban, and African dance. In 2023, she completed a residency at École des Sables in Senegal. Beyond her artistic work, she conducts anthropological research on African and Afro-Czech identities at the University of Hradec Králové. Her creative work

consistently explores identity and interculturality from the perspective of an Afro-Czech woman.

Prague Quadrennial (PQ)

An international festival of scenography and theatre space held in Prague since 1967. PQ connects artists, students, and the public through exhibitions, performances, and discussions, and every four years brings participants from more than 80 countries to Prague. The next edition will take place in June 2027.

Mgr. Barbora Příhodová, Ph.D. — Theatre scholar, curator, and Artistic Director of the Prague Quadrennial. Studied theatre studies and English at the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno. Specialises in scenography, theatre space, and interdisciplinary research. Recipient of several international fellowships, she leads research and curatorial projects.

Adam Svoboda — Producer and manager with more than 15 years’ experience. Has collaborated on alternative music and multidisciplinary festivals. Since 2015, he has been part of the Prague Quadrennial team and, since 2023, serves as Executive Director for the 2027 edition.

Colours of Ostrava Festival

The largest multi-genre music festival in the Czech Republic, held in the industrial setting of Dolní Vítkovice. In addition to concerts, it offers discussions, workshops, theatre performances, and other accompanying programmes. The festival focuses on international collaboration and fostering music mobility.

Mgr. Filip Košťálek — Music dramaturge and cultural producer based in Ostrava. Artistic Director of Colours of Ostrava, where he programmes



seven music stages and eight discussion stages. Co-organiser of the Czech Music Crossroads showcase festival. Promotes cultural openness and global dialogue through music.

AfroFilmes Festival

A film festival focusing on Lusophone African cinema and its diaspora. The third edition took place in 2025 in Prague, presenting films from Africa and Brazil alongside discussions, language workshops, and lectures. It connects African culture with European audiences, with additional screenings in Olomouc and Brno.

Mgr. Klára Trsková — Film curator, translator, and researcher specialising in Lusophone African literature. Holds a PhD from the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, where she examined representation in African prose. Has conducted research in several African countries and lectures on postcolonialism, gender, and film heritage.

4+4 Days in Motion International Festival of Contemporary Art

An international festival of contemporary art held in Prague since 1996, focusing on performance, visual art, dance, and experimental projects. It uses non-traditional venues and promotes interdisciplinary dialogue.

Pavel Štorek — Artistic Director of the 4+4 Days in Motion festival. Produces projects in both traditional and unconventional theatre spaces and supports interdisciplinary collaboration. Works at the Arts and Theatre Institute (IDU) in the PerformCzech Department.

Cirk La Putyka: Hit, Tell the Difference

An international performance bringing together Czech, Rwandan, French, and Canadian artists. Created in 2018 in collaboration between Cirque

La Putyka and the Rwandan troupe Future Vision Acrobat. Combines contemporary circus, dance, and documentary to reflect cultural differences and social stereotypes.

BcA. Petr Husička — Has over a decade of experience as a production manager and later Head of Production at Cirque La Putyka. Currently works as grant specialist, booking manager, and international projects manager for the company.

International Book Fair and Literary Festival Svět knihy

An international book fair and literary festival held annually in Prague. Showcases Czech and international literature, the book market, and translated works. Offers a rich accompanying programme of author readings, discussions, and professional encounters. Serves as a platform for literary dialogue, international exchange, and connecting readers, creators, and publishers.

Radovan Auer — Director of International Book Fair and Literary Festival Svět knihy and literary adviser to the Czech Minister of Culture. Former Marketing Director of Plzeň 2015 – European Capital of Culture and executive film producer.

Tanec Praha Festival

An international contemporary dance festival presenting both Czech and international artists. Supports co-productions, experimentation, and international exchange. Member of European networks such as EDN and Aerowaves.

Mgr. Yvona Kreuzmannová — Founder of Tanec Praha and initiator of numerous international projects promoting contemporary dance. Active member of European networks. Awarded the French Ordre du Mérite for her contribution to European cultural cooperation.



The Authors of the Study

Pavla Hivert, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor,
Department of Arts Management,
Prague University of Economics and Business

Pavla Hivert is an assistant professor at the Department of Arts Management at the Prague University of Economics and Business, where she is involved in teaching and research. Since 2025, she has also held the position of financial and administration director at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. Until 2025, she was the long-time director of the Arts and Theatre Institute and general director of the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space.

Thanks to her education in economics and management and her many years of work experience in large cultural institutions and projects, she is a member of a number of expert teams and working groups dealing with cultural policy in the Czech Republic and abroad. She is the national author of the Czech Republic's profile in the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe. She regularly publishes on various topics related to culture and the creative sector. She is a member of the Czech Section for Culture of UNESCO.

The Czech Cultural Institute (NIK) has as primary aim to become a modern, efficient, and open institution with nationwide reach, providing comprehensive support to the cultural infrastructure of the Czech Republic.

The Czech Cultural Institute (NIK) was established on 1st July 2025 through the merger of two existing publicly funded organization established by the Ministry of Culture – NIPOS (National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture) and ATI (Arts and Theatre Institute).

NIK departments:

- Theatre Institute
- Arts Institute
- Creative Europe Culture Office
- Prague Quadriennial
- Artama (Amateur Art Activities)
- Statistics on Culture
- Methodology and Strategy for Culture

Mgr. Barbora Novotná

InfoPoint NIK Coordinator

Barbora Novotná coordinates the InfoPoint NIK at the Czech Cultural Institute. With her background in English Translation Studies and the Theory and History of Theatre at the Faculty of Arts at Masaryk University in Brno, she works as a translator, researcher, and cultural manager. She gained professional experience working on various international projects in the Czech Republic and abroad. Since 2014, she has been based at the Czech Cultural Institute (former Arts and Theatre Institute).

InfoPoint NIK is an information portal of the National Institute for Culture (NIK) focused on working conditions in the cultural sector. Its aim is to help cultural professionals across artistic disciplines navigate the administrative challenges of their practice, whether related to taxation, insurance, copyright contracts, or visas. The core of the project is an online guide, while InfoPoint NIK's activities also include an online helpdesk, consultations, and workshops.

InfoPoint NIK operates in Czech and English and is therefore intended both for Czech artists and cultural managers and for international professionals collaborating with the Czech arts scene. InfoPoint NIK is a member of the On the Move network and also functions as the Czech Mobility Information Point. From its launch in 2017 until 2025, it was known as CzechMobility.Info.



About **DECONFINING** Arts, Culture & Policies in Europe & Africa

The **DECONFINING** project is implemented by 12 partners in 11 European countries with the aim of developing a reference framework between the EU and Africa for sustainable and equitable intercontinental cultural exchange and is intended to expand to other world regions. The project emphasises a new, participatory model of cooperation, both virtual and physical, focusing on research, the joint development of policy recommendations, and the creation, touring, and dissemination of artistic projects.

Key outputs include public forums, micro-conferences, newly created artistic works – (including performances and installations), twenty podcasts featuring (tandem) artistic contributions and related content, artistic tours, and the aforementioned series of studies.

Lead partner: Zentrum Bundesrepublik Deutschland des Internationalen Theaterinstituts (ITI), Germany

Other partners:

- Pro Progressione (PRO-P), Hungary
- Bodø2024 IKS (Bodø2024), Norway
- Kulturhauptstadt Bad Ischl – Salzkammergut 2024, Austria
- Nacionalinis Kauno dramos teatras (NKDT), Lithuania
- Hrvatsko narodno kazalište Ivana pl. Zajca Rijeka (CNT Rijeka), Croatia
- Art Transparent (ATC), Poland
- The Czech Cultural Institute (NIK), Czech Republic
- On the Move (OTM), Belgium
- Goethe-Institut (GI-M), Germany
- Inštitut za transmedijski dizajn (ITD), Slovenia
- Culture Funding Watch (CFW), Tunisia

**For current updates,
please visit the project website
and social media channels:**

- <https://www.facebook.com/deconfining.eu>
- <https://www.instagram.com/deconfining.eu/>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/company/deconfining-eu/>
- <https://chat.whatsapp.com/G05r22PxcK25gmpjGgZ4JI>

