

Original Research Article

**Genealogy of World's Fairs (Expos)
Traced through an Assessment of Their Structure & Content***Mohammad Shafiei¹, Reza Sameh^{1**}**1. Department Architecture, Faculty of Architecture & Urbanism, Imam Khomeini
International University, Qazvin, Iran**

Received: 15/03/2025

Accepted: 28/08/2025

Available online: 22/11/2025

Abstract

Problem statement: World's fair, as the most important phenomenon of the modern era, which emerged with the commencement of the industrial revolution, contributed to the reflection of attitudes, the presentation of findings, and technological and cultural developments. Despite their long-standing history, rarely have their structure, content, and historical course been systematically assessed to provide a guideline for future planning. How can the World's Fairs be assessed, and what insight will the findings provide for their future planning?

Research objective: a) To achieve the structural and content logic of World's Fairs through a fundamental understanding of the running themes in each period, b) to examine the evolution and historical course from the beginning to the present, c) to present the evolutionary path and explain generations in such a way that show their continuity in the future can be explained through a perspective.

Research method: To understand the history and logic behind the emergence of the World's Fairs, the study adopted a genealogical approach and a descriptive-analytical method. The data were collected from literature review, historical documents, scientific articles, and databases, and analyzed using a comparative approach. The inductive reasoning was used for description, content analysis, and categorization of the collected data and the evaluation of that genealogy and typology.

Conclusion: Despite the differences of fairs, they share an inherent essence and a tendency towards growth that set the groundwork for multiple flows, such as development in subsequent periods and evolutions of their following themes. Various flows affect their nature, but the end and change of each generation don't mean a fundamental transformation, and sometimes themes are repeated in an overlapping manner. Therefore, it can be planned in such a way that future fairs, regardless of regional organization in several places simultaneously, follow the path of the new generation and complete its process.

Keywords: *World's Fair, International Exposition, Expos, Genealogy.*

Introduction

Following developments such as the Renaissance and the awareness triggered by the Industrial

Revolution, the industrialization process turned England into a pole with burgeoning growth, which necessitated a space to display industrial power. Hence, World's Fairs¹ emerged almost simultaneously with modern industry. Their main purpose was to bring together achievements, to show discoveries, and, as a result, to facilitate

* This article extracted from Master Dissertation of "Mohammad Shafiei" entitled "International Exhibition in Hengam Island by Redefining the Concept of International Architecture" that under supervision of Dr. "Reza Sameh" which has been done at Faculty of Architecture & Urbanism, Imam Khomeini International University, Qazvin, Iran in 2021.

**Corresponding Author: +989121828904, rsameh@arc.ikiu.ac.ir.

their comparison. The industrialization progress in all fields was accelerated by holding these fairs, and this process served as an antecedent to the change that later occurred in man and his feelings and in the human environment (Giedion, 2021, 59).

World's Fairs have always had achievements in various fields along their path and over time, and have incurred profound changes in their goals, executive structure, central themes, and even methods of representation. Such developments arise from major transformations in global politics, economics, cultural trends, and emerging technologies. Therefore, addressing the issue is important in examining the roots. Moreover, triggering contributing factors to the formation of each period can clarify the system governing the themes and their logic, and on the other hand, it provides a more accurate understanding of the spirit that prevailed in the eras in which they were held, so that the reading and adaptation of historical and social trends in each period can be clarified to explain their governing spirit. Therefore, the present article aims to achieve the structural and content logic of world's fair through fundamental understanding of their governing theme in each period, examining the evolution and historical course from the beginning to the present, presenting the path of evolution and explaining the lineage of generations in such a way that a clear perspective can be considered for them while planning their continuation in the future.

The research problem is to organize the findings, as well as to categorize and count the generational diversity of this event, which was done through a fundamental understanding of the running themes of fairs in each period, examining their evolution until the present era, categorizing the findings and presenting the path of evolution, and finally explaining the type and lineage of world's fair. The main research questions are as follows: How can the structural and content logic of World's Fairs be assessed through the lens of their genealogy, and what insight will the findings of this study provide for their future planning?

Research Methodology

To understand the history and logic behind the

emergence of world's fair, the present study employed a genealogical approach, which, unlike traditional historiography, does not seek the origin or essence of things; rather, it focuses on the different layers of the evolution of concepts from the perspectives of discourses, forms of knowledge, and mechanisms of power (Foucault, 1977; Rabinow, 1984). In other words, the goal of genealogy is not to "reconstruct history" but to "ask how concepts are made possible" in specific historical circumstances. This study employed a qualitative method to investigate the emergence and development of concepts, structures, or phenomena by emphasizing the layers of transformation and hidden continuities over time rather than finding a single origin. In contrast to classical linear historiography, this method examines historical ruptures, coincidences, and redefinitions to discover relationships of continuity and their socio-cultural contexts, and has the capacity to explore beyond these concepts and challenge official narratives (Garland, 2014).

In this article, genealogy seeks to identify, analyze, and evaluate the processes of formation based on the structure and content of world's fair (expos) in the context of time to understand the nature of generations in each period. Its components were selected based on criteria such as the name and the official and dominant nature of the subject in each period, the goals of the host country and organizers, key works, which were accessible by scrutinizing literature, and an empirical search. Following the classification of data, findings were analyzed using content analysis.

Therefore, this research was carried out through the collection, explanation, and analysis of the content of pertinent literature and documents (books, domestic and foreign publications) and existing electronic documents using a descriptive-comparative method. Inductive reasoning was made based on the description, analysis, and classification of the collected materials and the evaluation of the typology of that lineage (Fig. 1). The sources with reliable historical information, and the website reference, were used for data on World's Fairs.

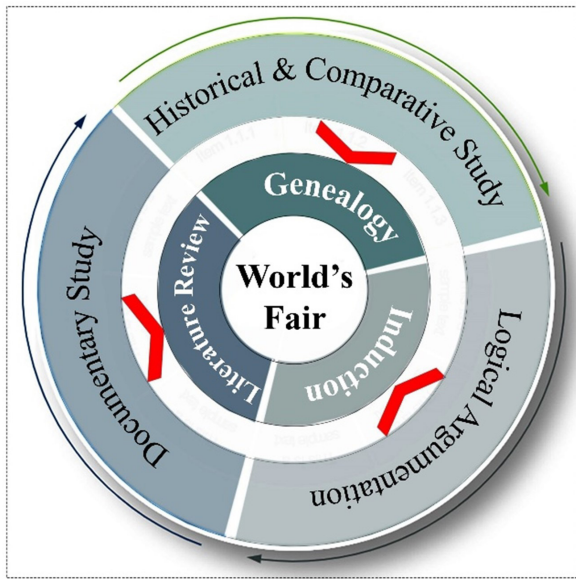


Fig. 1. Research Methodological Framework; Source: Authors

Research Background

The subject of world's fair in the literature of architectural history and theory has received much attention. Among its earliest precedents, we can mention the book "Space, Time, Architecture" (Giedion, 2021, 259-270). Parts of the book "Western Architecture: Roots and Concepts" (Bani-Masoud, 2015) are also dedicated to this theme, and in the book "Iran and World Exhibition" (Bani-Masoud, 2021), the history of fairs and Iran's presence in this event are narrated. Another similar study, entitled "Historical and Social Contexts of the Formation of Qajar-Era Pavilions in World's Fair and Their Place in Modern Iranian Architecture" (Jamal-al-din & Kiani, 2020), is worth mentioning, which focuses on the architectural experience of Iran and also addresses the subject from a sociological perspective. In the book "Theory of Modernity in Architecture" (Haghir & Kamelnia, 2016), the focus has been on the philosophy and reasons for the emergence of fairs. Also, the article "Rereading Art and Politics in the International Expos with a Focus on the Crystal Palace (1851)" (Zarezadeh et al., 2015) examines the subject from the perspective of art. In several books and articles, Maurice Roche has addressed fairs as a super-event and examined their content and social aspects. Although foreign articles

and publications, and books on the history of architecture have reviewed the subject of fairs in detail, reliable analytical sources, especially their systematic classification, are very limited.

Theoretical foundations

• A Review of world's fairs (1851-2025)

The World Fair was primarily a product of the industrialization of some societies, and was initiated by England, France, and Belgium. Art, along with industry, became the spirit of the fairs of that era, and as this event was established and played an instrumental role in expressing the power of European countries, America also joined the organizers to express its independence and political integrity and show its achievements. This event, which was fluid in its location, gradually changed, and developments in terms of content and theme, which were sometimes tangible or intangible, were influenced and advanced by the conditions of its era and the host country. The early fairs aimed to present products from all over the world to the extent that the director of the 1867 fair referred to it as an "encyclopedia of human knowledge" (Carta, 2013, 2). Roche considers world's fair to be "the parade of modern society" and "super-events," and he refers to Fairs and the Olympics as "the only clear and spectacular examples of a dense social ecosystem and social calendar of public culture events in modern societies" (Roche, 2000, 1 & 33). Western exceptionalism, the development of colonialism, and the rise of economic and scientific-technological advances have been among the most significant reasons and impetuses for organizing these major international events.

Fairs have also displayed a variety of social phenomena associated with modernization and capitalism, which have led to their progress and success on a global scale, to the extent that of the 55 officially registered fairs, 33 were held in the 60 years after the first fair in London and 25 in the 70 years after World War II. Although global economic and environmental problems, insecurity, or world wars have affected the fairs, they have never stopped

them from being held (Abbattista, 2014, 6). Since the first fair, the event has served as a window into scientific, technological, and industrial progress, presenting these changes both directly to visitors and through publications and media around the world, and has also provided the opportunity to hold parallel international and specialized conferences, especially in the fields of engineering and architecture (Cardoso de Matos et al., 2012, 4).

The World's Fairs started with the construction of the Crystal Palace, dating back to the 19th century; a period of swift technological and social shifts in the Western world and the growing emergence of a middle class that shaped them, reflecting the latest innovations and commercial developments (Frost & Laing, 2017, 8). The Great Fair of 1851, sponsored by the Royal Society of Arts and Industries, was the first international event, whereas previous events in France and Britain had been regional. The experience was incomparable in size and public impact, attracting over 6 million visitors, and set a model for subsequent fairs that were copied by other countries. From then on, fairs celebrated commodity culture on an unprecedented scale, which is why Marx described it as "commodity fetishism," and many critics considered this event to be the beginning of the emergence of a class as consumers (Smits & Jansen, 2012, 178). The fair was divided into four sections at this time: manufactured goods, machinery, raw materials, and fine arts, which later became the standard pattern for dividing interior spaces in world's fair (Bani-Masoud, 2021, 68). The importance of the Crystal Palace was not only due to its architectural and structural features, but also because it demonstrated the nature of the modern era; as Marshall Berman refers to it as "a symbol of the modern era" (Haghir & Kamelnia, 2016, 48-49). The highlight of the fair was the Machine Hall and its 83-meter span without a central column. This huge hall, 620 meters long, was considered a major revolution in the field of construction in its time. After hosting the first World's Fair by England, France, its long-standing and traditional rival,

hosted the first World Fair in 1855 and then hosted it three times until 1889 (the turning point of the first period, hosting 32 million visitors, equivalent to the population of France), leaving behind a significant legacy in the form of the Eiffel Tower. In the following period, Austria-Hungary hosted the Fair in 1873 under the official title of "Culture and Education", mainly displaying housing, rural houses, and agricultural products, which for the first time had a perspective beyond the expression of political and economic competition and exposed people to a wide range of non-European artifacts and images (Japanese art) (Rampley, 2011, 129), as journalists wrote: "Nothing but beauty can be seen in this fair" (Bani-Masoud, 2021, 13). Shortly after, the United States hosted the first World's Fair in 1876, held in Philadelphia to commemorate the centennial of the Declaration of Independence; America would later host eight more. Australia did the same in 1880, and Spain was the next destination in Europe. The phenomenon of the fair city is rooted in a specific political, economic, and social culture, as seen in the 1888 Expo, which resulted in the creation of the urban park and green space, Leisure Park (Ballester, 2014, 2). The first was the 1883 Amsterdam Expo, where 28 countries presented their colonial culture and exports (Bani-Masoud, 2021, 85). Belgium has also hosted five times since 1897.

The Chicago Fair in 1893, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the discovery of the American continent, under the supervision of the leaders of the Chicago School, played a significant role in the style of American architecture, which later transformed American urban design, and as a result of the design of this fair, a new city was created. Subsequently, in 1905, coinciding with the anniversary of the Kingdom of Belgium and the 75th anniversary of the country's independence, the industrial city of Liège sought to exhibit the technological achievements of Europe between 1830 and 1905 under one roof (ibid., 96 & 118). The following year, Milan hosted the event on the occasion of the opening of the Simplon Tunnel, and with the theme of transportation,

created a transformation in this field and gained achievements, but in 2000, focusing on healthy food for humanity, it hosted its last event. The cities of Ghent and Brussels hosted the next two editions, and then San Francisco, wrecked by earthquakes and fires, gained an opportunity to be rebuilt and show itself in 1915 by using the opening of the Panama Canal as an excuse. Following its previous successful hosting in 1929, Barcelona had been completely modernized, its Gothic quarters had been revitalized, and its infrastructure had undergone extensive renovation. Later, Chicago, Brussels, and Paris were the other organizers, respectively, until New York's turn in 1939, with the theme of "Building the World of Tomorrow" as the last fair that considered modernity and technical achievements as the only way to human happiness (Bani-Masoud, 2021, 147), with a break of about twenty years. In 1958, the last Belgian fair was held to begin a new discourse in fairs, and Seattle in 1962 focused its attention on the sky and space achievements and streamed a dreamy spirit into the flow of fairs. Five years later, Montreal also marked Canada's first presence, with the theme of man and the surrounding world and the spread of the international style in the form of Moshe Safdie's landmark work, the Habitat 67 residential complex. In the late 20th century, enthusiasm for World's Fairs in the United States quickly faded, and the focus shifted again to Europe and Asia, where Japan hosted the first Asian World's Fair in Osaka in 1970.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the next World's fair were held in Hanover (Germany), Shanghai (China), and Milan (Italy). The 2017 World Expo in Astana (Kazakhstan) and the 2020 Expo in Dubai (United Arab Emirates) opened a new chapter in their history (Frost & Laing, 2017, 8-9). In general, the world's largest fair event has presented and transmitted concepts in several different dimensions throughout its life and, corresponding to the event, has allowed the global view to develop in visible and hidden layers. Table 1 summarizes the basic and quantitative data on the World's Fairs, which presents the characteristics of their periods; the year and

location of the event, the official title and themes of each period, and the significant event or architectural work of each event are also included to create a mental image and association.

Discussion

The structure and content of the World's Fairs provide a platform for countries to display and promote their identity in global and commercial dimensions, in which countries showcase not only manufactured goods, industry, and technological achievements, but also strategic and ideological concepts, national and political identity. Fairs can also be considered a medium for displaying goods and transmitting ideas (Smits & Jansen, 2012, 173). They were initially a visual representation of the modern world, which was reflected in the architecture of the fair, and later helped introduce technology in urban spaces; for example, the transformations that occurred in Paris are described by Miriam Levin as follows: "The process of building fairs helped the city move into the future." In fact, permanent structures in urban spaces where fairs were held were also a demonstration of the building technologies of their time. They were also a pretext for urban planning, transportation development, and have always been a reflection of technological progress, sustainable development, discoveries, and the complex mechanisms of industrial society.

This event was actually an advertisement serving as a showcase for countries to convey their desired images of themselves to the world (Cardoso de Matos et al., 2012, 6). Hence, we can see the multidimensional existential nature of events that could be effective in all aspects of life in previous centuries. It also leads to a multifaceted perception of the host's surrounding environment, including the landscape, social space, and architecture. In the present era, world's fair pursue diverse goals that are centered around the axis of communication between different parts of the world in different areas of human life and various scientific fields. Therefore, they are constantly changing and, although they have been

Table 1. List of Official World's Fairs (Expos) & Features of Each Period. Source: Authors, adapted from the BIE Database.

Number	Event	Official Name	Theme	Participants (Country)	Visitors	Work/Achievement/Feature
1	London-1851	Industry of All Nations	Industry of all countries	25	60 thousand	Crystal Palace
2	Paris-1885	Exposition Universelle des produits de l'agriculture, de l'industrie et des beaux-arts de Paris	Agriculture, industry, & fine arts	27	5 million	Palace of Industry
3	London-1862	Industry & Art	Industry & art	39	6 million	Significant Fair Hall
4	Paris-1867	Agriculture, Industry & Fine Arts	Agriculture, industry, & fine arts	42	15 million	First Centralized Circular Fair
5	Vienna-1873	Culture & Education	Culture & education	35	7 million	Largest Circular Building to Be Held
6	Philadelphia-1876	Centennial Fair of Arts, Manufactures, & Products of the Soil & Mine	Art, construction, & products of the soil & mines	35	10 million	Fair of Edison & Graham Bell's Inventions
7	Paris-1878	Exposition Universelle de 1878, Paris	New technologies	35	16 million	Balloon Flight
8	Melbourne-1880	International Fair of Arts, Manufactures, & Agricultural & Industrial Products of all Nations	Art, industries, agriculture, & industrial products of all nations	33	1.3 million	Eclectic Buildings
9	Barcelona-1888	Universal Fair of Barcelona	Fine & industrial art	30	million 2	First Hosted by Spain
10	Paris-1889	Exposition Universelle de 1889, Paris	Celebration of the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution	35	million 32	Eiffel Tower - Hall of Machines
11	Chicago-1893	World's Columbian Exposition	Fourth century of the discovery of America	19	27 million	Chicago & Eclectic Buildings
12	Brussels-1897	International Fair of Brussels	Modern life	27	6 million	First Hosted by Belgium
13	Paris-1900	L'Exposition de Paris 1900	In the 19th century, a glimpse	40	50 million	Art Nouveau Style Presentation
14	Saint-Louis-1904	Louisiana Purchase Exposition	Celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase	60	19 million	Largest Fair Up to That Time - Attention to Accommodation
15	Liège-1905	Universal Fair of Liege	Celebration of the 75th anniversary of independence [Belgium]	70	7 million	Attention to Reconstruction
16	Milan-1906	Esposizione Internazionale Del Sempione	Transportation	40	-	First Hosted by Italy
17	Brussels-1910	Universal & International Exposition of Brussels	Artistic & scientific works, agricultural & industrial products of all nations	26	13 million	Attention to Landscape & Nature/Strong Colonial Display
18	Ghent-1913	International Universal Fair of Ghent	Peace, industry, & art	24	9 million	Largest Belgian Fair - Reconstruction
19	San Francisco-1915	Panama-Pacific International Exposition	Peace, industry, & art	41	18 million	Jewelry Palace
20	Barcelona-1992	International Fair of Barcelona	Industry, art, & sports	29	5 million	German Pavilion (Vanderrohe)
21	Chicago-1933	A Century of Progress, International Exposition	Independence on the path of industry & scientific research	21	38 million	Disneyland - Nazi Germany
22	Brussels-1935	Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles	Modern life	25	20 million	Thematic Fair

Rest of Table 1.

Number	Event	Official Name	Theme	Participants (Country)	Visitors	Work/Achievement/ Feature
23	Paris-1937	International Exposition of Arts & Technology in Modern Life	Art & technology in the modern era	45	31 million	(Transportation)
24	New York-1939	New York World's Fair 1939-1940	Building the world of tomorrow	54	-	Thematic Focus of Non-Conflict between Art & Industry
25	Haiti-1949	Bicentennial International Fair of Port-au-Prince,	Festival of Peace	15	250 thousand	One of the First Fairs with the Theme of Tomorrow & the Future
26	Brussels- 1958	Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles - Wereldtentoonstelling Brussel	A worldview: a new humanism	39	41 million	Nativeism - Native Spirit & Combination with Modern Art
27	Seattle- 1962	Century 21 Exposition	Man in the space age	49	9 million	Beginning of Addressing "Humanity"
28	Montreal- 1968	Universal & International Fair Montreal Expo	Man & his world	62	50 million	Education/Space/ Future
29	Osaka- 1970	Japan World Exposition Osaka	Progress & harmony for	78	64 million	Addressing Human Problems & the Environment
30	Seville- 1992	Universal Fair of Seville	Industry of all countries	112	41 million	Dissemination of the Program for Global Coexistence
31	Hannover- 2000	Expo 2000 Hannover	Agriculture, industry & fine arts	174	18 million	Happy Spirit - Cultural & Artistic Performances
32	Shanghai- 2010	Expo Shanghai 2010	Industry & art	246	73 million	Establishment & Launch of the BIE Institution
33	Milan- 2015	International Registered Fair Expo 2015 Milan	Agriculture, industry & fine arts	145	21 million	The Largest Fair & Participation Space
34	Dubai- 2020 (2022)	Expo 2020 Dubai	Culture & education	192	24 million	Thematic Pavilions
35	Osaka- 2025	Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan	Art, construction & products of the soil & mines	150	Unfinished	The First Middle East Hosting of Fairs

shaped over time, they rarely follow past approaches. (Eskandari Rouzbahani, 2021, 147) They are more like a cultural interface, conveying the message of progress through scenography and urban tools; A message based on a universal theme with magnificent architecture and a narrative of ideas, progress, and aspirations of societies (Ballester, 2014, 4). Since international events play an important role in the story of a country and its people, fairs are key occasions that can provide a platform for public communication, like a bridge between different periods of life that a city chooses to present a vision for the future. Measures such as urban renewal, the

regeneration of specific areas, branding or rebranding, and the reconfiguration of infrastructure systems (transport, telecommunications, and utility networks) are part of the host city's efforts in this direction.

On the one hand, fairs are products of their time: the physical expression of the cultural geography and innovative capacity of the world at a given time; the urban, cultural, and technological heritage is a true reflection of the society that created them, thus explaining the emphasis on architecture, construction, content, and technology in different periods.

Between 1851 and 1940, fairs were strongly influenced by material progress in the fields of

industry, agriculture, and invention. Themes that showed the desire to build the future and the importance of national identity. The years between 1958 and 2000 highlighted the need to direct innovations in the service of the well-being of humanity. The focus shifted from a unified identity to relationships, emphasizing the connection of individuals with each other. With the increasing role of the information revolution, architectural qualities no longer had a central place in fairs. Instead, themes such as the human world, progress and harmony for humanity, the age of discovery, nature, and technology stand out. Fairs now reflect a growing awareness that every action has long-term consequences for the environment and human life, and can once again be a real tool for progress in solving current global lifestyle problems. Although many consider it an outdated concept, for the BIE, it represents innovation, progress, and continuity between fairs, where each one is a turning point towards the future and a catalyst for development. (Monclús, 2017, 12 & 13).

However, fairs as social and multidimensional processes can be defined and analyzed in terms of a set of three types of characteristics. Each of the sets includes a dual axis with opposite poles as modern/non-modern, national/international, and urban/local. Each set is analyzable alone, but all of them must be discussed and examined together in a complete and contextual analysis (Roche, 2000, 8). In today's world, although the traditional role of fairs has changed, depending on the overall nature, they maintain their social and structural role and can be evaluated in different situations. Table 2 shows the structure and content of fairs along with an expression of their nature, function, and different roles.

• **Genealogy & analysis of findings**

The structure and content of fairs cannot be analyzed

and genealogized devoid of the historical context and developments. The centuries after the Renaissance always witnessed excitement and innovations in industry, thought, and art, each of which was considered a kind of cornerstone of modernity. The Age of Enlightenment, which fought against the superstitious ideas of the ages before it, also created changes in the course of human thought that can be interpreted as a revolution. These developments, from popular uprisings and revolutions to inventions such as the railway, all laid the ground for the events in the following centuries, so that England, with its increasing growth, became the center of industrial production and growth, and then France joined it.

The 18th century also witnessed the spread and association of new concepts of nation and state, which began with the Treaty of Westphalia and was considered the cornerstone of the emergence of national states that founded European societies and then spread around the world (Jafari, 2011, 3), and the first modern national state emerged in Britain in the 17th century. The American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789 are prominent events in the history of the growth of multi-ethnic nationalism in America and mono-ethnicity in France (Kavasemi, 2020, 4). The early and middle years of the 18th century coincided with the beginning of America's comprehensive development and stability after the French wars; therefore, after England, it was France that hosted fairs for several periods in competition with England, and then America took over as the first host.

Another trend was the rise of imperialism, which took on a more serious form with colonialism, leading to the exploitation of distant lands by countries such as France and England, and fueling widespread cultural and political changes. Although human representations can be found throughout history in various contexts such as war and sacred sites, the formation and spread of ethnic representations are closely and directly related to the two historical phenomena of colonialism and the fair, which were the basis of modernity. This theme was organized in the pavilions

Table 2. The Structure & Content of the World's Fairs. Source: Authors; Adapted from Roche, 2000, 8-13.

Structure	Form	Content
Form	Fluid	(Meta-event)
Content	Eclectic	Sociological
Background	Variable	Venue-Event
Character	Multidimensional	(Multidisciplinary)
Role	Intermediate	(Medium supernaturalit)

of some European countries in the second half of the 18th century, but in the following century, it reached new material and symbolic dimensions in the form of the World's Fair. Imperialist colonial representations gained momentum from the 1870s and were promoted by two new disciplines: physical anthropology and ethnology (Sánchez-Gómez, 2013, 3).

After Philadelphia in 1876, the focus on the running themes of that era almost ended, and with the unification of France and the rise of the new imperialism, the beginning of the Second Industrial Revolution (1871-1914), and the expansion of wealth, industry, and territory in America, the theme of colonial exposition continued with vigor until the end of the first generation, and as World War I approached (Ghent-1913), colonial exposition also ended. The war's achievement was the dissolution of empires and the formation of emerging countries, and fairs continued to be held until the end of the war, but after San Francisco in 1915, there was a 14-year gap until the next period, and gradually, colonial themes were never addressed again. From then on, the display of living people was a practice in the Western world, but it reached its peak in the mid-nineteenth century and was recorded at the Brussels Fair in 1958 (Abbattista & Lannuzzi, 2016, 2). However, the fairs never regained the cultural status they had previously enjoyed, and many were not successful in terms of art and economy (Britannica, 2022). From around 1930, the world was involved in a widespread economic recession for ten years, which caused a huge crisis in the growth of unemployment to the extent that the production of industrial products decreased by 60 percent (D'Apice & Ferri, 2010, 39).

After World War II, the Cold War and the global polarization of power between the United States and the Soviet Union began. The formation of the United Nations and the change of political system served as the basis for addressing issues of humanity (starting with Brussels 1958), peace, and the future. With the first space flight and the landing of man on the moon, the Soviet Union and the United States began to present scientific bodies to each other, and at

the Seattle 1962 and Montreal 1967 fairs, Man in the Space Age and extraterrestrial themes were discussed. After 1970, fairs tended to address a specific theme, often environmental and awareness-raising, rather than celebrating a historical anniversary or colonial empire (Britannica, 2022). At the beginning of the 21st century and the first fairs of this era, the themes took on a global nature and the focus shifted away from expressing national situations and regional achievements; for example, in Hanover-2000, participants were asked to plan for the 21st century, and in Milan-2005, human nutrition and healthy food for the whole world were the sole theme of the fair. At Expo Dubai-2022, connecting minds and building tomorrow were the focus of the fair. The Osaka-Kansai 2025 Future Expo, hosted by Japan, also focused on designing tomorrow. Over time, themes became consistent and repeated, and a series of fairs continued, each with a shared message and a similar structure, sometimes with themes and even the structure and content of the fairs. This sequence was generally unintentional, and at one point, another global event or turning point would silence it, and another generation would emerge with new concepts.

Therefore, the context of time and place has always played a fundamental role in holding fairs, and of course, after the fair was held, the achievements and manifestations of the fair effectively caused transformation, flow, and development, or sometimes caused complications to the context and the host community; in Fig. 2, historical and significant events of the world are expressed in a way that shows both the impact on the quality of fairs and the change in worldview and policy choices in choosing organizers, the sequence and location of the event, and the preparation for the beginning and end of generations. This does not mean a sudden decline and destruction of themes, but rather it has always initially found a downward trend and sometimes been forgotten, or even continued in other periods in a weak way, and combined with a new theme. For example, we can mention the change from the theme of industry and production to technology. Also, throughout the history of holding fairs, generational overlap has occurred in terms of content. For example, the Montreal Expo 1967,

although it was in the middle of the second generation in terms of time, was considered the intellectual groundwork for the third generation in terms of focus on the future. Therefore, the important points for expressing the generation can be seen in several factors. Table 3 shows the generational framework of the fairs, their time period, the running themes in each era, as well as the important and effective factors in the formation and decline of each generation.

This means that the context of time and place has always played a key role in holding fairs, and of course, after the fair is held, the achievements and manifestations of the fair effectively led to transformation, flow, and development, or sometimes caused complications to the context and the host community. In Fig. 2, historical and significant events of the world are expressed in a way that shows both the impact on the quality of fairs and the change in worldview and policy choices in choosing organizers, the sequence and location of the event, and the preparation for the beginning and end of generations. This does not mean a sudden decline and destruction of themes, but rather it has always initially found a downward trend and sometimes been forgotten, or even continued in other periods in a weak

way, and combined with a new theme. For example, we can mention the change from the theme of industry and production to technology.

Also, throughout the history of holding fairs, generational overlap has occurred in terms of content. For example, the Montreal Expo 1967, although it was in the middle of the second generation in terms of time, was considered the intellectual groundwork for the third generation in terms of focus on the future. Therefore, the important points for expressing the generation can be seen in several factors. Table 3 shows the generational framework of the fairs, their time period, the running themes in each era, as well as the important and effective factors in the formation and decline of each generation.

According to Table 3, the transition and movement from one generation to other is not simply caused by the passage of time, but rather the occurrence of global events has been its greatest driving force; by reviewing the nature of the periods of holding, addressing the spirit of each period, themes, and then compiling generations, it can be concluded that these periods both influenced and were influenced by the societies of their time. In other words, fairs

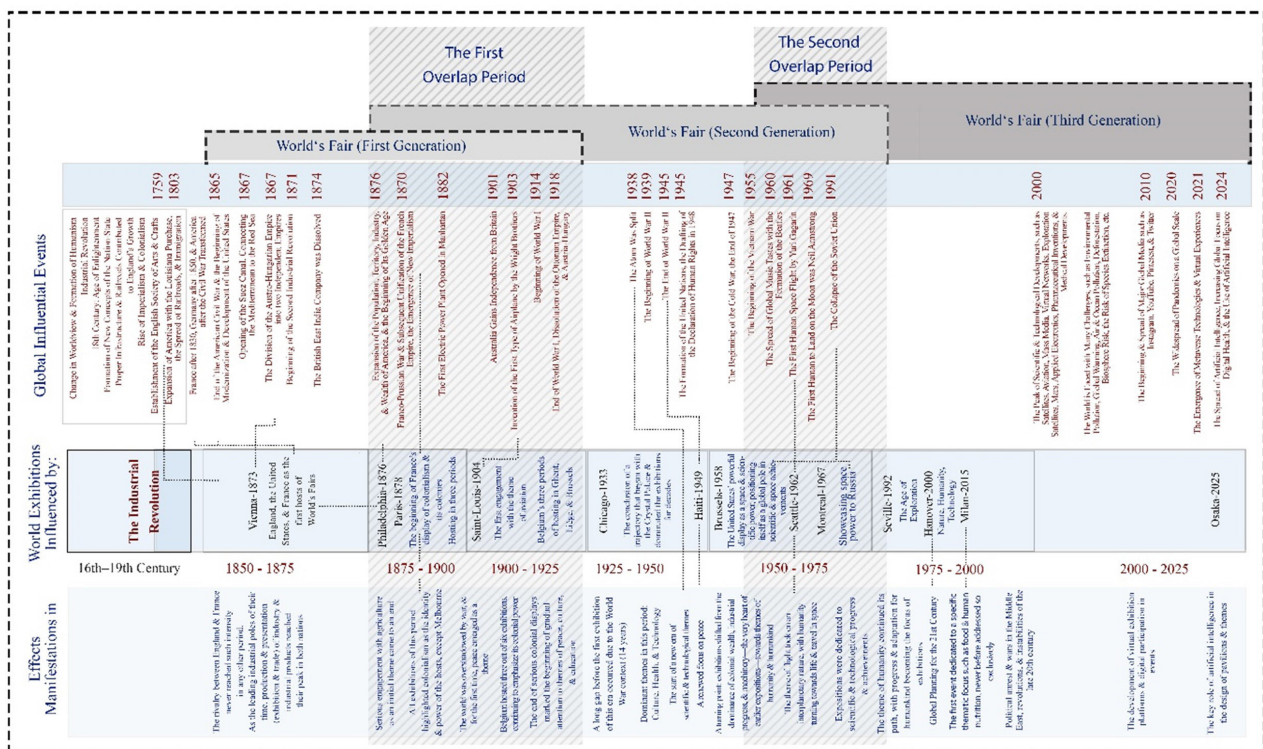


Fig. 2. Historical Trends Affecting World's Fairs; Source: Authors.

Table 3. The Generational Framework of World’s Fairs & the nature of Themes. Source: Authors.

generation	interval	Nature and Themes	Time	Factors affecting the formation or decline of each generation
First Generation	London 1851 - Barcelona 1929	Industry Industrial production Art of Nations Agriculture Colonialism Ethnic Show	Beginning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The growth of industry & the increasing production of industrial products; - The creation & growth of imperialism, the need for labor, & the display of colonial power; - The agricultural revolution, the need to produce & supply machinery, & facilitate agriculture; -The emergence of new materials & changes in technology & methods, & the consolidation of the industrialization of fairs
			Ending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating a negative image of human representations reflecting the opinions of writers & critics; - Saturated supply of machinery & industrial products & homogeneity in the presentation of achievements; - End of the “Colonial” representation in earnest & the fading of ethnic representations; - World War I & the long pause until the last fair of the generation (Barcelona-1929); - Decreased attention to the themes of “Host Country Art” & “Art of Nations»; - Less attention to the theme of “Agriculture”; & - Addition of the theme of “Peace” shortly after the decline of the colonial representation.
Second Generation	Chicago 1933- Seville 1992	Technology Politics Culture & Health Tomorrow, the Future Flight Humanity	Beginning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The last level of the display of industry, technology, & flight (after a break & with a change from the initial nature of); - The development of technology as a scientific achievement & discovery; & - World War II & the disintegration of some empires, changes in world relations, & the political system of countries.
			Ending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The end of the 20th century & the beginning of the 21st century; - The formation, consolidation, & dominance of future themes in the context of technology; - The emergence of thematic & futuristic fairs; & - The collapse of the Soviet Union & the polarization of global power.
Third Generation	Hannover 2000- Osaka 2025	Tomorrow, the Future Peace Humanity Culture & Health Education	Beginning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entering the new millennium (21st century); - Adopting the resolution “Sustainability of Fairs” in 1994; - Incorporating sustainability principles into the organization of fairs in Hannover 2000. - Calling for global votes to present solutions for managing the world in the new century for nature, energy, knowledge, health, & future nutrition (BIE, 2022).
			Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasis on the use of global collective wisdom; & - Ongoing thematic fairs.

appeared as a social and cultural super-event and also had thematic and structural overlap with each other. Fig. 3 shows how generations have been compiled. Under each category of generation, the range of fairs, the addressed themes, including the running themes in each event, and its followers in each generation are shown. Content commonalities and overlap can be mentioned as an effective factor in the path of growth and development of fairs, serving as the driving force of change from one generation to another. Table 4 shows the intergenerational overlap, which is presented based on the frequency of the official

or running themes in each period. In this table, each theme is considered as a cluster, and the frequency of clusters for each generation is shown. This trend is also considered for the overlap between generations, and, for instance, the running themes of the first generation have the most overlap with the second generation. Also, the second and third generations have the most in common in addressing themes such as technology and culture. Fig. 4 shows the frequency of generations and the period of each generation in a pie chart, indicating that the first generation also had the most continuity in terms of time.

		First Generation (1851-1929 AD)															Second Generation (1933-1992 AD)					Third Generation 2000 to present			Frequency													
Event		London-1851	Paris-1855	London-1862	Paris-1867	Vienna-1873	Philadelphia-1876	Paris-1878	Melbourne-1880	Barcelona-1889	Paris-1889	Chicago-1893	Brussels-1897	Paris-1900	Saint-Louis-1904	Liège-1905	Milan-1906	Brussels-1910	Ghent-1913	SanFrancisco-1915	Paris-1929	Chicago-1933	Brussels-1935	Paris-1937		NewYork-1939	Haiti-1949	Brussels-1958	Seattle-1962	Montreal-1967	Osaka-1970	Seville-1992	Hanover-2000	Shanghai-2010	Milan-2015	Dubai-2020	Osaka-2025	
First Generation	Industry	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	22
	Art	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	23
	Agriculture	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	9
	Colonialism							*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	10
Second Generation	Celebration					*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	11
	Politics							*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	7
	Space-Flight						*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	6
	Technology						*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	15
Third Generation	Culture & Health				*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	13
	Peace				*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	4
	Education					*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	8
	Tomorrow-Future										*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	10
Transportation															*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	5	
Humanity																					*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	8	

Fig. 3. Frequency of Addressing Themes in Different Generations of the World’s Fairs. Source: Authors.

Table 4. Frequency of Themes & Their Intergenerational Overlaps; Source: Authors.

Generation	Industry	Art	Agriculture	Colonialism	Celebration	Politics	Flight-Space	Technology	Health Culture	Peace	Education	Tomorrow/Future	Transportation	Humanity	Total
Generation 1	20	17	7	9	7	5	3	4	4	3	4	1	1	0	85
Overlap 1 & 2	14	11	2	9	6	5	3	4	4	2	2	1	1	0	64
Generation 2	2	4	1	1	4	2	3	8	5	1	1	4	3	4	43
Overlap 2 & 3	1	3	1	0	3	1	2	6	4	1	0	4	1	4	31
Generation 3	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	3	5	1	4	23
Total	22	24	9	10	11	7	6	15	12	4	8	10	5	8	151

Conclusion

World’s Fairs emerged after the flourishing of industry and in pioneering lands, serving as a medium to express the countless developments of their era; global social, political, and cultural events have also been effective in their transformation. The research findings show that the countries that initiated the holding (England and France) have hosted only the first generation, while the second generation has flowed into America and Belgium, and the third generation has been held in Germany and then in Asia. Each period has had a unique approach and been influenced by the current trends of the country where it is held, the political and developmental goals of organizers, and despite structural and

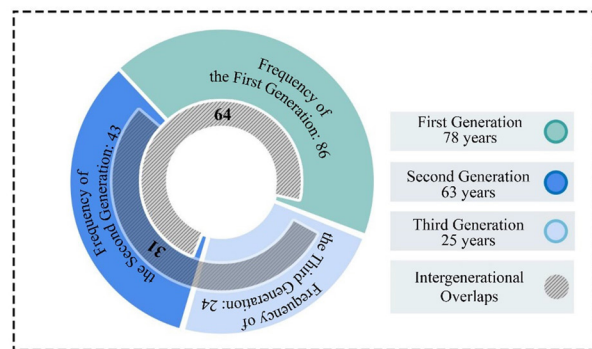


Fig. 4. Frequency Pie Chart of Generations & the Overlaps of them; Source: Authors.

architectural diversity and even changing themes, there has been a progressive content logic and a sequence, which has been the major concern in this research in the form of genealogy. Regarding the genealogy, the results of the analyses indicate three

general generations that dominate the fairs: the first generation (London - 1851 to Barcelona - 1929), the second generation (Chicago-1933 to Seville-1992), and the third generation (Hanover - 2000 to Osaka - 2025). In terms of content, “industry” stands at the top of the themes having the highest frequency (22 out of 35 events). Throughout the entire period of holding, much attention has been paid to technology (the highest frequency in the second generation and 15 out of 35 events), which has served as an intergenerational link, and finally, the theme of tomorrow/future holds the highest frequency in the third generation (10 themes out of 35 events).

Structurally speaking, it was found that the time course of the development of the exhibitions has influenced their genealogy. The end and change of generation does not mean a fundamental transformation, and generations have commonalities and overlaps, and the intergenerational transition has occurred gradually, in the sense that the characteristics of the new generation have gradually taken shape and existed in the context of the previous generation. For instance, the transition from the second to the third generation has not been based solely on the demands of the time, but on a gradual change in paradigm over several decades, from showcasing technology to focusing on a shared future and global issues such as sustainability, health, and nutrition. Some events, such as Montreal in 1967, have simultaneously contained the characteristics of both generations. These overlaps have not only served as a period of transition, but also as a context and generator for the formation of the next generation, because the combination of elements of the previous generation with new approaches has provided the basis for the consolidation and identification of the new generation. At the same time, each generation has also been born in the context of major historical and social changes and has been a reflection of the spirit of its time.

Table 5 also addresses the frequency of world exhibitions in terms of date, location, and event year, and indicate that the United States, France, Belgium, Spain, and Japan have hosted the largest number of

exhibitions, respectively. Also, the desire to hold exhibitions in the United States and Europe has diminished with the entry into the 21st century and has gained strength in Asian countries. In the latest event, “Osaka 2025,” as the complete crystallization of the third generation, using digital technology, sustainable structures, and human-biological issues, the Expo has been upgraded from a spatial platform to a conceptual and global platform and the exhibitions have transformed from an industrial and nationalistic event into a global multimedia and human-centered platform in the present era, and the genealogy of these events also provides the opportunity to understand the path of evolution and provides a useful model for future research in the field of exhibition design and policy-making. Fig. 5 briefly depicts this evolutionary path.

• Suggestions for future research

Due to the importance of the World’s Fairs and their multiple effects on various social areas and urban planning and architecture issues, it is necessary to suggest ways to continue the research. Based on the research findings, these suggestions are expressed in two related research and executive-operational fields in a coherent and complementary manner. Due to the comprehensiveness of the dimensions related to the World’s Fairs and the multidimensionality of the fields with this event, in the present article, an attempt was made to address the nature and content structure of the themes and the statistics of the findings to recognize the generation and lineage of the fairs. Therefore, subsequent studies and research can address the evolution and physical trajectory (formal and spatial) of the fairs. It is also possible to create conditions for future fairs to follow the path of the third and new generation of fairs, regardless of regional and territorial organization, and to complete their process, in such a way that they address global issues and challenges more than national concerns, and also that pavilions on special, unique, and important themes take precedence over territorial pavilions. Since the host selection system creates a kind of monopoly, this monopoly and concentration can be broken in future periods, and an

Table 5. Frequency of World’s Fairs based on Location. Source: Authors.

Country	City	Date (AD)	Generati on	Fre quency in the country	Country	City	Date (AD)	Genera- tion	Fre quency in the country
United States	Philadelphia	1876	1	8	Spain	Barcelona	1888	1	3
	Chicago	1893	1			Barcelona	1929	1	
	St. Louis	1904	1			Barcelona	1992	2	
	San Francisco	1915	1		Japan	Osaka	1970	2	3
	Chicago	1933	2			Aichi	2005	2	
	New York	1939	2			Osaka	2025	3	
	England	Seattle	1962		2	London	1851	1	2
		Montreal	1967		2	London	1862	1	
France	Paris	1855	1	6	Italy	Milan	1906	1	2
	Paris	1867	1			Milan	2015	3	
	Paris	1878	1		Australia	Melbourne	1880	1	1
	Paris	1889	1		Haiti	Port-au-Prince	1949	2	1
	Paris	1900	1		China	Shanghai	2010	3	1
Belgium	Paris	1937	1	6	Germany	Hanover	2000	3	1
	Brussels	1897	1		UAE	Dubai	2020	3	1
	Liège	1905	1		Austria	Vienna	1871	1	1
	Brussels	1910	1						
	Ghent	1913	1						
	Brussels	1935	2						
	Brussels	1958	2						

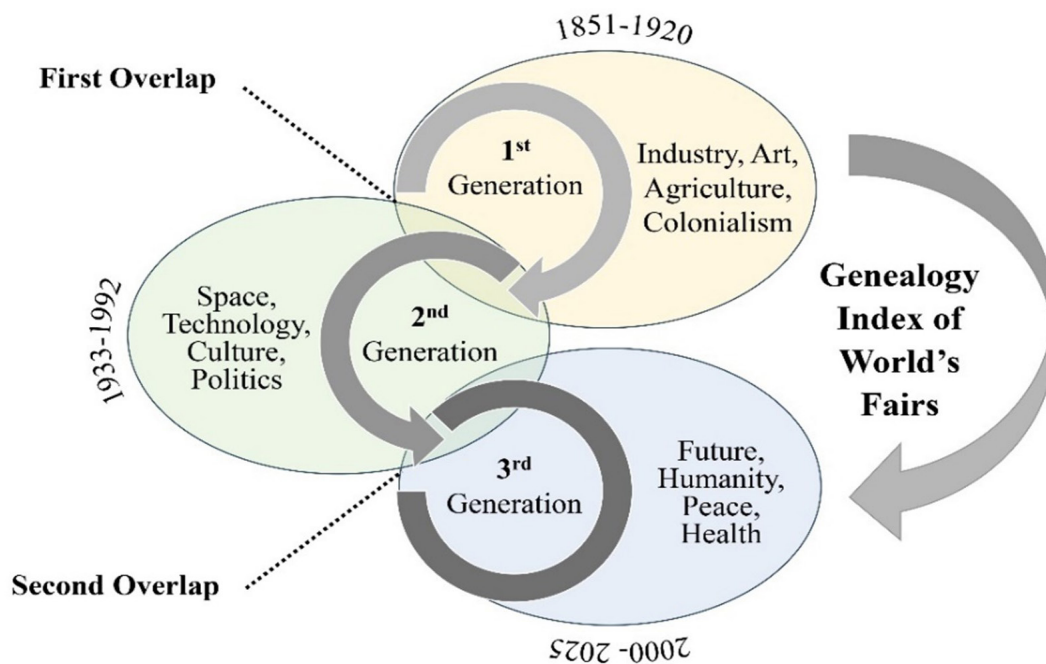


Fig. 5. Image & Diagram of the Evolutionary Path of World’s Fairs from the Beginning to the Present. Source: Authors.

event can be held separately and decentralized (but coherent and united) in several territories. Of course, the aforementioned cases and suggestions can be expanded, supplemented, and developed.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest in conducting this research.

Endnotes

- 1- International exhibition, world exhibition, international exposition, Exposition Universelle, world fair, or EXPOs
- 2- The Simplon Tunnel is a railway tunnel between Switzerland and Italy.
- 3- Other exhibitions were held, but since they were not recognized after the formation of the BIE, they have not been mentioned in this article. However, they have been evaluated in the logic of the place of holding. In addition, exhibitions before 1851 in England and France were excluded from the research because they were regional and “national” in nature.

References List

- Abbattista, G. (2014). *Concepts and categories in the history of world expositions: Introductory remarks*. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10077/10421>
- Abbattista, G., & Iannuzzi, G. (2016). World Expositions as Time Machines: Two Views of the Visual Construction of Time between Anthropology and Futurama. *World History Connected*, 13(3). <https://doi.org/10.13021/whc.v13i3.4081>
- Ballester, P. (2014). La mémoire des méga-événements comme instrument de la planification urbaine?. *Téoros*, 33(1), 8–19. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1036715>
- Bani-Masoud, A. (2015). *Western Architecture: Roots and Concepts*. Art of Century Architecture.
- Bani-Masoud, A. (2021). *Iran and World's Fairs- from Paris 1867 to Dubai 2020*. Kasra.
- Cardoso de Matos, A., Demeulenaere-Douyère, C., & Souto, M. H. (2012). The world exhibitions and the display of science, technology and culture: Moving boundaries. *Quaderns d'Història de l'Enginyeria*, 12, 3–10. <http://hdl.handle.net/10174/6378>
- Carta, S. (2013). The image of the Shanghai 2010 Expo: The contribution of single pavilions to Shanghai's global image. In *Architecture/Public Building*. Delft University. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.foar.2013.06.006>
- D'Apice, V., Ferri, G. (2010). *The Great Depression*

of the 1930s. In: *Financial Instability*. Palgrave Macmillan Studies in Banking and Financial Institutions. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230297111_7

- De Groot, P. (2005). A multidisciplinary analysis of world fairs (= expos) and their effects. *Tourism Review*, 60(1), 6–12. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb058458>
- De Oliveira, N. G. (2020). *Mega-events, city and power* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429242663>
- Eskandari Rouzbahani, M. R. (2021). Explaining the Paradigms Governing the Architectural Design of Pavilions in World's Fairs. *Shabak Specialized Scientific Journal*, 7(4), 145-160. <https://civilica.com/doc/1496303>
- Foucault, M. (1977). Nietzsche, genealogy, history. In D. F. Bouchard (Ed.), *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and interviews* (pp. 139–164). Cornell University Press. <https://philarchive.org/archive/FOUNGH>
- Frost, W., & Laing, J. (2017). *Exhibitions, trade fairs and industrial events* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Garland, D. (2014). What is a “history of the present”? On Foucault's genealogies and their critical preconditions. *Punishment & Society*, 16(4), 365–384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474514541711>
- Haghiri, S., & Kamelnia, H. (2016). *Theory of Modernity in Architecture*. University of Tehran.
- Jafari, A. (2011). Globalization and De-Westphalianization from State Variables. *Political Science Quarterly*, 13, 83-113
- Jones, Z. M. (2020). *Cultural mega-events: Opportunities and risks for heritage cities* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429285325>
- Monclús, J. (2017). *International Exhibitions and Urbanism: The Zaragoza Expo 2008 Project* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315589398>
- Rabinow, P. (1984). *The Foucault reader*. Pantheon Books.
- Rampley, M. (2011). Peasants in Vienna: Ethnographic display and the 1873 World's Fair. *Austrian History Yearbook*, 42, 110–132. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237811000087>

- Roche, M. (2000). *Megaevents and modernity: Olympics and expos in the growth of global culture* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203443941>
- Sánchez-Gómez, L. A. (2013). Human zoos or ethnic shows? Essence and contingency in living ethnological exhibitions. *Culture & History Digital Journal*, 2(2), e031. <https://doi.org/10.3989/chdj.2013.031>
- Smits, K., & Jansen, A. (2012). Staging the nation at expos and world's fairs. *National Identities*, 14(2), 173–188. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2012.67781>
- The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2022, November 23). *World's fair*. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/worlds-fair>
- Bani Massoud, A. (2015). *Western architecture roots*. Century Architectural Art
- Giedion, S. (2021). *Space, time and architecture : the growth of a new tradition* (M. Mazini, Trans.). Sharkat Entesharat Elmi ve Fareangi (Amuzesh Enghalab Eslami). (Original work published 1982) <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315415291>
- Jamal-al-din, G., & Kiani, M. (2020). Historical and Social Contexts of the Formation of Qajar's Pavilions at World Exhibitions and Their Legacy in Iranian Modern Architecture. *Journal of Architecture and Urban Planning*, 13(28), 69-92. <https://doi.org/10.30480/aup.2020.822>
- Kamelnia, H., & Mahdavi-Nejad, M. J. (2016). *Introduction to Contemporary Architecture from East to West: Exploring the Concepts and Roots of Its Formation*. Elam-e-Memar
- Kavaasmi, A. A. (2020). The Crisis in Nation- State and its Possible Future. *Pizhūhish-i siyāsāt-i nazāri*, 9(5), 1-10. <https://political.ihss.ac.ir/en/Article/11810>
- Zarezadeh, F., Mokhtabad Amreie, S. M., & Rahbarnia, Z. (2015). Rereading Art and Politics in International Expos (Case Study: Crystal Palace Exhibition, London, Great Britain, 1851). *The Monthly Scientific Journal of Bagh-e Nazar*, 12(33), 81-90. https://www.baghsj.com/article_9994.html?lang=en

COPYRIGHTS

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with publication rights granted to the Bagh-e Nazar Journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE**

Shafiei, M., & Sameh, R. (2025). Genealogy of World's Fairs (Expos) Traced through an Assessment of Their Structure & Content. *Bagh-e Nazar*, 22(150), 69-84.

DOI: [10.22034/bagh.2025.512690.5787](https://doi.org/10.22034/bagh.2025.512690.5787)

URL: https://www.bagh-sj.com/article_230333.html?lang=en

