The wool processing industry of northern Bohemia in the 19th century – what the industrial album can tell us about the company formations and their development

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Abstract. The aim of this paper is to analyze the creation and expansion of significant wool-processing companies in the northern Bohemia, specifically in the district of the Business and Trade Chamber in Liberec. These enterprises and their factory grounds were established during the 19th century. However, we can find many differences between them, because the environment, in which they were developing, was changing year by year. Attention is paid to the founders and owners of the firms and their business beginnings. This thesis was based on materials, which were collected from the industrial album “Die Gross-Industrie Österreichs.” For more information see [1].

Keywords

Company, entrepreneur, factory, industrial revolution, Poster2015, textile, wool.

1. Introduction

The bearer of the first phase of the industrial revolution in the world, as well as in the Czech lands, was the textile processing industry. And the most important branch was wool processing. By the value of its production it had greatly surpassed the other two branches of textile industry, which were linen and cotton processing. Brno and Liberec were two main centers of wool-cloth production in the Czech lands. Brno was closely connected with home weaving of textiles, which slowed down its later progress. On the other side the region of Liberec was developing so fast, that it became more important during the second half of the 19th century than Brno. The latter is also the subject of the thesis.

Significant wool-cloth processing companies formed in the region of Liberec throughout the 19th century. But the economic, legal, political and cultural environments were gradually changing and entrepreneurs led their companies differently in each of the periods. The mentioned era can be divided into following terms:

1) Intrusion of machines into the process, in some regions (the region of Liberec included) strongly connected with the proto-industrial era.

2) Development of the industrial revolution in the 1840s.

3) The main expansion and consummation of the industrial revolution between the 1850s and 1870s.

4) The second industrial revolution, which began at the end of the 19th century – in the 80s and 90s. For more information see [2].

Unfortunately, the application of this partition on the wool-cloth producing factories, founded throughout the 19th century, can be quite problematic.

Fig. 1. The list of wool-cloth processing companies in northern Bohemia and their factory ground locations map. End of the 19th century. Information was collected from [1], pp. 99–183.
2. The creation and expansion of significant wool-processing companies

A certain amount of funds was necessary in order to establish the new production plants. Many of the industrialists obtained their capital during the proto-industrial era. Good example can be Konrad Blaschka, the founder of the factory in Hodkovic nad Mohelkou, who gained a part of the necessary finances from trading with glass. But the foundation and development of the new company required significantly more funding than he could obtain, therefore merging of other small capitals was inevitable. The firm Blaschka & Comp. was founded in the 1830s by three citizens from Hodkovic nad Mohelkou – Konrad Blaschka, black dyer Franz Hiller and a trader Anton May.

Proto-industrial undertaking played an important role in the start of Felix Heintschel’s career as well. At the beginning, according to a family tradition, he became a weaver factor. Simultaneously, he started to produce damask jacquard shawls and carpets, however, still with the assistance from the home weavers.

Later, in the half of 19th century, was established the company “E. Heintschel & Co.” by Felix and his younger brother Eduard. The factory ground was located in Jindřichovice pod Smrkem, and after a while the owners enlarged the enterprise by adding the printing house and dye house. In the workshops handwork was still used. In addition, the brothers formed another manufacturing unit in the Ore Mountains, where needlework was applied, and employed around 400 embroideresses.

The family tradition was also very important for Johann Liebieg, the most prominent entrepreneur in Liberec. In fact, his father was a master draper. Later, Johann Liebieg’s company was the largest and the most significant in the expansion of the wool processing industry in northern Bohemia. However, initially there was only one building, which prior served for feudal undertaking and Liebieg bought it in the year 1827. The wool-cloth production started one year after that. In subsequent years the dye house, printing house and handwork weaving mill were built. The mechanical weaving mill was added in the year 1866. Therefore, the establishment included all necessary production processes and became self-sufficient.

A similar example is Ignatz Klinger, who came from the family of weavers. The great advantage of textile producing families was the experience. The members were getting practice since their childhood.

Ignatz Klinger, for example, gained his experience from the family business with linen-cloth. Nevertheless, he left it after a while and worked in C. E. Blumrich’s weaving enterprise in the 1830s. This manufacture focused on the cotton-cloth weaving. Since he was very good at his work, he became administrator of several branch offices.
within this establishment. Unfortunately, after the death of the owner C. E. Blumrich the company has dissolved.

Ignatz Klinger decided to carry on with the work of his previous employer. At that time he knew many of Blumrich’s customers and employees – homemade weavers, who had lost their jobs after the demise of the original company, which was very helpful for his beginnings. However, the home crafted cotton-cloth weaving wasn’t as effective as mechanical; therefore he has chosen to move to another sector of the textile production. In order to follow fashion trends he began with wool-cloth and half wool-cloth production. This was an excellent career move, since he was able to fill in an empty space in the market. Many printing and dying factories, which were founded in the northern Bohemia at that time, needed wool cloth as a raw material for their work. Among them were also Johann Liebg’s and Konrad Blaschka’s companies, which we had mentioned before.

For this reason Ignatz Klinger became the main supplier of wool-cloth in the northern Czech for about twenty years. His company grew very fast and the production became centralized. The woolen fabrics were so good, that they were being exported abroad, to Thuringia and Baden-Württemberg. In the 1860s the production became the true factory as we know today, since the mechanical looms were bought.

Ignatz Klinger’s starting conditions were ideal – he already had experience with textile production, he knew the needs of local market and he was also able to react to the trend changes in the 1840s, when woolen and half-woolen textiles became popular in the Czech lands. These textiles were also very desired by some greater companies as a raw material, as mentioned above. At the beginning of his business he obtained existing buildings, which could be expanded later. There was also enough manpower in the neighborhoods in the form of home weavers. His products were further adjusted and printed in foreign countries, so they became superior. Then they returned back and were sold. Hand in hand with purchasing new looms (manual at the beginning, mechanical in the end) came the centralization of production. In this case, the continuity between the proto-industrial and industrial era is very well evident.

After the death of Ignatz Klinger his three sons Oskar, Edmund and Ottomar took over the company. In 1880 they’ve build finishing house and dye house since the company could no longer use the services of foreign firms, which was due to the introduction of taxes. Their company became fully self-sufficient during the third quarter of 19th century.

Weaving also became the business principle for Samuel Siegmund Neumann, who moved his company several times, before he finally settled in Liberec in 1868. He chose Liberec because there was already an existing railroad connection, which simplified the import of materials and export of goods. He also founded a hand weaving mill in Hrádek nad Nisou, employing 500 weavers, which produced a woolen merchandise inspired by commonly desired English designs. Even though the manufacture was mechanized in the year 1880 and gained the factory status, the company still partly used the work of home weavers.

An interesting opposite to the entrepreneurs mentioned above is Franz Schmitt, because he didn’t come from the family with the large textile tradition. His father was a retired soldier, who ran a tobacco shop. Franz’s first encounter with the textile industry was through his relative Johann Liebig, who also recommended to him to study chemical-technological specializations at the Polytechnic school in Prague, in particular the dying technologies. This was the main preparation for his upcoming occupation. Franz Schmitt differs from the businessmen of the first generation, mainly because of this higher educational level. Thanks to his job in the Johann Liebig’s and then Konrad Blaschka’s factory he also obtained practical knowledge of the cloth dying.
and rebuilt them for dye house and finishing house. In the 1850s mechanized spinning mill, new dye house and print house followed. The Schmitt’s company owned two spacious factory complexes in Český Dub.

Fig. 8. Numbers of employees in two factory grounds of the company F. Schmitt in Český Dub - decrease was a result of the war crisis. Information was collected from: SOKA Liberec, the chronicle of Český Dub I. 1918–1925, p. 25.

The emerging companies were initially concentrated only on a specific segment of wool-cloth production. However, enterprise expansion, foundation of new workshops and introduction of new, better and better machines went hand in hand. So the production process became fully developed and factories self-contained.

Most entrepreneurs rented or bought already standing premises, for example Johann Liebieg, Josef Zimmermann and Franz Schmitt. If the businessmen had sufficient funds, they could erect new buildings. Nevertheless, this wasn’t very frequent in their beginnings, rather in the establishment of branch offices. Of course, the most successful enterprises had the largest number of affiliated companies. For instance, Liebieg’s family owned factory grounds in Svárov, Haratice and Železný Brod. Franz Schmitt founded new factories in Zitava and Semily, while the latter became more important than the objects in Český Dub. This was due to better spatial and transport options. Ignatz Klinger had been trading with Italy for a long time, which is why he decided to build a branch there.

Fig. 9. The proportion of employees in branch offices of Johann Liebieg & Co. End of the 19th century. Information was collected from [1], p. 171.

Very important for activities and presentation of the companies were various exhibitions and participation in the Business and Trade Chamber in Liberec. Some firms received the privilege during their existence, which allowed them to use the designation “k.k. (kaiserlich-königlich) privilegierte fabrik” – Blaschka & Comp. k.k. priv. Wollwaren-Fabrik, F. Schmitt k.k. priv. Wollwaren-Fabriken, Josef Zimmermann k.k. priv. Feintuch- und Schafwollwaren-Fabrik, Anton Demuth & Söhne k.k. priv. Feintuch-Fabrik, Wilhelm Siegmund k.k. priv. Feintuch Fabriken, Franz Liebieg k.k. priv. Wollenwaren-Fabrik, E. Heintschel & Co. k.k. priv. Druck- und Wollwaren-Fabriken, Johann Liebieg k.k. priv. Woll- und Baumwollwaren-Fabriken, to name a few.

Fig. 10. The branch office of the company Ignatz Klinger in Mladá Boleslav. Source [1], p. 158–159.

The factory grounds have developed gradually, which was determined by their business success and not necessary by their size. At the beginning the factories were built near a water source, and if it was possible, close to the communications infrastructure, such are roads and later railways. New objects were erected and the old ones were renovated and modified using innovations in constructions, materials etc. More were also applied to the productions. The most important was the utilization of steam engines and later electricity, which freed factory grounds from dependence on water.

Fig. 11. The steam engine in the F. Schmitt’s branch office in Semily. Source [1], p. 177.
At the end of the 19th century the wool-processing companies were fully established. They became completely mechanized and exported products to many countries in Europe, India, Egypt, northern and southern America and many others. Eventually, the textile industry has lost its important role after the inception of the second industrial revolution in the 1880s and 1890s. Thus ends “the golden era” of textile factories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>HP</th>
<th>Spindles</th>
<th>Looms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ignatz Klinger</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>65000</td>
<td>875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johann Liebig &amp; Co.</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>220000</td>
<td>2700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Schmitt</td>
<td>3950</td>
<td>70000</td>
<td>1770</td>
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**Tab. 1.** The three biggest companies. Information was collected from [3], p. 372.

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### References


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Simona NOSKOVÁ was born in Sokolov in 1987. She studied History at the Technical University in Liberec and now she is an internal doctor student in the Dept. of Management of the Masaryk Institute of Advanced Studies at the Czech Technical University in Prague. She is interested in the history of textile industry, entrepreneurial families and industrial heritage.