

At the Interface between Telling the History of the Firm and Business History. The Prague School of Economic History and its Path to Contemporary Business History¹

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KEYWORDS:

Methodology of business history — Czech Republic — Prague School of Economic History — Business history networks

Business history is a field that has long been established in economically developed countries and is richly represented in research; it also has a foothold not only in the business and world of history, but also in the wider public. It has been gaining in popularity for more than two decades in the Czech Republic as well, although the conditions for its development are far from ideal. Business history in the Czech Republic is more or less institutionally “homeless”. Among both historical and economic departments, there is not a single one that specializes exclusively in business history. They lack the defined habilitation and professorial procedures at universities that are standard in many economically developed countries of the West. There is no established publication space, whether for monographs or studies, reviews, and reports on developments at home and abroad, nor are there upcoming events and projects. Meetings of experts have so far been largely haphazard, depending on the projects being undertaken by individuals. Despite the above, research interest and the interest of the wider public in business history is steadily growing.

The development of the business history in the Czech Republic is inextricably linked to the Prague School of Economic History, which formed and still forms one of its main pillars. The Prague School of Economic History is the name given to a research center, a loose grouping of economic historians centered around the Ústav hospodářských a sociálních dějin (Institute of Economic and Social History, further as ÚHSD) at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague.² It was constituted on the basis of close

1 This study was carried out at Charles University as part of the PROGRES Q09: Historie — Klíč k pochopení globalizovaného světa (PROGRES Q09: History — The Key to Understanding the Globalized World). It is an updated version of the text Eduard Kubů — Barbora Štolleová, *Na cestě k moderní business history. Dějiny podnikání v badatelském poli pražské hospodářsko-historické školy* (On the Way to Modern Business History. Business History in the Research Field of the Prague School of Economic History), *Hospodářské dějiny/Economic History* 35, 2020, no. 1, pp. 13–30.

2 Further reading Matěj Spurný — Barbora Štolleová, *Institute of Economic and Social History, Faculty of Arts, Charles University (1993–2018)*, *Prager wirtschafts- und sozialhisto-*



cooperation with prestigious foreign departments in Cambridge, Vienna, Berlin and Frankfurt am Oder and includes an intersection of several generations of economic historians specializing in modern economic history. Its name was first used by the renowned Cambridge professor of economic history Alice Teichová. The historians who apply to this professional group deal with modern economic history from the late 18th century to the present day. They concentrate on the Bohemian lands in the context of European development, especially Central Europe. Their focus has been on topics of European significance, arising from the need to understand the continuities and discontinuities of economic developments in the 19th and 20th centuries, with an emphasis on economic and social transformation processes. In contrast to the descriptive-narrative interpretations that abounded in the past, the Prague School of Economic History emphasizes the analytical approach to research and is receptive to interdisciplinarity. Its core staff traditionally consists of the members of the Seminar of Economic History, ÚHSD of the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University, and historians collaborating on its institutional projects. An integral part of the “School” and the continuation of the field are students and graduates of master’s and doctoral programs.

The aim of this contribution is to highlight what and how historians belonging to the Prague School have done in the field of business history in correlation with the development of Czech historiography. The focus of attention is exclusively on methodological instrumentarium; we do not aim at a holistic view of domestic historiography in the given section. That would have to be much broader, of course.³ The aim of the paper is to indicate in what ways it approaches and in what ways it diverges from the world business history discourse and to indicate its possibilities for further development (wishing to indicate a specific path to modernity).

CZECH/CZECHOSLOVAK TRADITION OF BUSINESS HISTORY

Writing the history of enterprise or collective entrepreneurship has a specific tradition in the Bohemian lands which dates back to the 19th century, when the Bohemian lands were part of the Habsburg monarchy. The earliest works dealt with the history of small and medium-sized money institutions, which gave birth to modern national Czech entrepreneurship, defining itself against the older national German or German-Jewish entrepreneurship. Among the important works published before the First World War, we should mention the history of the Živnostenská banka (Trades Bank) by its director Josef Horák, the business of Czech banks in the first decennia and during the First World War by Antonín Pimper.⁴ Horák and Pimper were people

rische Mitteilungen / Prague Economic and Social History Papers 27, 2018, no. 2, pp. 7–34. Available from: <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11956/120118> [cit. 2021-10-5].

3 Petr Popelka — Eduard Kubů — Barbora Štolleová, Podnikatelé českých zemí. Pokus o historiografickou bilanci (Entrepreneurs of the Bohemian Lands. An attempt at a historiographical balance), *Český časopis historický* 115, 2017, no. 3, pp. 731–755.

4 Josef Horák, *Přehled vývoje českých obchodních bank* (Overview of the Development of Czech Commercial Banks), Praha 1913; Antonín Pimper, *České obchodní banky za války*

of great knowledge, navigating in the midst of the action. They wanted to convey to the public the recent history of companies of national importance that contributed to the emancipation of Czech business. Although they also recall critical periods, these publications are essentially a celebration of the times in which they were created. In this respect, they are close to, although not authentically, jubilee promotional company pamphlets, which were a common means of self-presentation for companies from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Professional historians in the former Czechoslovakia have only focused on corporate history since the 1950s, after the establishment of the communist regime. The main thread of their work, however, was not business as such. It was mainly focused on the nationalized state or cooperative enterprise and their production. The accents, in the spirit of the ideological demands of the time, were placed on the traditions of class struggles, i.e. the involvement of the company's employees in the struggles "for a better tomorrow" (expressed in the language of contemporary ideology). Such a reduced conception lacked the discernment of business strategies, the movement of the firm on the competitive market, and the efficiency and performance of the enterprise. A distorting mirror was held up to the image of the entrepreneur and manager. From an active agent bearing responsibility for the operation, performance, and development of the enterprise, he became an arrogant asocial exploiter appropriating workers' and employees' labor.⁵ The above is not to say that the historical works from the period before 1989 dealing with companies have no testimonial value today. Many of them were based on serious and comprehensive archival research, and their authors acted on the boundaries of what was possible and permissible under the communist regime.⁶

The years of the 1970s and 1980s slowly opened up the space for more circum-spect case studies that left the ground of obligatory ideologized history and focused their attention on business in selected industries, regions, and the position of Czech companies on foreign markets. They began to notice the links between business and politics, whether domestic or international.⁷ It is no coincidence that the history of

a po válce: Nástín vývoje z let 1914–1928 (Czech Commercial Banks During the War and After the War: An Outline of Development from 1914–1928), Praha 1929.

- 5 Milan Myška, Business History in der Tschechischen Republik, In: Alice Teichová (ed.), Business History. Wissenschaftliche Entwicklungstrends und Studien aus Zentraleuropa, Wien 1999, pp. 68–70; Václav Jíša, Dějiny závodů — programová vědecká disciplína (The History of Factories — a specialized scientific discipline), Československý časopis historický 37, 1989, pp. 16–43.
- 6 An example is the history of the ČKD: Josef Petráň — Vilém Fuchs, 90 let práce a bojů: stručný přehled dějin ČKD Sokolovo, závodu národního podniku ČKD Praha [1871–1961] (90 Years of Work and Struggles: A Brief Overview of the History of ČKD Sokolovo, a Plant of the National Enterprise ČKD Praha [1871–1961]), Praha 1961; the history of the Baťa Concern: Bohumil Lehár, Dějiny Baťova koncernu [1894–1945] (History of the Baťa Concern [1894–1945]), Praha 1960; or the three-volume history of the Brno Zbrojovka: Otakar Franěk, Dějiny koncernu brněnské Zbrojovky (History of the Brno Zbrojovka Concern), part I–III, Brno 1969, 1970 and 1973.
- 7 Notable names include Antonín Klimek, Jan Janák, František Janáček, Zdeněk Sládek, Milan Myška, and Ctibor Nečas.





business was virtually the exclusive domain of people with professional training as historians who lacked a deeper economic background; this established a contrast with developed Western countries that persists to this day. A special chapter was the history of socialist enterprises, i.e. state-owned or collective cooperative enterprises.

The collapse of the communist regime and the centrally planned economy in Czechoslovakia after the turn of the 1980s and 1990s formally freed up space for economic history and business history cultivated according to common and standard practice in Western Europe and overseas. The adaptation of economic historians and economic history was relatively fast, yet still slow. There was a lack of a domestic base of case studies and methodological studies that would have fruitfully considered the application of foreign models and templates to the specifics of the Czech environment. The problem was the hesitant establishment of economic history as an independently cultivated academic discipline and the involvement in transnational professional networks (transnational projects, conferences, institutions). Czech/Czechoslovak economic historians were busy at that time, working on a number of topical issues, and understanding the nature and traditions of the development of economic life, past and present transformation processes, restitution, and replacement of “aryanized” Jewish property. In the published works related to the history of business, the professional mentality of business historiographers who were completely unable to break away from the old stereotypes of looking at a company, lived on, even though the works were clearly de-ideologized. And there was another important factor, namely the minimal social demand. At the beginning of the 1990s, the concept of entrepreneurship and entrepreneur did not evoke positive connotations in the still mentally socializing Czech society.⁸ The birth of the Czech entrepreneurial elite was in many ways linked to the non-transparent practices at a time of legally insufficiently regulated privatization processes of “national”/state possessions.

The number of works touching on entrepreneurs and the history of entrepreneurship, without explicitly referring to business history, increased during the 1990s.⁹ Old themes and approaches were transformed into more modern forms, and foreign inspirations grew in importance.

The spectrum of topics is symptomatic of the following widely used research fields, most of which can now be described as traditional:

The field of enterprises/firm/company history. The beginnings of the tradition date back to a time when history of enterprise was usually written without the ambition of examining business as such, and when works either lacked systematized economic data or provided it, but without the necessary analytical evaluation, i.e., understanding of the economic ratio of the firm. What before the fall of the com-

8 Eduard Kubů, *Obraz české transformace v zrcadle sociologického výzkumu* (The Image of Czech Transformation in the Mirror of Sociological Research), *Historická sociologie* 2011, no. 1, pp. 41–62.

9 P. Popelka — E. Kubů — B. Štolleová, *Podnikatelé českých zemí. Pokus o historiografickou bilanci*, pp. 731–755.



unist regime at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s was an expression of the ideological limits of Czech/Czechoslovak historiography became a “professional vice” in the post-Soviet environment. Despite this, many of these works constitute an extremely useful and rich factual and informational reservoir. As an intersection of the old and the new, two volumes of the collectively prepared history of one of the most important engineering enterprises of the past and present, Škoda Works, from the 1990s, is worth mention.¹⁰ The novelty of both works was the modern structural elaboration of the concern perceived as a structured organism in a dramatically changing historical context.

The field of industrial regions. A classic field developed within economic history even before 1989 is the one of industrial regions. It grew out of the issue of the industrialization of the Bohemian lands as the industrial core of the Habsburg monarchy and focused on the development of individual key industries within the region, their modernization and technical-technological development. The history of the enterprises/companies/firms forming the region was an integral part of it, and the approach was descriptive, focusing on a few significant parameters, e.g. types of production, its structure, capacities of enterprises, numbers of employees, etc. The region that received the attention approved “from above” was the steel and coal “heart” of the Bohemian lands — the industrial region of northern Moravia and Silesia. The research between the 1960s and 1980s resulted in a series of collective monographs.¹¹ An innovative form of this approach is presented by Milan Myška’s work “Region a industrializace” (Region and Industrialisation), dedicated to Silesia.¹²

The field focused on a specific area of business. A field with deep connections to the post-war (and even inter-war) period is a sector-oriented historiography. It is linked to the previous field by the emphasis on technical-technological development. In contrast, the sector-oriented works deal in much greater depth with the economic roles of the enterprise and the importance of the industry within the national economy as a whole. Among the most prominent are the branches of agribusiness, textiles, glassmaking, sugar industry, brewing, and others. An example is the thematic series

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- 10 František Janáček, *Největší zbrojovka monarchie: Škodovka v dějinách, dějiny ve Škodovce 1859–1918* (The Largest Arms Factory of the Monarchy: the Škoda Works in History, History in the Škoda Works 1859–1918), Praha 1990; Vladimír Karlický et al., *Svět okřídleného šípů: koncern: Škoda Plzeň 1918–1945* (The World of the Winged Arrow: the Škoda Plzeň Concern 1918–1945), [Plzeň] 1999.
- 11 Dan Gawrecki et al., *Metodologické a metodické otázky výzkumu průmyslových oblastí za kapitalismu: soubor studií a materiálů* (Methodological and Methodological Issues in Research of Industrial Areas Under Capitalism: A Collection of Studies and Materials), Opava 1981; Dan Gawrecki et al., *Průmyslové oblasti českých zemí za kapitalismu. 1780–1945* (Industrial Areas of the Bohemian Lands Under Capitalism. 1780–1945), vol. 1–2, Opava 1987 and 1991.
- 12 Milan Myška, *Region a industrializace. Studie k dějinám industrializace Slezska. 1800–1918* (Region and Industrialization. Studies on the History of Industrialization in Silesia. 1800–1918), Ostrava 2014.



of publications “Z dějin textilu” (From the history of textiles).¹³ During the 1980s, a three-volume “Z dějin hutnictví v Československu” (History of Iron Metallurgy in Czechoslovakia) was published.¹⁴ The 1990s were characterized by a renewed interest in the money sector, which resulted in the synthesis “Dějiny bankovníctví v českých zemích” (History of Banking in the Bohemian Lands).¹⁵ If the earlier periods are the classic interpretation of the development of the field as a whole, the more recent periods, especially the part devoted to the interwar period, already take into account individual banks as market actors, thus methodologically approaching the modern concept of the business history. Business in the service sector is represented by research on tourism in the critical period of the Second World War.¹⁶

Field focusing on the entrepreneur as an actor in economic and social life, on entrepreneurship as a social group, has its roots in Czechoslovakia before 1989 and afterwards grew into the widest and most frequently used field in our country. The contextualization of the entrepreneur as a national, political, social, cultural actor or patron usually strongly overlapped his role as an economic actor, especially as a manager running a company. An elementary approach to the topic is the biographical approach, building on family roots, identity, and the socio-economic significance of the individual within society. The most significant project of this kind is the two-volume “Historická encyklopedie Čech, Moravy a Slezska” (Historical Encyclopedia of Entrepreneurs of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia) prepared by a team of authors centered around Milan Myška.¹⁷ Another example is the encyclopedia of Brno entrepreneurs.¹⁸ Research on

13 Periodical series entitled: Z dějin textilu: Studie a materiály. Sborník příspěvků k dějinám textilní a oděvní výroby (From the History of Textiles: Studies and Materials. Proceedings of Contributions to the History of Textile and Clothing Production) was published in 1982–1988 (12 volumes in total). At the same time, the outputs of conference meetings were published. 1. setkání historiků textilního a oděvního průmyslu: protokol jednání v Mostku ve dnech 23.–24. května 1985 (The 1st Meeting of Historians of Textile and Clothing Industry: Protocol of the meeting in Mostek on 23–24 May 1985), Václav Rohlena (ed.), Z dějin textilu 4, Ústí nad Orlicí 1985; 2. setkání historiků textilního a oděvního průmyslu: Česká Skalice 14.–16. září 1987 (The 2nd Meeting of Historians of Textile and Clothing Industry: Česká Skalice 14–16 September 1987), Z dějin textilu 9, Ústí nad Orlicí 1989, etc.

14 Collective of Authors, Dějiny hutnictví železa v Československu, vol. I–III, Praha 1984–1988.

15 František Vencovský et al, Dějiny bankovníctví v českých zemích, Praha 1999. On the money industry see also Jan Hájek — Vlastislav Lacina, Od úvěrních družstev k bankovním koncernům (From Credit Cooperatives to Banking Concerns), Praha 1999.

16 Ivan Jakubec — Jan Štemberk, Cestovní ruch pod dohledem Třetí říše (Tourism Under the Supervision of the Third Reich), Praha 2018.

17 Milan Myška et al, Historická encyklopedie podnikatelů Čech, Moravy a Slezska do poloviny XX. století (Historical Encyclopedia of Entrepreneurs of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia to the Mid-20th Century), vol. 1–2, Ostrava 2003–2008.

18 Bohumír Smutný, Brněnští podnikatelé a jejich podniky 1764–1948. Encyklopedie podnikatelů a jejich rodin (Brno Entrepreneurs and their Enterprises 1764–1948. Encyclopedia of Entrepreneurs and their Families), Brno 2012.

entrepreneurs in the modern era, which, like Myška, emphasizes the social dimensions of the entrepreneur, or entrepreneurship as a social group, was brought about in short succession by projects under the leadership of Jiří Štaif, Eduard Kubů, and Drahomír Jančík at the ÚHSD, Faculty of Arts of the Charles University. This was research on entrepreneurship as an economic and social elite, or an actor of economic nationalism in a broad scope from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century.¹⁹ What may be an undeniable asset contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the personality/personalities from the perspective of economic, social, and cultural history may be a marginality lacking economic-analytical content from the perspective of business history.

The field of methodology. In terms of methodology, Czech production on business history to date can be described as modest. Historiographical production after 1989 has outstripped the methodological preparation and proficiency necessary for modern systematic treatment of business history. Many of the works approaching the requirements for works in business history have been chosen and approached intuitively rather than as conceptually method-based. This is not true of entrepreneurship research, which was already a real research discourse in the Czech Republic in the 1990s.²⁰ An outline of the methodological instrumentarium of world business history was made available to the Czech environment in a very useful handbook, the first of its kind in Czech historiography, by Jana Geršlová.²¹ A contemporary understanding of family business history was brought by the 2017 thematic issue of the prestigious

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- 19 Jiří Štaif (ed.), *Moderní podnikatelské elity — metody a perspektivy bádání* (Modern Business Elites — Methods and Perspectives of Research), Praha 2007; Eduard Kubů — Jiří Šouša (eds.), *Finanční elity v českých zemích/ Československu 19. a 20. století* (Financial Elites in the Bohemian Lands/Czechoslovakia of the 19th and 20th Centuries), Praha 2008; Drahomír Jančík — Eduard Kubů (eds.), *Nacionalismus zvaný hospodářský: střety a zápasy o nacionální emancipaci/převahu v českých zemích 1859–1945* (Nationalism Called Economic: Clashes and Struggles for National Emancipation/Superiority in the Bohemian Lands 1859–1945), Praha 2011; Eduard Kubů — Torsten Lorenz — Uwe Müller — Jiří Šouša (eds.), *Agrarismus und Agrarreliten in Ostmitteleuropa*, Praha 2013.
- 20 *Podnikatelstvo jako předmět historického výzkumu. Protokoly kolokvií, konaných ve dnech 2.–3. prosince 1992 a 9.–10. prosince 1993 v Ostravě* (Entrepreneurship as an Object of Historical Research. Protocols of Colloquia Held on 2–3 December 1992 and 9–10 December 1993 in Ostrava), Ostrava 1994; Jiří Štaif (ed.), *Moderní podnikatelské elity — metody a perspektivy bádání* (Modern Business Elites — Methods and Perspectives of Research), Praha 2007; M. Myška et al, *Milan Myška: z díla hospodářského historika* (Milan Myška: From the Works of an Economic Historian), Ostrava 2010; Jana Geršlová (ed.), *Co by tomu řekl Johann Becher? Kulatý stůl k dějinám podnikání* (What Would Johann Becher Say? Round Table on the History of Entrepreneurship), Praha 2010.
- 21 Jana Geršlová, *Dějiny moderního podnikání* (History of Modern Business), [Praha] 2012; cf. also Milan Myška, *Problémy a metody hospodářských dějin: metodické problémy studia dějin sekundárního sektoru* (Problems and Methods of Economic History: Methodological Problems in the Study of the History of the Secondary Sector), Ostrava 2010, pp. 219–238.





Český časopis historický (Czech Historical Journal),²² which seeks to transfer this concept and issue from developed countries and its application in the Czech environment. The development of the discourse on a broader research base was brought about by a collective monograph devoted to family business.²³

If we summarize very briefly the development of research in the field of business history in the Czech Republic, we can talk about three research centers and several important individuals, authors of serious monographic treatises respecting the methodology of business history. First of all, we should mention the Centrum pro hospodářské a sociální dějiny (Center for Economic and Social History) of the Faculty of Arts of Ostrava University, which benefits from the “legacy” of Milan Myška. It is certainly not an exaggeration to speak of the “Ostrava School” in business history. The profiling works of Aleš Zářický,²⁴ Petr Popelka,²⁵ and Michaela Závodná²⁶ are among the most important. A characteristic feature of the “Ostrava School” is a strong regionalism focused on northern Moravia and Silesia, industrialization conceived as a modernization process, and a focus on large business families.²⁷ The Ostrava center is loosely associated with Martin Jemelka and Ondřej Ševeček, who have long focused their attention on the Baťa factory towns.²⁸ The second center is the Tomáš Baťa University in Zlín, which focuses mainly on the entrepreneurial activities of its founders, the world-famous Baťa family.²⁹ The third center with a long-term

22 Český časopis historický 115, 2017, no. 3.

23 Milan Hlavačka — P. Bek et al., *Rodinné podnikání v moderní době* (Family Business in Modern Times), Praha 2018.

24 Aleš Zářický, *Rothschildové a ti druzí. Dějiny velkopodnikání v Rakouském Slezsku před první světovou válkou* (The Rothschilds and the Others. The History of Big Business in Austrian Silesia before the First World War), Ostrava 2005.

25 Petr Popelka, *Zrod moderního podnikatelství. Bratři Kleinové a podnikatelé v českých zemích a Rakouském císařství v éře kapitalistické industrializace* (The Birth of Modern Entrepreneurship. The Klein Brothers and Entrepreneurs in the Bohemian Lands and the Austrian Empire in the Era of Capitalist Industrialization), Ostrava 2011.

26 Michaela Závodná, *Koleje a město. Problematika městské kolejové dopravy ve vybraných moravských a slezských městech 1850–1918* (Railways and the City. Issues of Urban Rail Transport in Selected Moravian and Silesian Cities 1850–1918), České Budějovice — Ostrava 2016.

27 For a closer look at the “Ostrava School” see Petr Popelka — E. Kubů — B. Štolleová, *Podnikatelé českých zemí*, Český časopis historický 115, 2017, no. 3, pp. 746–747.

28 Ondřej Ševeček, *Zrození Baťovy průmyslové metropole: továrna, městský prostor a společnost ve Zlíně 1900–1938* (The Birth of Baťa’s Industrial Metropolis: Factory, Urban Space and Society in Zlín 1900–1938), České Budějovice 2009; Ondřej Ševeček — Martin Jemelka (eds.), *Company Towns of the Baťa Concern. History — Cases — Architecture*, Stuttgart 2013; Martin Jemelka — Ondřej Ševeček, *Tovární města Baťova concernu. Evropská kapitola globální expanze* (Factory Towns of the Baťa Concern. European Chapter of Global Expansion), Praha 2016.

29 Among the rich production, we should mention at least the works of Zdeněk Pokluda, e.g. *Zdeněk Pokluda, Baťovi muži* (Baťa’s Men), Zlín 2012 or Marek Tomašík (*Marek Tomašík*

focus on business history is the ÚHSD of the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University, with which the Prague School of Economic History is associated (see below). In addition to the above, several prominent solitary scholars from various institutions, such as the Historical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and the Masaryk Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, work on the history of business and entrepreneurship. We mention Milan Hlavačka, whose series of publications on the history of the Ringhoffers can serve as one of the exemplary ones in many respects.³⁰



CURRENT BUSINESS HISTORY AND THE PRAGUE SCHOOL OF ECONOMIC HISTORY

The Prague School of Economic History has naturally evolved in its approach to business history. Modern business history was introduced into research activities and teaching work at the ÚHSD of the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University in the late 1990s by Jaroslav Pátek. In its understanding and way of working in relation to business history, the Prague School of Economic History has gradually profiled itself as follows:

Business history is perceived as an autonomous sub-discipline of economic history. This stems, among other things, from the fact that business history in the Czech Republic does not yet have, as mentioned in the introduction, an independent institutional anchorage. The Prague School of Economic History is striving to closely link it with other subdisciplines that are slowly separating from general economic history, such as the history of science and technology, the history of transport, and especially the history of consumption. It emphasizes the exploration of entrepreneurial roots and traditions as a means of knowing and understanding the past, as well as a self-evident and useful component of the present and future.

I. SUBJECT OF INTEREST

I. 1. The Prague School of Economic History is committed to the roots of business history as constituted in the West from the late 1930s to the present. Its main thread in the field of business history has been the examination of the economic functions of an enterprise. It builds on the approach of the founders of the field in the 1930s who identified the goal of the field as the study of the enterprise as a functional unit in the

(ed.), Tomáš Baťa — doba a společnost: sborník příspěvků ze stejnojmenné zlínské konference, pořádané ve dnech 30. listopadu — 1. prosince 2006 (Tomáš Baťa — Time and Society: Proceedings of the Zlín Conference of the Same Name, Held on 30 November — 1 December 2006), Brno 2007.

30 Milan Hlavačka — Pavel Bek, Ringhofferové: rodina a podnikání (Ringhoffers: Family and Business), Praha 2019; Milan Hlavačka — Miloš Hořejš et al., Fenomén Ringhoffer: rodina, podnikání, politika (The Ringhoffer Phenomenon: Family, Business and Politics), Praha 2021.



marketplace operating on the principle of profit including organization, governance, management, business ethics, law (business administration). It identifies with the “entrepreneurial” approach of the next generation of business historians who went beyond business administration and sought to understand the enterprise/firm and its strategies in the broader context of market development.³¹ In the flood of an increasingly rich spectrum of research, the Prague School of Economic History, in line with authorities in the field such as Mira Wilkins and Franco Amatori, perceives that the core of the field once and for all remains the enterprise as an institution, its origin, growth, performance, and a struggle for survival, in other words, its economic ratio. They honor the words of Amatori, who stresses that, even if the sources do not always allow a satisfactory answer to all the above aspects, “it is necessary to at least try”.³² However, a return to the roots of the field does not mean a reductive approach to the development of the field, a return to an outdated past. We do not wish to defend business history as the history of individual enterprises. For more demanding approaches working comparatively with broader contexts, however, we do not have, and herein lies the basic problem, a sufficient amount of solidly developed case studies in the necessary variety for the Bohemian lands/Czechoslovakia. Case studies are an expression of the necessary knowledge and methodological base of the field. If we think of the construction of a field as the construction of a building, it cannot be built from the roof down, it can only be built on a sufficiently load-bearing foundation. In the case of business history, these are case studies.

I. 2. The subject of business history should be without exception all types of enterprises, from multinational corporations, joint stock companies, family businesses of all sorts, cooperatives, to sole proprietorships, as well as quasi-companies and other entities operating on the market.

I. 3. A case study does not necessarily refer to the enterprise as a whole from its establishment to its demise. It may be defined in a partial, temporal and factual way, i.e. it may focus, for example, on the promotional strategy in the selected period, on the ownership structure and its changes, on employment issues/labor as a production factor, etc.

I. 4. The examination of the enterprise and of the entrepreneur/manager is carried out in the broad context of market development, as well as political, social, and cultural developments. In this respect, the approach correlates with the almost universally accepted post-Chandlerian definition of the object of inquiry of business history.

31 Cf. e.g. texts by Henrietta Larson, Arthur H. Cole, Kenneth Lippartio or Philip Scranton and Roger Horowitz in a selection of texts reprinted in Walter A. Friedman — Geoffrey Jones (eds.), *Business History*, Cheltenham — Northampton 2013.

32 Franco Amatori, *Business History as History*, *Business History* 51, 2009, no. 2, March, p. 144.



I. 5. The counterbalance to the classical, traditional “bottom-up” perspective (i.e. from the enterprise as such towards the broader economic context), is the “top-down” perspective, i.e. the approach from the identified and processed problems of a macro-economic/global nature (structure of the economy, its maturity, transformation processes) towards individual actors, be it the firm, the enterprise, the entrepreneur, or manager.

II. METHODS

II. 1. The Prague School of Economic History is part of the historicizing stream of business history. It prefers the historical approach given by the instrumentarium of historical sciences. In this sense, it builds on the foundations of the conception of business history cultivated by economic history in the Bohemian lands/Czechoslovakia after the Second World War, especially on interpretative studies as they have been produced since the turn of the millennium.

II. 2. It respects economic theory, using it primarily as a theoretical starting point, a framework for organizing research. It does not primarily aim at a strict econometric depiction of firm developments and parameters, but focuses on capturing trends.

II. 3. The choice of methods is based on the specifics of the questions asked and the nature of the source and data base (its scope and completeness, explanatory possibilities). The combination of methods is determined on a case-by-case basis, it does not apply universally.

II. 4. It takes for granted the combination of historical, economic, sociological, legal, ethnographic, and other social science approaches in order to create the fullest possible picture.

The starting point to an updated conception of business history for scholars adhering to the Prague School of Economic History were projects on economic elites and economic nationalism. These topics became the subject of systematic interest from the late 1990s onwards (Jan Hájek, Ivan Jakubec, Drahomír Jančík, Eduard Kubů, Jiří Novotný, Jiří Šouša, Jiří Štaif). The works moved from the examination of institutions, collective identities of interest groups and entrepreneurs, and their strategies and attitudes in the economic space to individual actors, enterprises, managers, and entrepreneurial personalities, all in relation to their integration into social networks, performance and place in the process of economic development, commercialization of agriculture, industrialization, and formation of the tertiary sector. The perception of intergenerational continuity in the family business became a significant issue. The framework of the research scope of the Prague School of Economic History was completed by the specifics of the economy of the Bohemian lands. It required special analyses with regard to their multiethnic composition (economic nationalism) as well as their development, which was intertwined with heavy discontinuities compared to Western countries, and this over a relatively short period of time. The scientifically



addressed topics were also reflected in the pedagogical work, both in seminars³³ and lectures.³⁴ A number of Ph.D. and Master's theses further developed the problems of the history of business.

Business on a market of imperfect competition in accordance with the current methodology of business history was analyzed by Tomáš Gecko for the field of building materials,³⁵ Kateřina Pánková-Rozinková for the field of industrial brewing,³⁶

33 Among the selected seminars are Eduard Kubů's "Podnikání a podnikatelé v českých zemích 19. a 20. století" (Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurs in the Bohemian Lands in the 19th and 20th Centuries) or "Svět podnikání a jeho proměny v 18.-20. století" (The World of Business and its Transformations in the 18th-20th Centuries); Drahomír Jančík's "Výrobci a spotřebitelé XX. století" (Producers and Consumers in the 20th Century), Ivan Jakubec's "Problémy hospodářských dějin se zaměřením na dějiny techniky, dopravy a komunikací v 18.-20. století" (Problems of Economic History with a Focus on the History of Technology, Transport and Communications in the 18th-20th Centuries) and Barbora Štolleová's "Od trhů a tržnic k obchodním domům a hypermarketům. Spotřeba a její kultura v 19. a 20. století" (From Markets and Marketplaces to Department Stores and Hypermarkets. Consumption and its culture in the 19th and 20th centuries).

34 For example, the cycles of specialized lectures by Martin Minařík on brewing and beer consumption, Tomáš Gecko on the problem of cartelization, Jan Slaviček on the history of cooperatives, Marcela Starcová on the history of everyday life (alimentary culture), Ivan Jakubec and Jan Štemberk on the development of the tertiary sphere, and Barbora Štolleová on entrepreneurship during the Nazi occupation. In 2013–2019, the Master's accreditation in the specialization of economic history included a compulsory two-semester course "Podnikání, produkce a konzum v moderní době" (Entrepreneurship, Production, and Consumption in Modern Times) taught by Eduard Kubů and Barbora Štolleová.

35 Tomáš Gecko, Kartelizace cementářského průmyslu v kontextu hospodářských krizí v období let 1901–1938 (Cartelization of the Cement Industry in the Context of Economic Crises in the Period 1901–1938), In: Eduard Kubů — Jiří Šouša — Jindřich Soukup (eds.), Fenomén hospodářské krize v českých zemích 19. až počátku 21. století: Cyklický vývoj ekonomiky v procesu graduující globalizace (The Phenomenon of Economic Crisis in the Bohemian Lands of the 19th to the Early 21st Century: Cyclical Economic Development in the Process of Graduating Globalization), Praha — Ostrava 2015, pp. 205–218; Tomáš Gecko, „Outsiderem“ na trhu s cementem. Podnikatelské strategie Sasko-české továrny na portlandský cement v Čížkovicích 1898–1918 ("Outsider" in the Cement Market. Business Strategies of the Saxon-Czech Portland Cement Factory in Čížkovice. 1898–1918), Ústecký sborník historický 2016, no. 1, pp. 67–82; idem, Od akciové společnosti k rodinné firmě. Úloha Maxmiliána Hergeta při zakládání cementárny v Radotíně u Prahy. 1871–1874 (From Joint Stock Company to Family Business), In: Milan Hlavačka — Pavel Bek et al., Rodinné podnikání v moderní době (Family Business in Modern Times), Praha 2018, pp. 159–167; Tomáš Gecko, Nástroj prospěšný, či vražedný? Proces monopolizace na trhu stavebních hmot Předlitavska a meziválečného Československa (A Beneficial or Murderous Tool? The Process of Monopolization on the Building Materials Market in Cisleithanian and Interwar Czechoslovakia), Praha 2021.

36 Kateřina Pánková-Rozinková, Ochranná známka — nástroj konkurenčního boje plzeňských pivovarů na přelomu devatenáctého a dvacátého století (Trademark — a Competitive Tool for Pilsner Breweries at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries),

and Vojtěch Pojar for the field of hop-growing.³⁷ Comprehensive case studies of the birth and development of companies by the Prague School of Economic History were prepared by Jiří Fiala (Kralobanka — Bank in Hradec Králové)³⁸, Daniela Brádlarová (Legiobanka — Bank of Czechoslovak Legions)³⁹, Lenka Krátká (Czechoslovak Naval Navigation)⁴⁰, Martin Minařík (Smíchov brewery)⁴¹, Jan Slavíček (Sociakol and Včela cooperatives)⁴², and most recently Daniel Pick (Holešovice brewery)⁴³. Business history viewed through entrepreneurs, business families and their long-term strategies in a tightly knit convolute of the authors' collective of the Prague School of Economic History brought in 2014 a collective monograph "Pivo, zbraně i tvarůžky" under the leadership of Drahomír Jančík and Barbora Štolleová.⁴⁴



Hospodářské dějiny/Economic History 24, 2008, pp. 11–134; Kateřina Rozinková, Czech Brewing and its Cartelization 1869–1918, rigorous thesis, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, ÚHSD, Praha 2012.

- 37 Vojtěch Pojar, Zelené zlato: kartelizace chmelařství v českých zemích, 1890–1938 (Green Gold: Cartelization of Hop-growing in the Bohemian lands, 1890–1938), Praha 2017.
- 38 Jiří Fiala, Vzestup a pád Kralobanky (1868–1923): neúspěšný projekt starosty Hradce Králové Františka Ulricha? [The Rise and fall of Kralobanka (1868–1923): the Failed Project of Hradec Králové Mayor František Ulrich?], Hradec Králové 2011.
- 39 Daniela Brádlarová, Banka československých legií v letech 1919–1938 (Bank of the Czechoslovak Legions in 1919–1938), dissertation, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, ÚHSD 2006.
- 40 Lenka Krátká, Domovský přístav Praha: Československá námořní plavba v letech 1948 až 1989 (The Home Port of Prague: the Czechoslovak Naval Navigation between 1948 and 1989), Praha 2016.
- 41 Martin Minařík, V národních barvách: akcionářský pivovar na Smíchově v letech 1869–1945 (In National Colors: the Shareholder Brewery in Smíchov in the Years 1869–1945), Pelhřimov 2017.
- 42 Jan Slavíček, Ze světa podnikání do světa plánované distribuce: proměny spotřebního družstevnictví v letech 1945–1956 na příkladu severních Čech (From the World of Business to the World of Planned Distribution: the Transformations of Consumer Cooperativism in 1945–1956 on the example of North Bohemia), Praha 2017; idem, Spotřební družstvo Včela mezi podnikáním a politikou v letech 1905–1938 aneb pevnost proletářů v Praze (The Včela Consumer Cooperative between Business and Politics in 1905–1938 or the Fortress of Proletarians in Prague), Studie Národohospodářského ústavu Josefa Hlávky, 4/2019, Praha 2019.
- 43 Daniel Pick, První pražský měšťanský pivovar v Holešovicích v letech 1895–1918 (The First Prague Burgher Brewery in Holešovice in 1895–1918), Bachelor thesis, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, Praha 2020.
- 44 Drahomír Jančík — Barbora Štolleová (eds.), Pivo, zbraně i tvarůžky. Podnikatelé meziválečného Československa ve víru konjunktur a krizí (Beer, Guns and Aromatic Cheese. Entrepreneurs of Interwar Czechoslovakia in the Whirlwind of the Economy and Crisis), Praha 2014. For separate entrepreneurial biographies see Svatopluk Herc, Jan Otto — Podnikatel a bankovní manažer (Entrepreneur and Bank Director), Master's Thesis, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, ÚHSD, Praha 2013; Ludmila Cvrčková Porkertová, Od živnostenského podnikání k průmyslové velkovýrobě. Historie rodinné firmy Rolných 1862–1939 (From Trade Business to Industrial Manufacturing. The History of



A specifically coherent segment intersecting business history in its essence is the complex of projects on the “aryanization” and administration of Jewish companies during the period of Nazi occupation. The novelty was not only the retrospective examination of the character and performance of the companies, the economic mechanism of their expropriation, but also the analytical elaboration of their owners and managers.⁴⁵

Among the works intersecting the issues of business history which nevertheless have undeniable value from the point of view of business history, we recall the following. Kristýna Kaucká’s research on land reform on the Fürstenberg estates focused on the redefinition of the business environment in the area of property law.⁴⁶ Lenka Burgerová dealt with the “aryanization” of company and house property in Teplice.⁴⁷ Miloš Hořejš with the expropriation of Czech farmsteads and the subsequent German colonization during the occupation⁴⁸ and Barbora Štolleová’s forthcoming analytical

the Rolný Family Firm 1862–1939), diploma thesis, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, ÚHSD, Praha 2009; Eduard Kubů — Jiří Šouša, “Bývalí lidé”. Z podnikatele a manažera třídním nepřitelem — Ing. Jaromír Bečka s rodinou před únorem 1948 a po něm (“Former People”. From Businessman and Manager to Class Enemy — ing. Jaromír Bečka and His Family Before and After February 1948), In: Ivan Šedivý — Jan Němeček — Jiří Kocián — Oldřich Tůma (eds.), *České křižovatky evropských dějin. Únor 1948 v Československu. (Czech Crossroads of European History. February 1948 in Czechoslovakia)*, Praha 2011, pp. 215–224; Eduard Kubů — Jiří Šouša, *Člověk ve víru proměn společnosti a režimů: socializace, identita, krize identity, resocializace. Otto Rydlo — funkcionář komunistické strany, žurnalista, podnikatel a politický vězeň. 1896–1974 (Man in the Whirlwind of Changes in Society and Regimes: Socialization, Identity, Identity Crisis, Resocialization. Otto Rydlo — Communist Party Functionary, Journalist, Entrepreneur and Political Prisoner. 1896–1974)*, *Paginae historiae*, vol. 27, 2019, no. 1, pp. 576–600.

⁴⁵ Drahomír Jančík — Eduard Kubů, „Arizace“ a arizátoři. Drobný a střední židovský majetek v úvěrech Kreditanstalt der Deutschen. 1939–45 (“Aryanization” and Aryanizers. Small and Medium Jewish Property in the Credits of the Kreditanstalt der Deutschen. 1939–45), Praha 2005; Drahomír Jančík — Eduard Kubů — Jiří Šouša, *unter Mitarbeit von Jiří Novotný, Arisierungsgewinnler. Die Rolle der Deutschen Banken bei der “Arisierung” und Konfiskation jüdischer Vermögen im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren (1939–1945)*, Wiesbaden 2011.

⁴⁶ Kristýna Kaucká, „Taková tlačence na jednom dvorečku!“ aneb První pozemková reforma na velkostatech Křivoklát, Plasy a Radnice. 1918–1938 (“Such a Crowd in One Backyard!” or The First Land Reform on the Křivoklát, Plasy and Radnice Estates. 1918–1938), Praha 2018.

⁴⁷ Lenka Burgerová, *Arizace židovského domovního majetku v Teplicích-Šanově 1938–1945. Vyřazení Židů z hospodářského a sociálního života. Passports nemovitostí (Aryanization of Jewish House Property in Teplice-Šanov 1938–1945. The Exclusion of Jews from Economic and Social Life. Property Passports)*, Master’s thesis, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, ÚHSD, Praha 2004.

⁴⁸ Miloš Hořejš, *Nacistická germanizační a osídlovací politika v Protektorátu Čechy a Morava v letech 1942–1945 (Nazi Germanization and Settlement Policy in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in 1942–1945)*, dissertation, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, ÚHSD, Praha 2018.



work on the “aryanization” and Germanization of corporate big business during the Second World War also belong to the same specific period of history. Jaroslav Jelínek analyzed the organizational development and the ownership base of the significant engineering company in his diploma thesis.⁴⁹ Eduard Kubů focused on the business elites of the economic transformation.⁵⁰ The established trend is being developed by doctoral dissertations on the economic headquarters during the First World War, on the business of the Živnostenská banka (Trades Bank) in the 19th and 20th centuries, on the business of phonography and the jewellery trade, which are currently being commissioned at the ÚHSD of the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University. At the level of master’s theses, we are working on the V. J. Rott iron mongery (shop) in Prague, the famous horticultural company Böhm, and the large Prague building firm Nekvasil.

A compressed balance sheet of the output of the Prague School of Economic History shows that although much has been done in the field of business history, it is still too little. This is due in the first place to the limited staffing of the Economic History Seminar within the ÚHSD. The department is composed of five economic historians (I. Jakubec, D. Jančík, E. Kubů, T. Gecko, B. Štolleová) who have to scientifically and pedagogically “cover” the wide range of world and Czech modern economic history from the mid-18th century to the present. The development of business history can hardly be built on a heterogeneous set of scientific research activities of individuals who, within the limits of their modest time resources, devote themselves to selected problems or issues that are close and interesting to them. The Prague School of Economic History has long lacked the large joint projects that significantly integrated the school in the 1990s and the first decade of the millennium, and above all drew other researchers outside the ÚHSD of the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University into cooperation.

* * *

The revival of business history in the Czech Republic presupposes discussion of its needs and fundamental topics, both at the level of oppositions of large projects, in which leading Czech and foreign specialists participate, and then of informal reflections and discussions at various round tables, workshops, symposia, and international conferences. One of the first movers in favor of the reflection on business history after the fall of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia was the return of Alice Teichová to Czech historiography (Teichová emigrated to Great Britain with her husband Mikuláš after the Soviet occupation in 1968).⁵¹ Thanks to her, business history

49 Jaroslav Jelínek, *Organizační vývoj ČKD v 30. letech* (Organisational Development of ČKD in the 1930s), diploma thesis, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, ÚHSD, Praha 2010.

50 Libuše Macáková — Eduard Kubů, *Transformation of Economic Elites after the Fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia*, In: Friederike Sattler — Christoph Boyer (eds.), *European Economic Elites Between a New Spirit of Capitalism and Erosion of State Socialism*, *Schriften zur Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte*, Bd. 84, Berlin 2009, pp. 281–297.

51 Alice Teichová — Herbert Matis — Andreas Resch (Hg.), *Wissenschaftliche Entwicklungstrends und Studien aus Zentraleuropa*, Wien 1999; cf. also Antonie Doležalová, *Business*



came into the field of view of Czech economic historians, gathered around the ÚHSD of the Faculty of Arts in Prague, in the 1990s. In recent years, events associated with the activities of the European Business Historians' Association (EBHA) have made a significant impact on research in this area. Central and Eastern European issues were represented at the World Congress of Business History in Bergen in 2016, and three years later, in October 2019, Polish colleagues from Kozminski University in Warsaw, together with the EBHA, initiated an international workshop devoted to this field.⁵² Business history in a Central and Eastern European perspective also appeared as a topic of its own at the XIX World Congress of Economic History in Paris (2022). Among the questions posed were the specifics in the characteristics and development of businesses/enterprises in this area in the 19th and 20th centuries, the disparities in comparison with the experience of Western Europe and, consequently, the world.

An expression of the Prague School of Economic History's approach to the history of business in its contemporary conception and an expression of an effort to somehow systematize research and coordinate with other research centers and individual researchers was the organization of a workshop entitled "Business History in Central Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Sources — Methods — Interpretation" held in October 2020 in cooperation between the ÚHSD of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University and the Society for Economic and Social History of the Czech Republic (Společnost pro hospodářské a sociální dějiny České republiky). The publication output of the workshop is essentially in the form of a monograph. The collection of more than 20 texts, accompanied by an introductory study and a reflection on the future direction of the discipline, is spread over three consecutive volumes of *Hospodářské dějiny/Economic History*. Each of them has its own thematic definition. Volume 1/2020 focuses on issues of approaches and methods, volume 2/2020 contains the case studies presented at the workshop, and the last volume, 3/2020, presents a discussion of the possibilities and limits of the source base of business history in the Czech Republic.

The workshop held in autumn 2020 was intended as a feedback loop to the historian's community. The papers presented there, and the subsequent debate, undeniably brought interesting and novel topics and new insights to the discourse. A loose continuation of the efforts of the ÚHSD of Faculty of Arts at the Charles University to develop business history is the international scientific conference organized in cooperation with the National Technical Museum in Prague entitled "Podnikatel versus kapitál — Kapitál versus podnikatel. Dvě tváře jednoho vztahu ve střední Evropě 19. a 20. století" (Entrepreneur versus Capital — Capital versus Entrepreneur. Two Faces of One Relationship in Central Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries) organized for October 2022. The scope of the proposed conference is an analysis aimed at understanding the relationship of larger, smaller, and even small business entities to money institutions and vice versa. It calls for topics such as

History. Vědecký obor mezi historií a ekonomikou (Business History. The Scientific Field Between History and Economics), *Český časopis historický*, 115, 2017, no. 3, p. 720.

⁵² First World Congress of Business History, Bergen, 25–27 August 2016; Workshop on Business History in Central & Eastern Europe, Warsaw, 25–26 October 2019.

family financial strategies, collective savings (self-help), lending, industry-bank relations, foreign investment, etc., in order to contribute to the understanding of the strategies and behavior of the entrepreneur (manager) in the heavily under-capitalized economy of Central Europe. On the basis of these initiatives the authors of the study express their hope that business history in the Czech Republic will continue to develop dynamically.

