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# Industrial and commercial districts of a town – history and present

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### Abstrakt

Social and professional groups create a significant part of an urban community. It can be proved that business activities have existed ever since the Middle Ages in the town of Banská Bystrica: there were activities connected with mining and metallurgy (mines, smiths, etc.) and there were sawmills, textile factories, mills, and distilleries in the period of the establishment of manufactories and factories. Powerful local business families were formed in this context. The period between the two world wars was especially prosperous. A number of trades and shops were reconstructed. Later, during the socialist period, the tradition was interrupted and, after 1989, business activities did not continue in the tradition of family business. Commercial activities in the town have now been influenced and homogenized by the establishment of famous-brand retail chains and restaurants offering foreign cuisine. A professional group of miners in Banská Štiavnica had helped to create mining traditions. These traditions have been reproduced today – even after mine closings. Social activities of the town also reflect tradition.

### Klíčová slova

urban anthropology, industrial and commercial districts

The main aim of this study is to point out significant changes in public town spaces which created town cores and were centers of trade, crafts and businesses for centuries. My hypotheses are as follows:

1) In 1989, after a long period of a totalitarian regime, when all the functions of the town were centralized under the aegis of Communist ideology, the town attracted its original functions back. It was closely connected with a growing number of small businesses based on the private ownership of former owners and entrepreneurs and the free running of businesses by former owners (before 1948).

2) Mental images of industrial and market sections of the town depend on our preservation and presentation of crucial periods of our economic history and technical heritage.

Considering the time factor, I decided to analyze two periods: the period between the First and the Second World Wars and the period after 1989. Spatially, I focused on the town of Banská Bystrica because I have been dealing with this issue for more than two decades. I decided to do a survey of the middle class with the main focus on social and spatial stratification. I deal with three questions in this study:

1. What were the specifics and features of the town of Banská Bystrica in terms of its history? What created the special atmosphere of the town?
2. How did industry, trade, crafts and businesses support such specifics and features? What are the most significant changes when we compare those two above-mentioned periods?
3. How do the current inhabitants perceive their own historical facts and do the images of the industrial and commercial districts of the town belong to the mental maps of the Banská Bystrica?

1. Economic and industrial features of the town

The town of Banská Bystrica (one of the seven royal copper-mining towns – Kremnica, Banská Štiavnica, Nová Baňa, Pukanec, Ľubietová and Banská Belá), flourished as a regional mining center and had a crucial position in the economic history of Slovakia, especially in the 15th and 16th centuries. During

the next centuries, the economic importance and activities of the town changed significantly, but in 1925 an unknown author wrote the following words: "Banská Bystrica is very significant in the area of market, finance and industry; it has many important factories, many historical buildings in the centre and it is a real town" (Lupták, 1932).

The history of Banská Bystrica was connected with the exploitation of its abundant deposits of copper (and to a lesser extent of silver, gold, and iron). Banská Bystrica, together with other mining towns of Banská Štiavnica (nickThis study is a part of VEGA grant No. 1/2225/05 "Identita vybraných profesijných skupín v stredoslovenských mestách" and a prepared monograph entitled Banská Bystrica – mesto obchodníkov, remeselníkov a živnostníkov.

named "Silver Banská Štiavnica") and Kremnica (nicknamed "Golden Kremnica"), was the most famous and the wealthiest free royal mining town in the region. The affluent Fugger and Thurzo families founded the prosperous "Ungarischer Handel" company (German for "Hungarian Trade") in 1494.

Depending mainly on the mines around the town of Banská Bystrica, the company had become a leading world producer of copper by the 16th century (the company was dissolved in 1548). The copper deposits had been all but depleted by the 18th century, but there are still many places in the town which recall its rich and famous mining history (for example, some names of town districts and residential quarters – Na Troskách, meaning "On the Debris" or Hámor, meaning metallurgic manufacture). In the next centuries, the town became a center of several public and municipal institutions. Development of new industries also influenced the town of Banská Bystrica. Many new manufactories and factories were established, but they were of little influence and importance, particularly because of the Great Depression in the first half of the 20th century.

But we can say that smaller businesses and crafts greatly influenced the town. Industrial zones of the town were situated in the close distance from the historic town centre. Most small shops and businesses were situated on the town square and in the nearby streets and most of them were family businesses. Shopkeepers and entrepreneurs lived in the centre of town (for example at the end of Lazovna Street near a former textile factory; today it is the well-known Slovenka Textile Factory).

During the period between the two World Wars of the 20th century there were tens of small shops and businesses situated right on the town square and in the nearby streets. (See also Darulova, 2006). Together with local industry, they supported the economic development of the town because they employed more than one-third of its inhabitants.

At the beginning of the twenties of the 20th century the wood-products industry was the leading industry in terms of the number of factories as well

The first manufactories were established at the end of the 18th century (production of textile and copper dishes). A textile manufactory was established around 1725. Workshops focused on dyeing of textiles were mechanized in the 19th century. Metallurgic manufactory in the town quarters "Kráľová" and "Kostiviarska" produced weapons. Melchior Smrtník started to produce millstones in the 17th century. A sugar manufactory was established in 1830, but it had only a short existence. It was closed in 1840.

In the second half of the 19th century manufactories were replaced by modern factories. The first factory ever established in the town of Banská Bystrica was a wood-industry factory which produced goods by 1919. The first factory producing ceramics and cement was established in 1905. The textile factory of the Furdik family was established in 1906.

as employees. The second most important industry was construction; the food industry, the textile industry, the chemical industry, metalworking or leatherworking were also of great importance. Banská Bystrica became a real commercial centre. There were more than 110 shops with various goods. A 1932 publication focused on the town stated: "...the town has many shops and you can buy everything you want. There is a network of small businesses. Most small shops and businesses are located in the town. There are many nice coffeehouses, hotels, and restaurants in the town" (Almanach a adresár mesta Banskej Bystrice, 1932).

In 1932, the Business Community of the town consisted of more than 1,408 tradesmen of various types and registered around 400 apprentices. According to demographic statistics of 1930 that was one-tenth of all the inhabitants (the town had 11,321 inhabitants). As for the original ethnic composition

of the town, there were 9,600 Czechs and Slovaks, 470 Germans, 435 Hungarians, 600 Jews and 235 others (Krupa, 1998, p. 65).

There were 55 trades and 31 shops of various types in the town of Banská Bystrica.

When we talk about the multiplicity of commercial enterprises, we can say that the most frequent businesses were inns and restaurants (35), canteens or dining halls (3) and hotels (5). Other numerous groups were tailors (38), shoemakers (49), hansom cab drivers (16) and bakers (10). There were also 19 lawyers, 17 doctors and 5 dentists.

In 1932, there were 31 types of shops in the town of Banská Bystrica.

Inhabitants witnessed a growing number of groceries, some of which were considered luxurious because they were affected by a luxury tax (e.g., shops which sold jewelry, sweets, chocolates, perfumes, etc.). According to the statistics, there were 39 "luxury" shops in the town in 1920 (e.g., there were 12 watchmakers and jewelers).

The social status of tradesmen and shopkeepers was very different. For example, the revenue from business activities (we are talking about grocery shops) was from about 5,000 to 2,700,000 crowns per year. The lumber trade was one of the most profitable. Constructors and butchers were also very successful. The main aim of the Business Community was to support humanitarian, economic and educational interests of its members. (Almanach a adresár mesta Banskej Bystrice, 1932, p. 18). Membership in the Business Community was obligatory. (Almanach a adresár mesta Banskej Bystrice, 1932, p. 18) As for confessions, 6,611 identified themselves as Catholic, 2, 444 as Protestants, 76 as Calvinists and 1,146 as Jewish.

Craftsmen such as bakers, watchmakers, jewelers, tailors and shoemakers had lower social status and lower incomes.

If we want to emphasize the original ethnic composition of the shopkeepers we have to say that the Jews had a significant position; they controlled about 63% of all the shops in the town. But at the end of the 19th century former tradesmen and craftsmen were replaced by industrial production. That was the main reason why only few trades and crafts survived. But those trades and crafts were not controlled by Jews.

From the economic point of view, the most successful were shopkeepers and tradesmen; craftsmen were less successful (Darulová, 2005, p. 119). Middle-class shopkeepers and craftsmen were considered public representatives of the town because they were in everyday contact with visitors, foreigners or customers. They represented the town and its features. Names of individual shopkeepers, signs on shops or workshops are closely connected with the town and its history. Family businesses often advertised in local newspapers.

2. Changes of the town in terms of the structure of businesses, crafts and trades between 1918 and 1945/48 in comparison to the period after 1989

The non-violent revolution of November 1989 that saw the overthrow of the Communist government symbolizes, in some ways, the return of our society to the period before 1948, the period of the First Republic. We witnessed the change from "state employee" to tradesmen. To sum it up, we can say that the middle class survived its "liquidation" and all businesses were brought to an end after 1948, but suddenly they were resurrected in the 1990s (Marek, 2006, p. 8). Today, only few shops are named after their previous, original owners (for example, the "U Klimov" grocery, the "U Mihálikov" bakery or the "U Kemov" shopping center). Only a few family businesses are still "named" after their original owners, for example, the building of the Hotel Rak – meaning "Crayfish," named after its original owner Juraj Krebs (in Slovak Rak). But today this name is closely connected with a building other than the original one, the building of the "Červený rak" restaurant.

Dissolution of the guilds was a crucial historical moment. In 1884, the Law on the Adaptation of Craft as a Trade was adopted. The position of tradesmen in Czechoslovakia was defined by the so-called Law on Trades in 1924.

The original building of the Hotel "Rak" is located on the town square. It is the seat of T-Mobile today.

Picture No. 1: Original building of the "U Mihálikov" bakery (before 1928)

Picture No. 2: "U Mihálikov" bakery (present day)

Direct family members of former private owners of family businesses could demand return of their property (firms, shops buildings etc.) after 1989,

but only a few of them decided to do so and, later, only a small group of them decided to continue and revitalize the family business. Most rightful owners decided to sell or rent their property.

According to our survey we can divide the rightful owners into three basic categories:

- rightful owners who decided to sell their property;
- rightful owners who decided to renovate and rent their property;
- rightful owners who decided to start renovations and revitalization of the family businesses.

After 1989, only a few rightful owners decided to use the original shop names (e.g., the “U Klimov” grocery, the “U Mihálikov” bakery or the “U Havelkov” stationery store).

Many owners decided to rent their property for other purposes. For example, the family of former butchers rented their properties to the owners of a gambling room; another butchers’ family rented their house to the owners of the Positivo café, and ...“the G... family wanted to revitalize the family tradition and open a grocery but they could not compete with the general merchandising retail chains” (G. P.).

There are also other reasons why owners decided not to revitalize family businesses, for example...“we did not revitalize our original family business because our grandchildren are the rightful owners and they are either not skilled enough to continue or they lost their emotional connections with the former family business” (G. P.).

We witnessed a growing number of restaurants (rating 2 and 3 stars), a decline of boutiques and an increase in the number of small shops full of Chinese goods (textile, shoes, clothing etc.) after 1989. They can also be seen on the town square and in the nearby streets. There is also an increase in the number of jewelry stores run by businessmen of Italian or former Yugoslavian origin. Shops of today that are located in the centre have already lost their specific atmosphere. There were also significant changes in the number and types of shops. Today we are witnessing a certain homogenization of shops in Slovak towns and cities; we can see an increase in the number of shops similar to French-type restaurants (Copaline), fast-food restaurants (McDonald’s) or The rightful owners decided that the new owner of the bakery may use original name.

Picture No. 3:

Original building  
of stationery  
“U Havelkov ” (1928)

Picture No. 4:

The “U Havelkov ”  
stationery store  
(present day )

pizzerias; there are many shoe shops (Baťa) or sport shops (Kenvelo, Adidas, O’Neill, etc.). In 2006, the situation in the town dramatically changed after a new shopping mall (the Europe Shopping Center) was opened to the public. It caused many small shops in the town center to close, particularly boutiques and sports shops, which were replaced by new restaurants.

Basic commercial functions of the town were relocated from the center to uptown, where a new network of hypermarkets was built after 1989 – Tesco Stores, Baumax, Nay, showrooms or warehouses.

### 3. Reflections, mental maps and preferences

Throughout the centuries, a number of residential quarters, industrial and commercial districts, fortifications, places of entertainment and dominants were built in the town of Banská Bystrica. They had certain specific functions. Today many of them have lost their original functions or have just disappeared. So the history of the town can be seen only in archives, books or short historical remarks and that is the main reason why it is very hard to define the whole historical image of the town.

There were periods in the history of the town when all the industrial and market sections became an inseparable part of mental maps of the inhabitants. It was the period connected with mining and metalworking. Because this period ended two hundred years ago, there are no sites in the town which could

recall our memories. These sites either disappeared or were renovated by new owners (mainly mills, sawmills etc.). Companies built in the 19th century had only local importance (the textile and wood industries). Many of them were closed, except the Slovenka Textile Factory. Only the names of individual areas recall their original industrial functions. Few of them are still used and wellknown, for example:

- The “Na Troskách” area was closely connected with a silversmith and debris produced there. Today the term “Na Troskách” is closely connected with the newly established Europa Shopping Center;
  - The “Hušták” area, located beyond the town gates, was a suburb full of workshops; many of those buildings were destroyed during the period of Socialism;
  - The “Uhlisko” area is also closely connected with the mining history of the town. This quarter was full of wood piles used in the process of copper production.
- If we consider that mental maps are created by personal memories on the one hand and institutional bases on the other (schools, museums, memorials etc.), then traditional industrial and market areas of the town will be a part of the mental maps of former tradesmen and shopkeepers, or perhaps inhabitants who were born in the inter-war period. The survey proved that only old people know something about the prewar and Socialist industrial and commercial areas of the town. The younger generation is closely connected with Zvolenská Street, which is full of hypermarkets and showrooms. Our mining history is almost forgotten and the younger generation knows nothing about quarters such as Na Troskách or Medený Hámor. These quarters are not connected with mining anymore.

#### Conclusions

Considering the comparative study of tradesmen, shopkeepers and craftsmen (comparing years 1918 to 1945/8 and after 1989) we claim that:

- most rightful owners decided to sell or rent their property; only a small group decided to revitalize former family businesses (e.g., the “U Mihálikov” bakery or the “U Havelkov” stationery store);
- many renters do not continue in the family traditions and do not revitalize family businesses, we also witness frequent change of renters because of their insolvency;
- there is a change in the system of presentation of the owners; whereas, at the beginning of the 20th century, they tried to advertise their names and shops were named after their owners, today owners try to hide their identity and focus on the goods or services they sell;
- small tradesmen or craftsmen are primarily focused on selling goods during fairs or celebrations; they produce small presents made of wax, wood, clay or they sell gingerbread cookies;
- our historical experience with political persecutions and the existence of an irrational ideological attitude of hostility directed against the middle class (together with its isolation for more than fifty years) caused traditional crafts and businesses to decrease and current owners not to revitalize the small- and medium-size family businesses of their ancestors.

Considering the change of central parts of the town and inhabitants’ (or visitors’) preferences, it is necessary to claim that:

- there is an enormous effort to preserve or revitalize the historical atmosphere of the town; some shopkeepers, in particular, try to support this general tendency (e.g., preservation of the original name of one of the oldest restaurants in the town – Červený rak – meaning “red crayfish,” the original name of an old grocery store U Klimov – the name of the shopkeeper, historical portals of buildings, etc.);
  - on the other hand, the more changes we witness the more similarities with to other Slovak (or European) towns and cities we can find; the town is more open and diversified – e.g., various restaurants in the centre (18 restaurants on one square): the most interesting being Positivo – Cuban style, Olivo – Italian cuisine, Barbakan – a luxurious restaurant for foreigners (Barbakan – a historical building with a music garden), a French cr?perie, a Staroplzenska restaurant – foreign cuisine, a Slovak restaurant (1 star rating) etc.
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