

## REVIEWS

*Poczet polskich przedsiębiorców* [Polish entrepreneurs' cluster] (2018). Wydawnictwo Magam, Biblioteka Warsaw Enterprise Institute, Warszawa, pp. 192

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The process of developing the foundations of the free market economy, which took place in Poland in the last decades of the 20th century, resulted in an increase in interest in the issues of entrepreneurship, its role and importance in undertaking new economic initiatives and shaping social attitudes. The restoration of the importance of private property in the economy, the legislative amendments made, including the possibility of setting up companies and running a business, led to an explosion of entrepreneurship on a previously unprecedented scale. A characteristic feature of the transformations carried out in the 1990s was the rapid, often unexpected emergence of business leaders who used favourable circumstances to establish new organisational structures. Entrepreneurs, or rather businessmen – as A. Meducka pointed out – became “undisputed heroes of those times” [Meducka-Potocka A. 2017]. However, have these groups always been positively perceived by Poles in different historical periods?

The dynamic development of the private sector and the growing interest in the business environment, observed in the following years, naturally inclined to raise questions about the Polish tradition of entrepreneurship and those who established economic structures on Polish lands throughout the history. The history by providing personal models, according to the well-known saying *Verba docet, exempla trahunt*, belongs to those disciplines of the science that can be used in shaping certain social attitudes [see: Czechanowski P., Pacanowska R. 2014: 129-149]. Among publications, interviews or manuals, the Polish market was initially dominated by the positions showing well-known entrepreneurs from other cultural circles [Rigby R. 2015]. The most no-

table of them were the globally recognizable, distinctive figures of American entrepreneurs from the period of dynamic industrialization of the USA. However, the dominating principle on the ground of American capitalism that the winner takes everything, leading in practice to the creation of recognizable heroes, on the Polish ground, as in many other European countries, has not been applied. The experience of Polish history and the combination of a number of historical and cultural circumstances, including the experience of the partitions or the communist period, resulted in the fact that the professional group to which entrepreneurs belonged did not enjoy social respect. Family businesses in the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries were established on Polish lands by representatives of various nationalities, coming from middle-class communities, which in the past did not always lead to the disclosure of economic achievements other than those of Polish communities, and thus to the display of merits of representatives of other nationalities. On the other hand, the years of socialist propaganda reinforced the stereotypical image of a private entrepreneur, which was reflected in the lexical aspect and known terms such as “badgers and money changers”, indicating a group of those who possessed resources greater than other parts of society. And the experience gained in the conditions of the command and control economy system, the ability to adapt to new conditions in the case of the emerging class of Polish entrepreneurs became a good way to deal with uncertainty in the conditions of unstable legal regulations. The new approach to the entrepreneurs’ environment resulted in new publications of non-academic environments, and the above subject matter was particularly often discussed by publicists or activists of organizations and foundations supporting the entrepreneurship. In recent years, the publications of L. Kostrzewski and P. Międzyński [2015], as well as of M. Barbasiewicz [2012] and M. Dygas [2019] have contributed to the popularization of Polish entrepreneurs’ environments.

Among the publications addressing the issue of entrepreneurship, simultaneously having the character of a publishing house of an anniversary nature, prepared on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the regaining of independence by Poland, there is a distinguished publication issued under the auspices of the Warsaw Enterprise Institute – “Polish Entrepreneurs’ Cluster”. The manner in which the issues of Polish entrepreneurs’ environments were presented was the decisive factor in placing a review of the popularization publication in a scien-

tific journal. We received the first publication on the Polish market in the form of a compendium, offering a historical reflection on Polish achievements on the economic level, presented through the prism of biographies of unconventional characters. "*History, including economic history* – as indicated in the preface- *is created by people*". The paper was prepared by a team of authors interested in economic issues, representing various backgrounds and professional groups. This group included Marcin Rosołowski (communication and public relations specialist), Andrzej Krajewski (historian and journalist), Arkadiusz Bińczyk (manager in a private company) and Wojciech Kwilecki (representing the Polish Land Society). The authors, not affiliated with the academic environment, prepared an unconventional paper written in a colourful, lively language that differs significantly from classical academic discourse. This is its unquestionable advantage. At the same time, however, the popularizing character of this publishing initiative influenced the decision to abandon classical solutions, such as the indication of literature or sources in individual biographical notes.

The publication, divided into six chronological chapters preceded by an introduction, contains biographical articles of 61 figures who made "*a significant contribution to the economic development of the Polish lands*". Although the intention of the authors was to bring closer the figures from Poland's Piasts and Jagiellons who contributed to the Polish economy to the end of the Second Republic of Poland, the concept of presenting biographies of people from such different periods in a single paper may be somewhat surprising, as may the selection of the presented figures. Although, as indicated in the introduction, the paper "*is not also a ranking of the largest and the most famous*", it is difficult not to raise questions about the criteria for selecting the presented characters. In the publication, in order to characterize the achievements of specific individuals on the economic level, for the period before the partitions of Poland, such well-known figures as Kazimierz Czartoryski or Mikołaj Kopernik were presented. It should be added, however, that the distinguished Toruń scientist was presented, which may come as a surprise, in a nonstandard manner: as a scientist interested in the issue of money. Without questioning the legitimacy of including his profile in the publication, the question should be raised here whether, with reference to the title of the paper, he can be described as scientist or entrepreneur? As the well-known business historian Alfred Chandler pointed out, "*The entrepreneur is an innovator who*

*changes the methods of production and distribution, inventing new products and processes, new markets and sources of demand and creating new organizational forms*" [Jeffrey A. Harris 2013: 16]. Without trying at this point to decide which factors determine the number of entrepreneurial people and at the same time trying to indicate a common motive for the characters presented in the paper, it should be pointed out whether they share the same "*ability to constantly look to the future*", anticipating their times. This remark applies equally to the entrepreneurs of the Stanisławów times, as well as to the Second Republic of Poland.

Among those distinguished by a biographical note in the publication there were financial experts, such as the banker of the three kings Jan Bonert, Piotr Fergusson Tepper, Hipolit Wavelberg or prominent politicians, such as the statesman Jan Zamoyski. At the crossroads of private and public interests, many fortunes were created in the past. The historical narrative about the environment of Polish entrepreneurs is also heavily dependent on complex determinants of religious and national nature. However, an attentive reader will notice without difficulty that a significant part out of the then enlightened people of their epoch come from the immigrant backgrounds, those families who came to the Polish lands in search of new challenges and financial prosperity (Jerzy Fukier, Jost Decjusz). This is a good starting point for reflection on how people of German or Jewish origin contributed to the new achievements. Recalling many colourful figures, the authors point out, for example, the figure of a polonized Armenian, Paschalis Jakubowicz, who became famous as a manufacturer of contour belts from Lipków. However, the national context remains particularly visible in the case of those entrepreneurs whose careers began during the period of dynamic industrialization of the lands of the Kingdom of Poland (the Steinkeler and Kronenberg families).

The cluster of entrepreneurs does not only show the figures of those who have achieved success, equally often pointing to failures and defeats. The biograms presented on the work sheets show that life writes surprising scenarios, and favourable or negative circumstances determine the success of the enterprise. An example of a business initiative that lasted only a decade and was of great importance for grain trade was Prot Potocki, who tried to create, among others, a Black Sea fleet by setting up a Black Sea Trade Company and a trading and banking exchange office in Cherson. The end of the Stanisław era, the context of the partitions of Poland, the wave of bankruptcies of Polish banks

led to the collapse of a promising undertaking. The activity of Antoni Tyzenhauzen was also part of this trend.

Among the characters honored on the cards was one woman, Anna Jabłonowska, distinguished by her courage in the implementation of changes in her subordinate cities and properties. And although the reforms she undertook led to the failure of the whole undertaking, this example also provides a good illustration of the fact that life verified theoretical knowledge, though in practice women often administered landed estates with good results.

A careful reading of the paper, however, leads to another reflection related to the history of Polish entrepreneurship. Presenting biograms of people who "*contributed to shaping the Polish economy*" in such different areas as finance and management, infrastructure construction or trade, it is not difficult to notice that in relation to earlier epochs the majority of them are well-born people from higher social classes. Therefore, we meet representatives of wealthy nobility, middle-class people and noblemen. However, in their case it is difficult to resist the impression that family ties and connections, as well as education that was not available to the lower social classes, had a great influence on the courage to take new initiatives. It also raises the classic question of whether entrepreneurship can be learnt. Do specific predispositions and personality traits, such as persistence and consequence in achieving a goal, determine the courage to build new enterprises?

Poles belong to those groups of emigrants who find themselves abroad, in voluntary or forced emigration, achieving financial success. Among the creators of world cinema we can find many emigrants from the Polish lands, who joined the construction of a new industry, including the Warner Bros film studio. One of the creators of Polish cinematography, Aleksander Hertz, is also a character of this kind.

In the achievements presented on the pages of the publication you can notice timeless achievements, those that survived the trial of time, and their name gave rise to a well-known brand. This is what happened in the case of Antoni Patek and the created watch brand, still operating on the market today, the Hefra company, offering silver and plated tableware on the market for almost two centuries, or a slightly different initiative, because associated with the beginnings of the Polish aviation industry, an enterprise such as Airlines Lot Ltd. (Alfons Kuhn). At this point, it is also worth asking a question about private entrepreneurs of

the Second Polish Republic, such as O. Kon, J. Pfeifer, and M. Dąbrowski, who were not included in the Polish entrepreneurs list.

On the margin of the discussed paper it can be pointed out that the development of a new discipline on the Polish ground, namely entrepreneurship, leads to a question about the main directions of academic research. The renaissance of entrepreneurship brought visible changes in many areas of life: not only in the creation of new economic entities, which generated a significant part of GDP, but also consulting companies, legal and financial consulting, business environment institutions, numerous organizations and associations, and as a consequence, the demand for new areas of knowledge or a new approach to existing knowledge, including historical reflection. On the one hand, the issues related to the presentation of entrepreneurs' environments were a classic canon of historical research, and on the other hand, in Polish publications, especially those issued before 1989, some unilateral generalisations or interpretation errors can be observed. The papers showing entrepreneurs were printed in practice, especially when they concerned the companies or entrepreneurs less known on a national scale from the area of one of the three former partitions of Poland, in regional periodicals, and therefore they remain strongly dispersed. In the case of publications prepared in the final decades of the People's Republic of Poland or in the 1990s, erroneous interpretations or unilateral generalisations were not always avoided. The reasons for this kind of approach to issues include the lack of continuity in undertaking economic initiatives, and the above remark concerns different periods in Polish history. The group of Polish entrepreneurs, due to post-war nationalization, ceased operations and did not write a new family business history in the post-war period. However, the lack of continuity in undertaking business initiatives concerns various periods in Polish history. Some of the undertakings were destroyed together with the partition of Poland, others due to the ongoing uprising riot, and in relation to the twentieth century the damage caused during the First and Second World Wars or the takeover of the family business by the state. That is why, however, a historical reflection on what experiences have become the contribution of the entrepreneurs' environments is needed to build awareness and educate future entrepreneurs [Ochinowski T. 2013]. The continuity and durability of functioning the economic entities, which often use the remains of the pre-

viously functioning infrastructure, on the one hand does not constitute a new statement, and on the other hand the scale of the phenomenon – whether in relation to the post-war period or the Polish transformation – requires looking at it from a longer perspective, the perspective of the long duration.

The book has been published with the financial support of various institutions such as Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego, Polish Development Fund (“Polski Fundusz Rozwoju”) and the Czartoryscy XX Foundation. Its great advantage is the fact that every biogram is accompanied by colour photographs or an interestingly designed cover, and the printing on chalk paper highlights the anniversary nature of the publishing house on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Polish independence.

The presentation in the publication of the problem of complicated conditions of the economic history of the Polish lands in the past epochs, through the prism of colourful, individual fates of certain figures, constitutes an important and needed intention on the Polish publishing market. Searching for an answer to the question of what factors decide about undertaking new initiatives and entrepreneurial attitudes, whose examples can be found in different epochs and different environments, belongs to important research problems, and the continuation of the intended publication will find a group of recipients interested in the issues of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs.

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