

Cieszyn as an Alternative Centre of Commercial Education in Austrian Silesia before 1918?^{*}

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vol. 12, 2023, no. 1, pp. 64–83

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33542/CAH2023-1-04>



The study deals with the issue of commercial education in Austrian Silesia in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It specifically focuses on schools oriented this way in the East Silesian centre of Cieszyn (Teschen), whose development is placed in the context of more general trends in the development of Silesian and pre-Austrian commercial education. It primarily focuses on the circumstances of the emergence of schools and their composition, organization, curriculum content and students. The study aims to assess to what extent Cieszyn fulfilled the role of an alternative centre for commercial education in Silesia during the observed period alongside the provincial capital of Opava, and to what extent the significance of local educational institutions crossed provincial borders and benefited the population of the southern regions of neighbouring Galicia.

Keywords: Cieszyn (Teschen); Austrian Silesia; Education; Commerce; Nineteenth century, Twentieth century.

Introduction

The sphere of commercial education represented an integral part of broadly defined professional training, an educational segment that showed considerable particularities when compared to other spheres of education in terms of administration, organization of teaching, operation and purpose. The primary task of the commercial education infrastructure was to provide adequate theoretical and practical education on business and finance, especially for those who worked in trade, business and increasingly also in clerical positions. Commercial education prepared people for occupations based on intellectual activities. The level of education and the qualifications obtained varied considerably between specific cases, reflecting the wide range of different job positions. While graduates of the traditional apprenticeship along with their peers who broadened their horizons only under the guidance of their parents or even on their own were employed mainly in retail (and at home in the case of girls), graduates of various types of commercial schools found positions in lower and middle sections of the administration of enterprises and corporations, or in state, provincial and municipal offices.¹ Only very few graduates of the higher types of commercial schools (business academies) pursued university studies and other professional careers, pursuits which required them to complete a high school diploma at one of the *Gymnasien* or other types of high

^{*} This study has been financially supported by the Czech Science Foundation (GAČR) grant reg. no. 23-06062S entitled *Modernizace komerčního vzdělávání v Předlitavsku v letech 1848–1918: projevy, trendy, mechanismy*.

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¹ Hereto e.g. HINTZE, *Beamtenum*; SCHIMETSCHKEK, *Der österreichische Beamte*; RAPTIS, *Kaufleute*; RÖSKAU-RYDEL, *Niemiecko-austriackie rodziny*; HEINDL, *Bürokratie*.

schools (*Realschulen*). Graduating from these schools was also one of the requirements for studying at one of the commercial colleges (e.g. the *Exportakademie* in Vienna, the *Orientalische Handelsakademie* in Budapest, or the so-called *Handelshochschulen* in German states). From the social point of view, commercial education was intended for individuals who could be placed in the middle social strata, respectively in the emerging middle social classes. In the context of the ongoing social transformation, business education favoured mainly horizontal mobility in the creation of modern social classes and helped people to prevent drops in the social hierarchy rather than serve the social advancement of an individual.²

The presented case study is dedicated to the question of commercial education in Austrian Silesia in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly to schools in Cieszyn – the centre of eastern Silesia. Most of the few existing works on Cisleithan commercial schools have state-wide perspective and define text primarily based on study of statistical sources and valid legislation. There are few quality case studies on commercial education in specific locations or specific schools since much of this type of research suffers from limited sources and problematic methodological approach by the authors. Works on the history of cities and larger regions typically only provide minimal coverage of commercial schools, which can be said generally about chapters devoted to educational history.³ The study of vocational training in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries including research of commercial education, may be considered a traditional topic in the history of education, didactics and pedagogy as well as works focusing on socio-economic. It should be added that within the relatively large number of works published so far, the dominant theme is mainly the preparation for industry and crafting. Texts dedicated to the development of commercial education in the past represent only a relatively small portion of published works. While a great deal of them address current needs and issues related to commercial education. Works created in Germany play an important role in both directions of research.⁴ Furthermore, this country simultaneously act as a key organiser of geographically and thematically broadly works (*International Handbook of Vocational Education and Training* /58 volumes for individual countries published by Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung in Bonn in the years 1995–2023/ and the series *Studies in Vocational and Continuing Education* /20 volumes published by Peter Lang publishing house in the years 2004–2022/).

Similarly, to other areas of educational systems professionally oriented, non-state actors (individuals, business and merchant guilds, local governments, business, and trade chambers /*Handels- und Gewerbekammern*, hereinafter HuG/) played a primary role in commercial education for a long time. The Austrian administration began to regulate their almost unfettered influence more thoroughly only during the 1880s,

2 For more details see WESTRITSCHNIG, *Berufsbildung*, 276–279, 517–526; KADLEC, *Vzdělání*, 24–28, 231–245.

3 Shall we mention some of the newer high-quality works concerning the commercial education in the Cisleithan part of the Habsburg Monarchy, for example: IWICKA, *Średnie szkolnictwo*, 11–71; NEFE, *Vznik*; POTT, *Die Entwicklung*; KRAWCZYK, *Galicyskie szkolnictwo*, 227–255; ŚWIEBODA, *Szkolnictwo*; WESTRITSCHNIG, *Berufsbildung*; KADLEC, *Vzdělání*, especially pages 132–133, 226–245; KADLEC, *Rozvoj*.

4 Hereto e.g. ARNOLD, *Der kaufmännische Bildungswesen*; BAUMGARDT, *Die kaufmännische Grundbildung*; BRÖTZ – KAISER, *Kaufmännische Berufe*; HAHN – BOSSEK, *Kaufmännische Ausbildung*; HERZ, *50 Jahre kaufmännisches Bildungswesen*; HORLEBEIN, *Quellen und Dokumente*; LEIDER, *Die geistliche, wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Faktoren*; MICHAELIS, *Kompetenzenentwicklung*; PEEGE, *Das kaufmännischen Bildungswesen*; REHM, *Berufsbezogene Differenzierung*; SCHWARK, *Ausbildung von Industriekaufleute*.

first and most consistently among schools offering shortened training for merchant apprentices. It was only from the 1880s that the conceptual building of a system of commercial schools in the Cisleithan part of the Habsburg Monarchy began. In practice, this was manifested by significant legislative and organizational state interventions (e.g., standardized curricula, textbook requirements, and teacher education), as well as increased financial resources allocated by the state to support the development of this previously neglected part of education. By the outbreak of World War I, a system of commercial schools had been established, which included three-year vocational schools at the lowest level to educate merchant apprentices (*Kaufmännische Fortbildungsschulen*; teaching only a few hours a week, usually in the afternoons or evenings on working days). Further institutions with regular daily education were established: four-year commercial academies (*Handelsakademien*; completed with a high school diploma and with exemptions for graduates in the form of one-year military service – *Einjährig-Freiwilligen-Recht*), three- to four-year higher schools without a diploma (less regulated curricula, but also fewer benefits for graduates), and finally one- to two-year schools (*Handelsschulen*), with the form of only two-year commercial schools being standardized. Thanks to massive investments, legislative and organizational changes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Austria ranked among the countries with the highest quality of commercial education in Europe before World War I, and with the best-equipped school infrastructure.⁵

This case study of commercial education in Cieszyn (Teschen) aims to present the development of commercial schools in this centre of eastern Silesia. Special emphasis will be placed on the organization and financing of local educational institutions and the composition of their students. The aim of the presented study is to answer two key questions: 1) To what extent did Cieszyn fulfil the role of an alternative centre of commercial education in Silesia alongside the regional capital of Opava during the observed period?; 2) To what extent did the significance of local educational institutions extend beyond regional borders and benefit the population of the southern areas of neighbouring Galicia? The research is based on archival materials stored in the Regional Archive in Opava and printed sources (school statistics and the annual reports of schools) stored in libraries and museums in the Czech Republic (Opava, Český Těšín, Přerov, Olomouc, Praha) and Vienna (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

Cieszyn as the centre of the eastern part of Austrian Silesia

Cieszyn represented the traditional economic, cultural, educational and administrative centre of the eastern part of Austrian Silesia. This region stood at the intersection of two very differently developing spheres of Europe during the observed period: 1) To the west and north, it shared borders with countries that had already embarked on the path of industrialization at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth

5 See for example ENGELBRECHT, *Geschichte des österreichischen Bildungswesens*, 206–210, 259–260; KADLEC, *Rozvoj*; KADLEC, *Vzdělání*, 226–227, 231. Useful comparison of the Austrian commercial education system with the situation in other countries is provided by publications from the early twentieth century edited by high officials from the Austrian Ministry of Culture and Education, Friedrich Dlabáč and Ivan Žolger, as part of the series *Das kommerzielle Bildungswesen der europäischen und außereuropäischen Staaten* – e.g. ŽOLGER, *Das kommerzielle Bildungswesen in England*; ŽOLGER, *Das kommerzielle Bildungswesen im Deutschen Reich*; GELCICH, *Das kommerzielle Bildungswesen der Schweiz, Rumäniens, Brasiliens und Argentiniens*; ŽOLGER, *Das kommerzielle Bildungswesen in Belgien, Spanien, Portugal, Serbien und Bosnien*; GELCICH – ŽOLGER, *Das kommerzielle Bildungswesen in Italien, Frankreich, Griechenland, Peru, Uruguay, Paraguay und Costa Rica*; SCHACK – GELCICH, *Das kommerzielle Bildungswesen in Ungarn, Kroatien und Slawonien*.

centuries (Moravia, Upper Silesia had belonged to the Prussian administration since 1742); 2) To the east, it bordered a predominantly agrarian province of the Habsburg Monarchy, Galicia, where firmly established traditional social relations persisted for a long time and innovations in the economic sphere were rather exceptional. At the time of the onset of industrialization, the local deposits of coal, iron ore, sandstone and limestone played an important role, as did the production of coarse and lower-quality wool, which, however, receded into the background during the second half of the nineteenth century. The construction of the Košice–Bohumín railway in the 1860s and 1870s, which connected Cieszyn with Upper Hungary (currently Slovakia), played a significant role in the further development of the region, facilitating the import of raw materials and accelerating the pace of transformation of the industrial sector. In terms of population composition, non-Catholic Protestants held an important place in the region, with Poles, Czechs and Germans (in varying proportions in different parts of the region), often bilingual or multilingual, forming the population in terms of ethnicity.⁶

Cieszyn itself was one of the centres of the East Silesian wool industry, along with Bielsko and Frýdek (Friedek, Frydek). In this traditional town of craftsmen, which was increasingly overshadowed economically by the fast-ascending industrial cities, food and textile industries, such as wood and various commodities processing (especially linen processing), were about to develop. However, in Cieszyn, regional and partially supra-regional trade was concentrated. In the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Cieszyn served as an important administrative and cultural centre. It was a place with a high concentration of services and offices, and especially was an important educational centre (German *Realschule*; three *Gymnasien* – two German merged into one in 1873, one Polish; male and female German teacher training institute – *Lehrerbildungsanstalt*; from 1895, Polish *Gymnasium*). In relative numbers, the representation of economically active persons with their main occupation in the tertiary sector was unusually high compared to in the main Silesian centres (Opava/Troppau, Bielsko/Bielitz, Frýdek, Krnov/Jägerndorf).⁷

The population of Cieszyn and its suburbs increased from just under 10,000 to about 20,500 between 1869 and 1910, which remained considerably less than in the regional capital Opava (almost 31,000 inhabitants in 1910), but far more than in the other centres in the eastern part of Austrian Silesia of Bielsko (1910: just under 19,000 inhabitants) and Frýdek (1910: almost 10,000 inhabitants). Although most of the population were Catholics (about 2/3 in 1910), there were also significant numbers of Protestants (1910: 23 %) and Jews (1910: about 9.4 %), with members of these religions largely occupying only certain parts of the city. The ethnic composition of the population was also diverse, although in this case we can only rely on not entirely informative statistical data on the so-called *Umgangssprache*. According to them, in 1910 the people living here were 61.5 % German-speaking, 31.7 % Polish-speaking and 6.7 % Czech-speaking. It is safe to say the German-speaking elites, partly of Jewish origin, played a main role in the city during the second half of the nineteenth and

6 Hereto e.g. MYŠKA, *Region*, 138; POPELKA, *Zrod*, 114–122 (zde i další literatura k tématu); DOKOUPIL – NESLÁDKOVÁ – LIPOVSKI, *Populace*, passim. General overview of the economic and social development of Austrian Silesia and especially Těšín in the period under review GAWRECKI, *Dějiny*, 167–223; PANIC, *Dzieje*, 165–298 (authors of texts were Milan Myška, Janusz Gruchała a Grzegorz Studnicki); ZÁŘICKÝ, *Rakouské Slezsko*, I–II, passim.

7 PANIC, *Dzieje Cieszyna*, 67–96, 152–158; ZÁŘICKÝ, *Rakouské Slezsko*, I, 471.

early twentieth centuries.⁸ The brief socio-economic characterization of the Cieszyn region and its centre in Cieszyn sketched out in the previous lines is not autotelic and has its justification. It allows us to better understand the important context in which local commercial education developed, including key attributes for the sufficient social demand for such education, sources of capital investments and requirements regarding the teaching languages of such schools.

Commercial schools in Cieszyn until 1918: Circumstances of their establishment and financial support

The establishment of the earliest commercial school in Cieszyn in the early 1850s falls within the period when the first schools for educating commercial youth were introduced in larger settlements of the Cisleithan part of the Habsburg monarchy with a higher concentration of trade and merchants. The oldest of these, mostly with classes on Sundays and holidays, were opened to interested parties thanks to the initiative of trade guilds and individuals in Styrian Hradec/Graz (1828), Ljubljana/Laibach (1834), Vienna/Wien (1840, 1848) and Prague/Prag (1846). In the late 1840s and early 1850s, various institutions offering several hours of weekly classes were added, which were mainly concentrated on weekday evenings or Sunday mornings (e.g., Vienna 1848, Prague 1850).⁹ These schools spread partly also to smaller provincial centres during the 1850s, such as Opava (1851), Brno/Brünn (1856) and Olomouc/Olmütz (1860) thanks to the engagement of individuals and trade guilds (often with the support of trade and craft chambers).¹⁰ However, in Silesia, unlike in Moravia, two commercial schools were established in a short time. In addition to the Opava school established by the local guild of registered merchants (Gremium der handelsgerichtlich protokollierten Kaufleute der schlesischen Landeshauptstadt), a training centre for merchant apprentices was founded in the second provincial centre – Cieszyn – in the middle of 1853. The motives for its establishment were undoubtedly the same as in the case of the Opava school: that is, to provide better education for future traders than the practice in trade after completing the classic apprenticeship could bring. It was E. F. Schroeder – a local merchant, encouraged by the Opava HuG – who was behind the birth of the Cieszyn school.¹¹ Although the school was initially intended to be three years long, only two years were opened, which was related to the failure of expansion from two to three years of another Cieszyn school – the local *Realschule*. This was probably the reason for the early demise of the merchant school, about which available sources from the 1860s and early 1870s do not speak anymore. While the guild merchant school in Opava continued to function continuously, the youth from eastern Silesia (also due to the failure of efforts to establish a commercial school in Bielsko in the 1850s) lacked any opportunity to supplement their practical education in trade with theoretical lectures in school.¹²

8 PANIC, *Dzieje Cieszyna*, 57–65.

9 KLEIBEL, *Denkschrift*, 10.

10 About the Opava school in more detail, e.g. *Bericht der Handels- und Gewerbekammer... im Jahre 1851 und 1852*, 8; *Bericht der Handels- und Gewerbekammer... im Jahre 1853*, 20; *Bericht der Handels- und Gewerbekammer... in den Jahren 1854, 1855, 1856*, 13, 15, 22; *Statistischer Bericht*, 409.

11 PANIC, *Dzieje Cieszyna*, 159.

12 KADLEC, *Vzdělání*, 374–375.

Only at the beginning of the 1880s did the youth from the eastern part of Austrian Silesia gain the opportunity for theoretical preparation for commercial professions at a school that could be attended simultaneously with an apprenticeship in a trade. However, this did not happen in Cieszyn at first, but in Bielsko, where a commercial department was established as part of the reorganization of the local state industrial school (*Staatsgewerbeschule*) in the school year 1881/1882. The originally two-year department then turned into a three-year commercial *Fortbildungsschule* from the school year 1891/1892, which, however, remained connected to the industrial school.¹³ Cieszyn had to wait for such an educational institution for several more years. First, on the initiative of the Opava HuG, the second year of the local industrial *Fortbildungsschule* was divided into departments for craft apprentices (*Gewerbelehrlinge*) and commercial apprentices (*Handelslehrlinge*) in the school year 1885/1886. This happened shortly after the issuance of a key ministerial decree encouraging the development of industrial *Fortbildungsschulen* (1883), after which special commercial courses and commercial departments began to open at these schools across the Cisleithania region.¹⁴ The one-year Cieszyn department was then transformed into an independent two-year commercial *Fortbildungsschule* with the help of the merchant associations of Cieszyn and the Opava HuG from the school year 1888/1889.¹⁵ There is no doubt about the interconnection of this commercial school with the Cieszyn *Realschule* – it used the premises of the *Realschule*, its teachers participated in the education of commercial apprentices, and one of them, usually the director of the *Realschule*, led the teaching staff of the commercial school. The budget of the commercial school for apprentices was based on subsidies from the Opava HuG, the Cieszyn municipality, the Ministry of Education (k. k. Ministerium für Cultus und Unterricht) and contributions from the guilds of Cieszyn merchants (both recorded and unrecorded).¹⁶ For example, the school budget for 1909 included expenses of 2,862 K, with a contribution of 800 K from the state, 400 K each from the Opava HuG and the city of Cieszyn, a subsidy of 204 K from Cieszyn merchants, and an amount of 1,054 K not covered, which was to be covered mainly by an increased state contribution of 1,000 K (an increase of 100 K compared to the previous year). Compared to other schools of the same type in Krnov (2,116 K) and Frýdek (1,470 K), the budget of the Cieszyn institution was significantly higher, which was related to the higher number of years, students and teachers, and the length of its school year.¹⁷

Shortly after the establishment of the commercial department at the Cieszyn industrial *Fortbildungsschule*, another school for those interested in commercial education was opened in Cieszyn, offering both a full-time classical school format and specialized educational courses with evening and afternoon classes lasting several months. The founder of this private school, which existed from 1886 to 1909,

13 For more details about this school see KADLEC, *Bielsko*.

14 KADLEC, *Rozvoj*, 38.

15 See *Erster Jahresbericht*, 8; Zemský archiv v Opavě (Provincial Archive Opava; hereinafter ZAO), fund Zemská vláda slezská v Opavě (Silesian Provincial Government in Opava, hereinafter ZVS), cart. 2099, sign. 141/1.

16 From its foundation until the First World War, the Cieszyn commercial *Fortbildungsschule* was headed successively by Ludwig Rothe (until 1890), Max Rosenfeld (who replaced Rothe at the end of the school year 1889/1890), Hans Januschke (1890–1901), Ernst Kaller (1901/1902) and Rudolf Alscher (from the school year 1902/1903). See annual reports of this school for the years 1889–1913.

17 ZAO, fund ZVS, cart. 3694, sign. V/50/K-10. For a useful comparison with school budgets around the mid-1890s see *ibidem*, cart. 2108, sign. 141/1/K-1.

was Eduard August Schroeder (1852–1928), a lawyer, municipal politician and son of the Cieszyn merchant E. F. Schroeder.¹⁸ In a relatively short period of five years, two commercial schools were thus opened in Cieszyn – a public one, relying on subsidies from various authorities, and a private one, whose income came from tuition fees. According to the annual report of Schroeder's school from 1906, the amount of school fees was highly differentiated depending on which part of the school the student enrolled in. In addition to the enrolment fee (*Einschreibgebühr*) of 1 K, parents paid tuition fees of 180 K for a one-year daily commercial course, 64 K for an evening course for women and girls (eight months of study), 48 K for an evening educational course for young men (six months of study), 80 K for a special course for ladies (four months of study) and 16–100 K for various special courses for different subjects (foreign languages, typing, preparation for a banking exam).¹⁹ It was interesting and for Cieszyn quite typical that both schools had a long-standing common official. E. A. Schroeder taught several hours a week at the public commercial *Fortbildungsschule*, until the end of the school year 1899/1900, although he owned his own educational institution. Thus, from the mid-1880s, commercial apprentices from the eastern Silesian region had three options in Cieszyn to expand their practical knowledge of trade with the increasingly necessary theoretical knowledge.²⁰ Similarly, their counterparts from western Silesia were in a similar situation, where merchant *Fortbildungsschulen* were also operating in Krnov and Jeseník/Freiwaldau (both from 1889) alongside Opava. In the adjacent areas of Galicia, however, merchant apprentices did not have a similar opportunity until the beginning of the twentieth century (the opening of a commercial course at the local *Fortbildungsschule*).²¹

The schools in Cieszyn were exclusively intended for merchant apprentices, i.e., those people whose professional aspirations were associated with employment in retail. Commercial schools with classical full-day education during weekdays, which would prepare students for employment in larger commercial companies and businesses, and at the same time educate them as the increasingly sought-after administrative workers in the job market, were completely absent in eastern Silesia for a long time. While a two-year school in Opava had been satisfying the growing demand for such educated workers in western Silesia since 1894, only a one-year Schroeder school with limited capacity was available in the Cieszyn region of Silesia for a long time. In 1906, it was complemented by another private commercial school of Karel Czepel, again one-class, where German was the language of instruction (although necessary explanations were also provided in Polish, Czech, Hungarian and Slovak). As a private school with a unique organization, it was not funded from public sources, and its development depended entirely on tuition fees. The example of the school year 1913/1914 shows that not all

18 ZAO, fund Obchodní a živnostenská komora Opava (Chamber of Commerce and Trade; hereinafter OŽK), cart. 342, sign. XIIa2. For more details about E. A. Schroeder see BRÜMMER, 311; *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1850–1950*, 229 (available in online version here: https://www.biographien.ac.at/oebl/oebl_S/Schroeder_Eduard-August_1852_1928.xml); MYŠKA – DOKOUPIL, *Biografický slovník*, 127.

19 *Staatlich konzessionierte Handels-Schule*, 12, 14–18.

20 In the 1890s, a German commercial *Fortbildungsschule* was opened in the East Silesian region in the industrial town of Frýdek. At the beginning of the century, another one was opened in the city of Skoczków/Skotschau (German) and Orlová/Orlau/Orłowa (Czech). However, the attempt to establish a Czech commercial *Fortbildungsschule* in Slezská Ostrava/Polnische Ostrau/Polska Ostrawa proved unsuccessful. *První ročenka o českém živnostenském a obchodním školství ve Slezsku za rok 1913–14*. Opava 1914, 42.

21 See KRAWCZYK, *Galicyskie*, 243; ŚWIEBODA, *Szkolnictwo*, 214; ŁADYŻYŃSKI, *Niższe i średnie szkoły*, 91–93.

students had to pay for it. Out of the total amount of 8,250 K, three students did not contribute at all, and one paid only half of the prescribed tuition fees.²²

A higher category commercial school was represented by a municipal two-year school with German as the teaching language, operating in Cieszyn from the school year 1912/1913. It was only the second school of its kind in Austrian Silesia, complementing the older school in Opava from 1894. Its establishment was initiated by Cieszyn merchants, both those associated with the association of unregistered merchants of Cieszyn and its surroundings (Genossenschaft der nicht protokollierten Kaufleute von Teschen und Umgebung), and their counterparts from the guild of registered merchants (Gremium der protokollierten Kaufleute in Teschen). Soon, the Cieszyn merchants also gained the support of local politicians from the municipal council (especially Mayor Rudolf Bukowski and councillor Leonhard Demel), who took over the patronage of the commercial school project in 1909. The circumstances of the establishment of this boys' and girls' school show that the idea of opening a new commercial school did not always meet with understanding and support in matters of vocational education of the otherwise very active and engaged Opava HuG. It questioned the necessity of creating a new commercial apprenticeship school in Cieszyn, recommended rather to offer scholarships to applicants from Cieszyn at other schools in Cieszyn or Moravian Ostrava, preferred further development of the Opava school and generally played a rather passive or even obstructive role.²³ This is perhaps why the process of opening the school was prolonged, and the start of teaching was postponed from the originally planned school year 1910/1911 to the school year 1912/1913. The supra-regional importance of this school was evident from the beginning, as there were no similar schools (two-year school with full-day education) in eastern Silesia or in adjacent parts of Galicia. There was only one school of this kind in the entirety of Silesia, in the provincial capital of Opava.²⁴ This was confirmed by the composition of contributors from the preliminary list for the school year 1912/1913, which was presented by the Mayor of Cieszyn, Mr Bukowski, at the end of June 1912 when he applied for a subsidy from Opava's HuG. According to the document, contributions were agreed upon from the Cieszyn merchants' guild (500 K) and community (320 K), as well as the Cieszyn Gewerbeverein's assistance (300 K) and Fryštát merchants (500 K), and also from the municipal councils of Trinec/Trzynietz/Trzyniec, Skoczów and Bohumín/Oderberg (a total of 629 K). Mayor Bukowski counted on income from tuition fees, but there was still a deficit of almost 20,000 K between the planned annual expenses and income. He asked the Opava HuG to contribute one-third of this amount along with the provincial assembly, while the remaining amount was to be covered by state subsidies and the city

22 ZAO, fund ZVS, cart. 3691, sign. V/50/K-8.

23 ZAO, fund OŽK, cart. 342, sign. Xlla2; *Ibidem*, fund ZVS, cart. 3701, sign. V/50/K-19.

24 In the industrial city of Biata/Zülz, Alfred Nabe, Ludwig Kraus and Moriz Klappholz were all unsuccessful in opening private schools in the years just before World War I. The first two-year schools in the western part of Galicia were only opened in the city of Biata in 1913 (Polish) and 1914 (German). See KADLEC, *Vzdělání*, 494–496; ŚWIEBODA, *Szkolnictwo*, 224, 229; ŁADYŹYŃSKI, *Niższe i średnie szkoły*, 90–91; *Erster Jahresbericht der deutschen Kommunal-Handelsschule*, 5–6. It should be noted that at the end of the Habsburg monarchy's existence (October 1, 1918), a two-year *Szkola handlowa* with Polish as the language of instruction was opened in Cieszyn on the initiative of the Macierz Szkolna Księstwa Cieszyńskiego and Towarzystwo Szkoły Ludowej societies. However, this private commercial school did not play a significant role during the observation period. More details about this school and its structure, organisation and students in: MIĘKINA, *Księga*, 3–4; 1. *Sprawozdanie* (available in online version here: <https://www.sbc.org.pl/dlibra/publication/62743/edition/59001/content>).

of Cieszyn.²⁵ In the following years, it became clear that while the school could rely on relatively large provincial support (3,000 K in 1914), stable subsidies from the Opava HuG (2,500 K) and high state subsidies (5,000 K), the largest share of expenses – the balancing of income and expenses – was still borne by the Cieszyn municipality (just under 9,000 K).²⁶

Organization and curriculum of commercial schools in Cieszyn

Understanding how commercial schools functioned, how they were organized and what was taught in them reveals the true significance and benefits of these educational institutions. The qualification profile of graduates influenced how well individuals could compete in the professional world in the face of business competition. The knowledge and competencies acquired in schools represented one of the decisive factors in the success or failure of individuals in the job market and business activities and could give them an important competitive edge. At the same time, information about the organization of commercial schools and the nature of their curricula reflects the ideas of their founders and supporters about what it was necessary to develop for the upcoming generations of merchants and later (not only commercial) officials for them to be successful in their professional lives. Autodidacts and generally those who relied on lower education were clearly on the decline in the commercial sphere during the second half of the nineteenth century. It was not only a matter of keeping up with the dynamic changes brought about by the process of modernization, but also of maintaining credibility and the favour of potential customers (merchants) and of facing the increasing qualification requirements for certified education (administrative staff).

Until the 1880s, Austria did not intervene in the development of commercial education, and such educational institutions were created spontaneously, with a relatively diverse spectrum of schools with different organization, curricula and schedules. Nevertheless, we would undoubtedly find certain common features among the oldest commercial schools, regardless of whether they were private or guild-based (associational) schools. For the oldest commercial schools, which taught from the mid-nineteenth century, the emphasis was on maximizing the efficiency of the educational process. Only the most important knowledge for business activities was to be conveyed to students in the shortest possible time (usually a few hours per week). Preparation for teaching was intended not to burden the students too greatly or distract them from fulfilling their obligations outside of school, especially those related to their apprenticeship in trade. Therefore, emphasis was placed on language instruction, calligraphy, stylistics, geography, arithmetic, accounting (simple and double-entry) and the basics of Austrian exchange and commercial law. Across subjects, the key was to link theory with practical examples and visual demonstrations. Theory was to be maximally linked to practice in teaching. According to available sources, this was true, for example, for the oldest commercial schools in Vienna, Prague and Opava. It is hardly doubtful that this was the case for the two-year German commercial school of E. F. Schroeder in Cieszyn, though relevant sources unfortunately do not exist.²⁷

25 ZAO, fund OŽK, cart. 342, sign. XIIa2.

26 KADLEC, *Vzdělání*, 493.

27 See for example: *Bericht der Handels- und Gewerbekammer... im Jahre 1853*, 20; *Bericht der Handels- und Gewerbekammer... in den Jahren 1854, 1855, 1856*, 13; VILICUS, *Gedenkschrift*, 29–30, 39–40.

We have a much better idea of the organization and content of instruction for the Cieszyn German commercial *Fortbildungsschule* founded in 1885, which existed as a separate educational institution from 1888. The shape of the school was fundamentally influenced by Austrian educational regulations, which from the 1880s established the basic parameters of organizational and content-related aspects of instruction. However, there could be no talk of a complete unification of schools of this kind in Austria or Silesia. Until the end of the Habsburg monarchy, no provincial regulations were issued for these schools, so there was room for some modification of generally conceived Austrian standards.²⁸ The Cieszyn commercial *Fortbildungsschule*, which was mandatory for commercial apprentices from 1897, was initially designed as a two-year programme with a nine-month school year (from October to mid-June). In the first year of study, there were nine lessons per week, which consisted of what is called "merchant arithmetic" (Kaufmännisches Rechnen), Merceology (Warenkunde), business exercises (Geschäftsaufsätze), commercial geography (Handelsgeographie), bookkeeping (Buchführung) and calligraphy (Schönschreiben). During the seven lessons per week of the second year, basically the same subjects were covered, only business exercises were replaced by commercial correspondence (Kaufmännische Correspondenz) with commercial geography being eliminated.²⁹ The teaching was always arranged so as not to disturb the students' work duties during the day and not to interfere with the education at the *Cieszyn Realschule*, whose premises were also used by the *Fortbildungsschule*. Specifically, it was taught from Monday to Friday between 6am and 8pm, the teaching later also being extended to Sunday mornings. Over time, certain changes were made to the teaching, particularly regarding the expansion of the number of years from two to three in the academic year 1892/1893. The number of lessons per week gradually stabilized at eight and teaching was concentrated in the evening on weekdays. The school year also stabilized: it lasted from 1 October until 30 June of the following year. New subjects were added, including German language, accounting work (Kontorarbeiten) and civic education. Senior students could optionally attend a two-hour shorthand course, a subject that was very popular and useful at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³⁰

The private commercial school of E. A. Schroeder, established in 1886, offered several study programmes. Unlike the *Fortbildungsschule*, which focused exclusively on male apprentices, Schroeder's school had a more diversified purpose and reflected the specific focus of each educational course.³¹ While some courses were intended only for boys (men), others were exclusively for girls (women). Only the one-year full-time

28 Although, theoretically, it was possible to disregard Austrian educational regulations, educational institutions lost both necessary financial resources (the granting of state subsidies was tied to compliance with prescribed legislation, the use of officially approved textbooks, etc.) and useful rights for schools and their graduates, which ultimately contributed to the attractiveness of educational institutions (general recognition of school certificates, benefits for graduates in relation to mandatory military service or apprenticeship).

29 See *Erster Jahresbericht über die commerciale Fortbildungsschule*, 3–4. Detailed breakdown of the content of each subject in both years in the same place.

30 See annual reports of this school from the years 1892/1893 (p. 3), 1897/1898 (pp. 5–9), 1908/1909 (p. 3) and 1913/1914 (pp. 3–4). For admission to the school, a certificate of completion of the compulsory school attendance was required together with a proof of sufficient knowledge in reading, writing and arithmetic.

31 *Staatlich konzessionierte Handels-Schule*, 12. The admission requirements corresponded to the demands, especially for those interested in studying in a one-year full-time course. Schroeder required a certificate from *Bürgerschule*, or alternatively an annual certificate from lower classes of *Gymnasium* or *Realschule* with German as the language of instruction.

course allowed co-education (like Karel Czepel's school), although most female students attended one of the education courses for girls (women). In terms of the content of education, Schroeder aimed to meet the needs of small- and medium-sized merchants and to provide practical knowledge and competencies needed by administrative staff, particularly those in lower positions. The one-year course with all-day teaching covered simple and double-entry bookkeeping, commerce (Handelskunde), exchange laws (Wechsellehre), merchant correspondence and arithmetic (Kaufmännische Korrespondenz/Rechnen), American-style bookkeeping, commercial geography and accounting work. The evening course designed for girls and women, like the evening course for young men, consisted of only one lesson per week. Its content was limited to bookkeeping, exchange laws and accounting work, with teaching lasting eight months in the former case (from 1 October to 1 June) and six months in the latter (from 1 October to 1 April). The Extra-Course for ladies also had similar content and lasted only four months, taking place twice a year. Specialized courses, which offered the study of specific subjects, completed the diverse range of study programmes at Schroeder's school. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were seven courses in total (French language, English language, shorthand, typing, German tutoring, preparation for banking and other similar exams, and economics), which usually lasted eight to nine months with teaching twice a week.³²

In Czepel's one-year commercial school, boys and girls were taught together. The main objective was to provide practical education as quickly as possible for future members of the business profession. Emphasis was therefore placed on individual education with maximum consideration given to students' previous education, professional position, age, abilities and prospects. The teaching time was very variable and did not follow the classical interchange of individual subjects by hours. The school had two courses: 1) a daytime course on weekdays, except for Wednesday and Saturday, always from 2pm to 5 pm; and 2) an evening course taking place from Monday to Friday, always from 8pm to 10 pm. Depending on the abilities and diligence of the students, the time of completion varied. While some managed to master the curriculum (accounting, commercial and exchange law/Wechselrecht/, commercial arithmetic, numismatics/Münzenkunde/, business correspondence, commercial and transportation geography, shorthand, typewriting, modern languages) in just four to five months, others needed the whole ten-month school year for it.³³

32 Ibidem, 14–18.

33 For more details about this school see Prospekt.

Mandatory Subjects	Girls' School		Boys' School	
	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year
German Language	2	3	4	3
Business Mathematics	5 / 3	3	5 / 3	4
Business and Exchange Studies	3 / 1	2	4 / 2	3
Correspondence and Accounting Work	2 / 4	3 / 0	2 / 4	3 / 0
Accounting	2 / 4	4 / 0	2 / 4	4 / 0
Accounting Exercise Work	0	0 / 7	0	0 / 7
Geography and Civics	2	2	3	4
Stenography	2	2	2	2
Calligraphy	2	1	2	1
Polish / French Language	5	5	5	5
Elective Subjects				
Typewriting	0	2	0	2
Czech Language	5	5	5	5

Table 1: Curriculum with hours per week per subject of a two-year municipal commercial school in Cieszyn during the school year 1913/1914. Note: Values for individual semesters are separated by a slash. Geography and civic education were taught separately at the boys' school. Students learned three hours of geography per week in both years, and one hour of civic education only in the second year.

The Municipal Business School in Cieszyn was designed as a two-year educational institution whose main task was to provide adequate professional and general education to boys and girls who aspired to a career in business or related professions. Internally, it was divided into business schools for boys and girls; co-education was not applied here, unlike in Czepel's private school. The organization of education, curriculum and admission requirements were based on the Austro-Hungarian regulations issued for two-year commercial schools in the Cisleithan part of the Habsburg Monarchy from 1890 onwards (especially exemplary organizational statutes, the so-called *Normallehrpläne* from 1890 and 1910). Although there was some room for mild modification depending on local conditions, two-year commercial schools were largely standardized, as were, for example, *Handelsakademien*.³⁴ Only boys and girls over fourteen years of age who had completed three classes of *Bürgerschule*, or boys who had completed at least three classes of some type of secondary school or girls who had attended *Mädchenlyzeum* were admitted to the first year without passing an entrance exam. Other applicants had to take German, arithmetic and geography entrance exams, with boys also taking a biology exam. Although the education of boys and girls was carried out separately, there were no significant differences in educational content. The composition of subjects was basically the same, as were the textbooks used (see Table 1). Unlike girls, boys learned Merceology (*Warenkunde*), and their total duration of teaching was seven hours longer per week than that of girls. In addition to the German language, another language was compulsory at school, and students could choose between Polish and

34 See GELCICH, *Das kommerzielle Bildungswesen in Österreich*, 144–172.

French. Typing was initially the only optional subject, but in the school year 1913/1914, Czech language classes were added due to increased demand.³⁵

Students and graduates of the Cieszyn commercial schools

It is appropriate to ask who attended the commercial schools in Cieszyn. What were the territorial, ethnic, religious and socio-professional components of the population that sent their children to these schools? An analysis of these characteristics will make it easier to understand both from which parts of Cieszyn society (and the Cieszyn region) the demand for the development of local commercial education came, and which social groups benefited from the presence of these schools. Alas, a complete characterization of the students at commercial schools in Cieszyn is impossible. Nevertheless, this applies to the observed period generally for students of vocational education. To a large extent, this is a heuristic problem. Sources recording students at vocational schools are often preserved only fragmentarily, and in the case of many private schools not subsidized by public resources, they are mostly not available at all. And if the applicable sources do exist, they are often incomplete series with only basic statistical data. Moreover, statisticians often compiled different data at different times, among other things depending on the needs and instructions of supporters of these schools. Monitoring certain phenomena over a longer period is thus significantly hampered, if not entirely impossible. Another problem is posed by not entirely clear criteria for sorting statistical data, which is typical, for example, for statistics on the social origin of students.³⁶ However, finding out about the composition of students in vocational schools, in this case the commercial schools in Cieszyn, has significance, even though such knowledge will be considerably limited, and we must consider the aforesaid difficulties that working with relevant sources (such as annual reports, school statistics, school catalogues) brings. Students have always been and always will be an integral part of educational institutions; assessing schools without considering students lacks meaning inherently.

We have very little information about the students at the oldest commercial school in Cieszyn (opened 1853). According to sparse information from the Opava HuG annual reports, for example, we only know that an average of 25 students attended this two-year school annually from 1853 to 1856.³⁷ In the case of the German-language school for apprentice merchants, it can be assumed that its students were mainly recruited from the families of traders and entrepreneurs directly from Cieszyn, as afternoon and evening classes after work in the store practically excluded the presence of students from more distant areas. As for ethnicity and religious origin, the composition of the student body at this school probably reflected the diverse structure of Cieszyn's population. Besides local German Catholics, it is also likely that Czechs, Poles, Jews and evangelicals attended the school.

We do not know much about the composition of the student body of the Eduard August Schroeder school between 1886 and 1909 either. The school offered a wide range of study programmes and had a diverse organization, which undoubtedly attracted interest not only from families of businessmen and craftsmen in Cieszyn, but also from parts of the academic community. It was probably attractive mainly to its non-elite

35 *I. Jahresbericht*, 9–10, 16–18; *II. Jahresbericht*, 51–52, 60–61; ZAO, fund ZVS, cart. 3701, sign. V/50/K-19.

36 See e.g. KADLEC, *Vzdělání*, passim.

37 *Bericht der Handels- und Gewerbekammer... in den Jahren 1854, 1855, 1856*, 17.

components clasifiable to the lower part of the so-called learned middle-class (primary school teachers, lower-level clerks), or to later-born children from larger families of local lawyers, doctors and higher-ranking officials. Undoubtedly, girls also attended the school. Special evening educational courses allowed individuals who were already employed to attend the school, in addition to adolescent students, catering to those who wanted to increase their qualifications and thereby improve their job prospects. Based on the curriculum and tuition fees, it can be inferred that the school mainly served the materially better-off German-speaking community in Cieszyn, whether Catholic or non-Catholic (Jewish or evangelical). Unfortunately, there are no relevant sources that would clearly demonstrate this. An incomplete list of 146 graduates from 1906 does not help in this regard either. In an ethnically diverse locality where a significant part of the population was at least bilingual, it is not possible to infer anything from the recording of individual names.³⁸ However, the aforementioned list is valuable for another reason because it reveals the portfolio of work positions in which the school's male (76) and female (70) graduates eventually found employment. Although their exact job placements are not always clear, the graduates quite demonstrably filled employee positions in various businesses, transportation and manufacturing companies (nine of them worked directly in Cieszyn's ironworks) and offices (especially in accounting departments). Among the graduates were also managers or owners of small businesses. The vast majority found employment in Silesia, especially in its eastern part and primarily in Cieszyn (94), although it is likely that the incomplete list does not include those who moved elsewhere, the school director having been more likely to have lost contact with them. Significantly fewer individuals are represented from other parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (such as Moravia, adjacent parts of Galicia and, especially, Vienna), or from other countries (such as Hungary, Germany and Uruguay).

We have a much better idea of the composition of students in the German *Fortbildungsschule* in Cieszyn during the period of the school years 1888/1889 to 1912/1913, which covers the time from the beginning of the school's existence as an independent educational institution to almost the beginning of World War I. Thanks to the preserved annual reports of the school, which were issued by its management for the purpose of informing school supporters, we can reconstruct at least the basic characteristics of students over almost a quarter of a century.³⁹

At first glance, it is obvious that the number of students in the relatively small school at first grew significantly over the years. While in the late 1880s and early 1890s there were usually between twenty and thirty students attending, after 1892, the number of people enrolled in studies rarely fell below 80 and mostly ranged between 85 and 97. This was significantly due to the expansion of the school from two to three years during the school year 1891/1892, changes in trade regulations at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (which emphasized compulsory attendance of *Fortbildungsschulen*), increased interest in studying at the school and improvement in school attendance. This fluctuated only around 60 % at first but from 1904 it was usually around 80 %, either due to positive motivation for study (financial

38 *Staatlich konzessionierte Handels-Schule*, 6–11. One possibility would be the extremely laborious task of tracking down individual families in the materials from the nearest censuses, of 1900 and 1910. However, this effort – while its results would be interesting and highly valuable – exceeds the ambitions of the given text.

39 See *Jahresberichte 1888/1889–1912/1913*.

support for studying) or more strictly enforced repressive measures (fines, necessity of a certificate from the school to obtain a vocational certificate). However, a closer look at the development of school attendance shows that it was relatively variable in individual years and fluctuated within the respective school year and that differences also existed among individual classes. It was almost a rule that students in the final year of school missed fewer days in school than their younger colleagues. At the same time, the school had better attendance in the autumn months (October, November) than in the winter and, especially, in the spring months at the end of the school year (April to June), when attendance in some years reached only about 50 % of all those enrolled in studies. Considering the mother tongue, students from German-speaking families dominated in Cieszyn's commercial *Fortbildungsschule*, where they usually made up around $\frac{2}{3}$ of all the students. Although their share was not stable in individual years, they always represented the majority of all students. In addition to a few students with Hungarian or other native language, the school was supplemented by students from Slavic families, mainly Polish-speaking students, which made up between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the students in most school years. Czech youth was only present in larger numbers (5–11 students per year) at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. More than half of the students, almost 70 % in some school years, were of Catholic faith, and were relatively evenly supplemented by Protestants and Jews.⁴⁰ Although we do not possess information on the territorial origins of the school's students, given the organization of studies (limited number of evening lessons), it can be assumed that people studying at the school mainly lived in Cieszyn or relatively easily accessible villages in the immediate vicinity of the school.

We only have basic information about the students of Karl Czepel's private commercial school. In the first years of the school's existence, there was a growing interest in studying at this educational institution every year (1906/1907: 22; 1907/1908: 40; 1908/1909: 55; 1909/1910: 65).⁴¹ Undoubtedly, co-education played a significant role in this increase, which made studying accessible to girls as well. It seems that it was only before World War I that the school experienced a certain decline in interest. In the school year 1913/1914, a total of 46 students (including 24 girls) enrolled to study there, which is certainly related to the establishment of a competing municipal commercial school in Cieszyn in 1912. The composition of the student body was quite diverse according to their previous education. While some had only finished *Allgemeine Volksschule* or *Bürgerschule*, others had completed a lower level of some type of secondary school, or even a whole secondary school (Gymnasium, *Realschule* and their combination).⁴² According to a statistical report on student enrolment in the school year 1913/1914, the largest group of students were children from Polish-speaking families (22 out of 46), followed by German-speaking youth (12) and Czech-speaking youth (5). In addition to these dominant groups, the school also had students from Hungarian and Slovak families (3, 1), who were the only ones of non-Cisleithan origin. The composition of students according to religion was also diverse and typical

40 Similar characteristics were also exhibited by the students at the *Fortbildungsschule* in the East Silesian town of Bielsko. For more details see KADLEC, *Vzdělání*, 500–501.

41 Prospekt, unpaginated.

42 Ibidem.

of Cieszyn. In addition to Catholics (26), regular attendees at Czepel's school included Protestants (13) and, to a lesser extent, Jews (4).⁴³

The two-year city commercial school opened in 1912 and had both boys' and girls' classes before the First World War. There were about twice as many girls as boys in both years. In the school year 1913/1914, 46 girls and 22 boys enrolled in the first year, while the ratio between boys and girls in the second year was 37:21. Looking at the composition of students' birthplaces, their families had been settled in either Cieszyn itself (about 31 %), or in the Cieszyn part of Silesia for a long time. Most students came from German-speaking families (70 %), while the rest were recruited mainly from Polish-speaking backgrounds (21 % overall, 46 % in the boys' section of the school) and Czech-speaking backgrounds (7 %). The rough proportion of $\frac{1}{4}$ of Protestants among all students corresponded to a higher representation of Protestants in the population of Cieszyn. In addition to Protestants, Jews (12 %) also attended the school, but Catholics (61 %) predominated. It is interesting to look at the socio-professional composition of students' parents, although we are limited to very fragmentary information. Of all 121 students in the school year 1913/1914, 21 came from families of merchants, three from industrialists, 12 from entrepreneurs, seven from landowners, seven from teachers, 40 from civil servants, two from officers, 21 from officials, five from self-employed persons and one each from families of Protestant clergymen, doctors and innkeepers.⁴⁴

Conclusion

The case study of the development of commercial education in Cieszyn showed that several commercial schools were established in this centre of eastern Austrian Silesia during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Except for the 1860s and 1870s, for which we lack relevant sources, we have evidence of the continuous existence of commercial schools in Cieszyn from 1853 to 1918. While some of these schools served only future traders and merchants, supplementing their parallel practical training with increasingly important theoretical knowledge, some schools were intended for the education of both future traders (for retail and medium-sized businesses) and clerical staff (so-called white-collar workers). In addition to publicly funded educational institutions, private schools also operated in Cieszyn. It was precisely this group of commercial schools that played a key role in the city during the observed period, measured at least by the offer of study programmes and their capacities. A relatively diverse range of commercial schools, in terms of organization of teaching, focus and curriculum content, had a common denominator: German was the language of instruction. A purely Polish school in Cieszyn was not opened until just before the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy, and no Czech school was established at all. Slavic languages did not play a significant role in commercial education in Cieszyn, which reflected both the composition of founders and supporters of local schools and demand on the labour market for commercial education primarily in German. Slavic languages were mostly offered only as optional subjects or occasionally as languages in which at least part of the teaching was carried out. However, the inclusion of Polish and Czech into curricula meant that Cieszyn schools became even more attractive to the local Polish- and Czech-speaking communities that represented a regular part of student bodies. In fact, the composition of students in commercial schools in Cieszyn did not

43 ZAO, fund ZVS, cart. 3691, sign. V/50/K-8.

44 *Il. Jahresbericht*, 54–59.

quite reflect either the characteristics or composition of the local population or local trade and business circles. The structure of students with significant representation of children from German-speaking families rather reflected the characteristics of that part of Cieszyn society that intended to improve the vocational education of their offspring in a commercial direction and could also afford such study financially.

The answer to the question of whether and to what extent Cieszyn fulfilled the role of an alternative centre of commercial education in Austrian Silesia alongside the provincial capital of Opava is not straightforward. The number and diverse range of local commercial schools undoubtedly favoured Cieszyn. However, these institutions were only schools of the lowest educational level until the beginning of the twentieth century. While a two-year commercial school (*Handelsschule*) existed in Opava since 1894, it was not until shortly before World War I that those interested in this type of education were able to find it in Cieszyn. While in the 1860s and 1870s Cieszyn probably lacked a school with a commercial focus and such an institution existed continuously in Opava from 1851, at the beginning of the twentieth century Cieszyn clearly surpassed the provincial capital in the number of schools, study programmes offered and number of students. Perhaps this is also because Opava concentrated its efforts and financial resources on three goals from the 1890s onwards: 1) transforming the local two-year school into a more prestigious commercial academy (*Handelsakademie*); 2) transferring this school to state administration; and 3) constructing a new school building. While they succeeded in the last two points, it was not possible to establish a commercial academy in Opava by the end of the period being examined. There is a lack of evidence that other Silesian cities attempted to establish such a school, including Cieszyn. It is for this reason that such a school was noticeably absent from Silesia, and those interested in higher commercial education from Silesia went to study at schools in Moravia (especially Olomouc) and Krakow. Cieszyn's importance in terms of distributing commercial education in the region was compounded by the desperate situation in eastern Austrian Silesia. Apart from *Fortbildungsschule* for merchant apprentices in Bielsko, which had been functioning since the 1880s, there were no other educational alternatives until the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Only then did commercial *Fortbildungsschulen* appear in Frýdek, Skoczów and Orlová. This was partially because it was not possible to take advantage of local potential (capital and demand) to develop local commercial education in the nearby industrial centre of Bielsko. Despite repeated attempts, no such school with full-time education was opened there. A similar situation also prevailed in neighbouring Galicia's border regions, where relevant educational alternatives were also sparse. The change came relatively late with the establishment of two commercial schools in nearby Biata in 1913 (Polish) and 1914 (German). For these reasons, not only students from Cieszyn were seen in commercial schools, but also from the wider region, be it eastern Silesia or southwestern Galicia. Cieszyn's schools also had a similar impact in terms of where their graduates found employment. In this regard, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Cieszyn fulfilled the role of a supra-regional centre of commercial education and an alternative centre to Opava regarding the diverse offer of study programmes and capacity of these institutions. The population of Austrian Silesia was thus able to benefit from two centres of commercial education. Similarly, this was the reality in neighbouring Galicia, where Lviv/Lwów/Lemberg and Kraków/Krakau emerged as centres of commercial education.

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