

CFA: Industrialization in Upper Silesia; the Example of the Ballestrem Corporation, ca. 1890-1950

## Industrialization in Upper Silesia in the 'Age of Extremes' A Cultural History of Business Using the Example of the Ballestrem Corporation, ca. 1890-1950

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Recommended by M.A. Steffen Heidrich  
Zentrum mittleres und östliches Europa

History

Research Projects

The Center for the Study of Central and Eastern Europe at Technische Universität Dresden and the Coal Mining Museum in Zabrze invite you to participate in the research project "**Industrialization in Upper Silesia in the 'Age of Extremes' A Cultural History of Business Using the Example of the Ballestrem Corporation, ca. 1890-1950.**" funded by the Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media (BKM).

No process shaped the "Transformation of the World" in the 19th century more than the industrialization of Europe, which initially only took place in individual regions of textile or heavy industry. Upper Silesia was a pioneer region of industrialization, where rapidly growing industrial production transformed the previously predominantly agricultural landscape through the construction of mines and smelters, workers' settlements and their connection with railroad lines. The borderlands of the German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian empires shaped the ethnic composition of the workforce as well as the economic practices of the Upper Silesian entrepreneurial dynasties that emerged from the large landowning aristocracy.

In the first half of the 20th century, the region was pivotal for heavy industry and arms production. With the partition that became effective in 1922 as a result of the First World War, Upper Silesia became a subject of dispute between Germany and Poland. After the invasion of Poland in 1939, National Socialist Germany annexed the eastern part and turned it into another site of its population policy and, at the same time, into an "armory" of the German Reich. After the Second World War, the entire region became part of the socialist Polish People's Republic, which nationalized the industrial companies. A large part of the German-speaking population was expelled or deported, including most of the people who until then had belonged to the circle of the owners and managers of the coal and steel industry.

The project merges economic-historical with cultural-historical perspectives and methods to reconstruct the history of the industrial character of Upper Silesia in the German-Polish border region and to integrate economic history into general cultural history. Using the Ballestrem corporation as a case study, the company history as a microhistory of Upper Silesian heavy industry can be combined with the material and immaterial shaping of industrial culture across the disruptions of the 20th century. The communicative, representative, educational, and tradition-forming dimensions of workers' welfare, church, settlement, and company headquarters

architecture, collection activities, and patronage will be examined, as will the development of raw materials and sales markets, technical innovations, the use of forced labor, and the handling of environmental destruction. The study of economic resilience and the ability to withstand crises, the formation of international networks, political commitment and adaptation in changing political and economic contexts are intended to illustrate the changes and continuities of aristocratic leadership in the "Age of Extremes".

The research project is scheduled to run until October 2023, **beginning with a kick-off workshop that will take place online from October 13 to 15, 2021**. The outcome of the project will be an interdisciplinary publication consisting of contributions on different aspects of Upper Silesian industrial history. The aim is to increase coherence and an interdisciplinary perspective of the research results through a constant exchange, project meetings and an advisory circle of experts from different disciplines. The editors have access to and advice from the Ballestrem Family Archives in Berlin and the state archives of the Silesian Voivodeship.

We call for you to submit proposals for a methodically reflected investigation of all economic, social, religious, political, architectural, philanthropic and patronage activities of the Ballestrem family and their effects in the above-mentioned period of investigation or for comparative perspectives on Upper Silesian industrial history or the aristocratic industrial magnates, which allow the activities of the Ballestrems in Upper Silesia to be understood in the context of their international relations. **Please send an outline (max. 3000 characters) explaining the subject and research perspective, and a short CV with a list of relevant publications no later than July 31, 2021 to [oberschl@tu-dresden.de](mailto:oberschl@tu-dresden.de).**

A contract for work [German: Werkvertrag] will be signed with the persons who will be selected to participate in the project. An author's fee of 1,500 euros is envisaged, as well as the possibility of reimbursement of travel expenses incurred for library and archive research, eyewitness interviews or similar. One third of the fee will be paid upon conclusion of the contract, the remaining two thirds will be due upon submission of the text by March 31, 2023.

Project members will also agree to participate in project meetings scheduled for March 2022 in Zabrze and October 2022 in Dresden.

Workshops and conference will be in both English and German. Invitations to a digital workshop will be sent out no later than two weeks after the registration deadline for the project launch in October. We look forward to welcoming you!

### **Registration and inquiries**

Steffen Heidrich, M.A.

e-mail: [oberschl@tu-dresden.de](mailto:oberschl@tu-dresden.de)

phone: 0351 463-37865 (Sekretariat)

## Contact

Steffen Heidrich

TU Dresden, Zentrum Mittleres und Östliches Europa, 01062 Dresden

**Telefon:** +49 (0)351 463 37865 (Sekretariat)

**E-Mail:** [oberschl@tu-dresden.de](mailto:oberschl@tu-dresden.de)