

## Lodz Textiles once Again – Initiative for the Renewal of the Textile Industry in Lodz

In the third decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Eastern Europe witnessed the rise of a large textile center. Previously unknown, the small city of Lodz became the promised land for entrepreneurs interested in a career in textiles. Many came from Germany, France, Austria and Russia to place their soon-to-be-magnificent factories here, to produce cotton and wool fabric, clothing and other textiles. Lodz grew throughout the forthcoming years from a small town to a large metropolis inhabited by thousands of newcomers.

Why did the textile industry become the vehicle of growth for the city? It is more than obvious that industry selection is dependent on several factors including the economic situation, demand for a specific type of good or local potential and conditions. The neglect of textiles in this region of Europe as well as political and social pressure to place its center in the middle of the Polish lands became the main opportunities for Lodz.

Current industry production in the city, such as mechanics, automation and electronics is reduced mainly to assembly lines which can be easily transferred to other countries offering a workforce that is less expensive. Meanwhile, from the marketing point of view, the tradition of a specific industry is also significant, and Lodz has over 150 years of experience in textiles including clothing, leather and fabrics.

Throughout 150 years the textile industry rose and developed three-fold at an extraordinary growth rate, giving employment to hundreds of city residents. It affected both the development of Lodz and the country itself by contributing significantly to the gross domestic income and being a strong vehicle of export. It also had an important disadvantage - it has degraded the environment irreversibly. At the same time the industry has shrunk three-fold. Each time it was not the result of competitors' activities but because of the formal decisions of authorities.

The fall of communism and its repercussions on CEE countries resulted in the mass bankruptcy of most of the biggest textile and clothing factories in Lodz. But with the experience gained over the 150 years and human resources with a particular set of skills, the industry did not surrender. More flexible companies that were more creative and better prepared for the rules of the new economy entered the stage. They found new niches which not only addressed the basic needs for clothing, underwear, and sportswear but also contributed to human security, health and medicine, technology, civil, rail and air engineering.

In order to build 1 kilometer of motorway, 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> of technical fabrics is necessary. Vehicles moving over that highway is another field of opportunity for the industry to produce furnishing fabrics and composites. Even contemporary medicine uses textile products on a mass scale, including the most innovative ones, implanted to replace diseased tissue.

Textile products are important in almost every industry, although we often do not realise that. And Lodz has been and still is a textile center, not only in Poland but in the entire CEE, even though many want to erase that fact from their memories.

We have an industry which comprises the largest occupational group in the city and voivodeship. It had to cope with a puzzling and unfavorable attitude shown by the former administration of the city and some luminaries of the economy, loudly announcing that 'fortunately, the textile industry has irrevocably disappeared'. The underlying premises given to justify these statements have been both untrue and unveiled absolute ignorance and lack of knowledge about textiles.

Lodz is a proud host of three large universities – the University of Lodz, the Technical University of Lodz and The Strzemiński Academy of Art, which educates specialists that feed the textile industry. Several research institutes with a worldwide reputation (Textile Research Institute, Institute of Security Technology 'MORATEX', Institute of Biopolymers and Chemical Fibres) have established their headquarters in Lodz.

Companies hiring hundreds of employees operate next to thousands of small entrepreneurs. The GATTA company is one of Europe's largest hosiery producers with modern production potential, advanced technology and stylish design. Over 2,000 employees work on its success. Another example - the Bilinski company, hiring approximately 200 people, focuses on the chemical treatment of textile materials.

Latest technologies developed at the Technical University of Lodz and research institutes of our city are widely applied by the Polish textile industry. One of the finest examples of this process is 'MORATEX' solutions, which enable the production of specialized, world class quality materials helping to protect the health and lives of the police, border guards, fire departments and the navy.

Graduates of the Academy of Art and the Institute of Architecture of Textiles of the Technical University are finest artists and designers who provide the industry with the highest level of design, and companies

founded by them create fashion that successfully competes with reputable foreign enterprises.

Lodz has a modern textile industry in terms of technological and organisational capabilities and has a splendid academic background. However, an anti-textile campaign, which started in the 1990's, has resulted in losses that are difficult to make up for. The international 'Interfashion' fair was transferred to Poznan after years of being held in Lodz. A lack of applicants for the Textile Faculty of the Technical University (Faculty of Material Technology and Textile Design) or secondary schools with a textile profile may be a cause of some concern. It is already affecting the development of the industry – it results in a lack of properly prepared staff, especially of a medium technical level, so desperately needed by companies struggling with unfavorable conditions. It is, in fact, an issue of an industry which is large enough to be responsible for 15% of national exports with Lodz in the middle of it. The city is responsible for leading it and setting the directions for its development.

Lodz has every feature required to maintain its status as the center of the textile industry, especially because of the strong research and academic background and the fact that the European Union considers the city as one of the three main centers of European textiles, alongside Milan and Lyon.

The only drawback is the lack of prestige and belief that it is the best place to invest in this industry and that the industry itself is good enough to develop a strong and successful career. It is a common stereotype that textiles is outdated, collapsing and with no prospects for future development. This stereotype can be changed only when people associated with the industry speak with one voice about their problems and needs. Only then can they be noticed by the authorities, media and banks.

This was the foundation for the initiative of the Polish Textile Association and Senator Maciej Grubski to create a Forum of science and industry. This is a place to exchange views and experience and an attempt to reach out to public opinion with the message that the textile industry has not fallen, being still successful and able to develop, with its center placed in Lodz. The first meeting of the Forum took place at the City Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2012. The participants of the event realised how much effort must be made to rebuild textile prestige and restore its well-earned place among other Polish industries.

Received 10.02.2012,

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