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The Influence of Industrial Revolution on Furniture Development in Vilnius City in the Second Half of 19th – the Beginning of the 20th Century

The main aim of my dissertation is to reveal the influence of Industrial Revolution on furniture development – manufacture, trade and import in Vilnius city. The second half of the 19th – the early 20th century was a period of changes in Europe. The appearance of furniture was affected by the renewal of past styles meanwhile as well as new design tendencies, caused by the invention of new technologies and its use in furniture manufacturing emerged. The spread of mass-produced furniture production was the main feature of this time.

It is important to notice that at the same time the long-lasting traditions of furniture craft still existed in the frame of guild system in Vilnius. The development of modern craftsmanship was impeded by medieval relict the guild system, which existed until the end of the 19th century. Craftsmen from the guilds defending their monopoly production rights fought against non-guild craftsmen, craftsmen from other cities and traders and opposed the establishment of the capitalist industry companies. Only at the end of the 19th century – beginning of the last century, new processes originated along with repercussions of the craft movement. The special courses and schools of crafts, which raised the professional level of craftsmen, reduced backwardness and represented modern craft ideas. My aim is to reveal the collision between furniture craft and mass-produced furniture manufacture and production. My fields of interest in this topic are the proportion between craft and mass-produced furniture; the influence of modernization on the traditional furniture craft; the establishment of furniture industry companies and their production. At the end of the 19th century, the producers experience was taken over the Central Europe and the mass-produced furniture industry was established in Vilnius. Transporting of new materials, technologies, fashions and its adaptation to local conditions enabled to create the local Vilnius furniture varieties.

For example, the first furniture factory was opened in Vilnius in 1895. In this way the mass production of the bentwood furniture took its start. My case study about mass-produced furniture could identify the mobility of furniture pieces and technologies as well as the design ideas

overstepping the borders of empires. Moreover, in my project I would like to examine the centre – periphery relationships between Vilnius and Europe in furniture production. In addition, I would encompass activities of representatives of foreign furniture companies, spread of the furniture catalogues, which were used to introduce the market with new products, overcoming the geographical limits. Furthermore, it is important to analyze the highly popular mass-produced furniture, which made the largest breakthrough in the furniture design. In my dissertation the problems concerning factors, influences and fashions that affected spread of furniture production would be raised.

In my research I would use different methodological approaches. The method of historical reconstruction would help to restore the view of furniture production in the past, because the large part of furniture from this period did not survive, but there is a lot of information about this period furniture in archival sources, advertising materials of the periodicals, catalogues of furniture factories and other iconographic material. The comparative method would be helpful in comparing the production of different factories production in Europe and Vilnius. The typological method would be useful in dividing furniture into groups according to their forms, materials and other features. Stylistic and attributional analysis would be used in a catalogue of surviving furniture.