



Krakow: An International City with a Global Advantage for Poland

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Abstract

Krakow is the second largest and one of the oldest cities in Poland; it is a popular tourist destination for travelers from all over the world. It was the capital of Poland from 1038 to 1596. The 15th and 16th centuries were known as Poland's Golden Age; during the reign of Casimir IV, many artists and artisans worked and lived in Krakow, and a printing press was created in 1473 in Krakow. The city has always been a prized possession during peace and in war. No doubt, this famous international city now attracts foreign direct investments and partnerships in basic research and innovation, sciences, industries, and higher education. This paper discusses how the city is not only international in character, but also provides a global advantage for Poland.

Introduction

Societies around the world have undergone changes throughout the history. Though modernization, quality of life, and access to the world-wide trade have been uneven, countries have managed to move from agrarian to industrial societies; some of them rather slowly, while others at a more rapid pace; with the development of tools, knowledge, and technology, societies began to exchange goods and services with others, and today, with Internet and high-speed connectivity, international business and global GDP, have grown substantially. Thanks to the rapid flow of information and world-wide integration of all sorts, we are experiencing what is commonly called "globalization," all over the world. International cities like, Krakow, are playing an important role in it. How? Historically, Krakow has been a seat of power for Kings and Queens; it functions as an anchor for connecting people from all over the world, through culture, arts, music, business, technology, higher education and innovation. These are further discussed and explained by the narrative on the history of Krakow.



A Brief History of Krakow

Since the arrival of Homo Sapiens, the city of Krakow has attracted the attention of hunters, conquerors, traders, tourists, and capital city for the kings and queens. The city of Krakow is a special place, and is called the heart of Europe; it has received visitors from far and wide since Homo Sapiens arrived on the continent. An ancient Neolithic shrine of mammoth bones in a hillside high above Kraków drew hunters from the hill-country to pray for bountiful game. The Celts left burial mounds overlooking the river on their long migrations across Europe. Roman traders wended their way through the Vistula valley in search of the amber-rich shores of the Baltic. When the last Slavic tribe of the Wiślanie conquered the lowlands of Małopolska around the 7th century AD, their mighty warlord Krak built his castle on the steep limestone rock of Wawel. The city was named Kraków in honor of its legendary founder (Davies, 2005). In the mid-10th century, Ibrahim ibn Yaqub describes the Wiślan city as "Krkva" and not yet united with the Polan tribe based in Gniezno to the northwest. Only a couple of decades later, however, Prince Mieszko I had united the two tribes into the first Polish state. Mieszko also introduced the new religion of Christianity to Poland. After a period of massive social unrest in the north, partly due to the enforcement of Christianity on a still largely Pagan population, the capital of Poland was moved from Gniezno to the tamer city of Krakow by King Kazimierz. By the 12th century, Kraków was a boom town and many important monuments of Romanesque architecture survive today from this period, most famously St. Andrew's church on Grodzka street, and the tiny chapel of St. Adelbert on the main square (Marek,2007). The 13th century saw the adoption of a western-style grid work of streets (older buildings remain at odd angles to the grid) and the first examples of the Gothic style imported by Dominican and Franciscan monks. In the 14th century the vigorous reign King Kazimierz the Great brought Gothic building projects on a massive scale to Krakow. Among his many achievements was the original founding of the Jagiellonien University in 1364 (Dorota, 2007). When Poland was joined with Lithuania by the marriage of Queen Jadwiga and Grand



Duke Jagiello, Kraków was suddenly far from the centre of the territory it ruled. Krakow remained a vibrant centre of religion, culture, education, and international trade for centuries. However, in 1596, King Zygmunt III felt need to move his administrative capital to what was then the tiny village of Warsaw, in order to be closer to an empire that threatened to break away at any moment. From the 17th century onwards, the kingdom of Poland suffered defeat after defeat and watched its vast territory whittled away piece by piece. Arrogant and insensitive political maneuvering on the part of the nobility led to a series of Cossack revolts that cost Poland the Ukraine. Royal intrigues led to a devastating Swedish invasion that swept over the land. Finally, the aristocracy's willingness to sell their votes in what had become an electoral monarchy resulted in a series of territorial annexations that completely divided the ancient kingdom amongst its neighbors Prussia, Austria and Russia. Poland ceased to exist in 1795 (Euromonitor, 2007). Under the Hapsburg rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Kraków prospered in spite of its lost freedom. Kraków was even briefly (1815-1846) a Free City of its own. The medieval walls of the city were torn down and the moat filled in to make the ring garden of the Planty that encircles the Old Town today. The branch of the Vistula that cut the island of Kazimierz from the main city had largely silted up and become an unhealthy swamp. The town authorities paved it and annexed Kazimierz to Kraków. In 1918 Poland regained its sovereignty as a result of the Treaty of Versailles. Both town and University discovered new energy and Kraków became a hothouse of art and learning. Many of the outlying villages around Krakow developed into suburbs (UNESCO, 1976). The sudden blossoming of inter-war Poland was cut short by the Nazi invasion in 1939. Whereas the capital city of Warsaw was practically razed to the ground, Kraków was spared by the Nazis largely thanks to its ancient ties to the German-speaking world. Only 70 km away, however, loomed the concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau where millions of human beings, predominantly Jews, from all over Europe died in horrifying circumstances (Harold, 1998). Ironically, the communist liberators of Kraków posed more of a danger to the city and its



lifestyle. Because of their distrust of the bourgeois intelligence, the new regime installed a vast "worker's paradise" of concrete housing blocks and smoke-belching steel mills called Nowa Huta on the edge of town next to one of the ancient burial mounds. The fall of communism at the end of the 1980s was in part hastened by the election of the Archbishop of Krakow, Karol Wojtyła, as Pope John Paul II. As the city grew in prosperity, a large number of renovation projects were undertaken in the 1990s. The Wawel castle complex, the main square, Mariacki church, and the Kazimierz ghetto have all been restored to their former glories. Transportation has been upgraded with improvements to the main train station and Balice airport. Where communism failed to bring viable industry to Kraków, capitalism has encouraged international business to put down roots. The tourist industry is booming as people all over the world re-discover the startling beauty of Kraków. In 2000, Kraków has taken on a festival atmosphere as the Jagiellonian University celebrates the 600th anniversary of our re-founding and the city has been chosen a European City of Culture (Jagiellonien University, 2007).

How Krakow became a city with global advantage

By the end of the 10th century, the city was a leading trading center, incorporated into the holdings of the Piast dynasty. Brick buildings were constructed; including the Wawel Castle, Romanesque churches such as St. Adalbert's, a cathedral, and a basilica. The city was almost entirely destroyed during the Mongol invasions of 1241, 1259 and 1287. It was rebuilt and incorporated in 1257, based on the Magdeburg law, with tax benefits and trade privileges for its citizens. These citizens were German settlers who moved in during the Ostsiedlung, and who constituted a majority of burghers in contemporary Polish and Bohemian towns (Brather, 2001). The older Royal fort Wawel was connected to the new town, built on its northern side around the market square, by its former suburbia (Okol) (Brather, 2001). Germans constituted the majority during the 14th century, and became Polonized in the 16th century. The city rose to prominence in 1364, when Casimir III of Poland founded the University of Krakow, the second oldest university in central Europe after the Charles University in Prague. The city continued to grow under the joint Lithuanian-Polish Jagielion dynasty (1386–1572). As the capital of a powerful state and a member of the Hanseatic League, the city



attracted many craftsmen, businesses, and guilds as science and the arts began to flourish (Foreign Cooperation, 2010).

Krakow after WW II and independence

Following the collapse of communism, the private sector has been growing in Kraków. There are about 20 large multinational companies in Kraków, including Google, Hitachi, IBM, General Electric, capgemini, Motorola, and Sabre Holdings, along with other British, German and Scandinavian-based firms. In 2005, foreign direct investment in Kraków has reached approximately USD 3.5 billion. Krakow tries to position itself as Europe's Silicon Valley based on the large number of local and foreign hi-tech companies. Kraków is the second city in Poland (after Warsaw) most often visited by foreigners (Watkins, 2006). The unemployment rate in Kraków was 4.8 percent in May 2007, well below the national average of 13 percent. In 2006, the city budget, which is presented by the Mayor of Krakow on November 15 each year, had projected revenue of 2,150 billion zwoy. The primary sources of revenue were as follows: 14% from the municipal taxation on real estate properties and the use of amenities, 30% in transfers from the national budget, and 34% in state subsidies. Projected expenditures, totaling 2,349 billion złoty, included 21% in city development costs and 79% in city maintenance costs. Of the maintenance costs, as much as 39% were spent on education and childcare. City of Kraków development costs included 41% toward road building, transport, and communication (combined), and 25% for the city's infrastructure and environment. The city has high bond credit rating (BBB+). As one of the popular international cities, Krakow maintains sister city status, with more than 30 cities around the world (Municipality of Krakow, 2010).

Conclusion

From the founding of Krakow by the Slavic war lord Krak, and the union with Polan tribe in the north, the Polish state became a unified nation, as she exists today. The remarkable journey of the international city of Krakow adds tantamount to how, other world cities help to create a vibrant cross-roads for trade, arts, culture, and music. The



21st century will repeat the history and importance of international cities, such as Krakow, and the evidence is already here, with Internet and globalization intensifying global integration.

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