

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROVINCIAL STATISTICAL OFFICE IN BOHEMIA IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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## Abstract

120 years ago took place in the Czech Provincial Council the general decisive talks about the establishment of Provincial Statistical Office in Prague, which became the foundation stone of the State Statistical Office after the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia. Our paper explains the circumstances about the development of the Provincial Statistical Office, about its relationship to the Central Statistical Commission in Vienna and also about the autonomous statistical offices in Moravia and other countries of the monarchy, because this year there is an important anniversary of the decisive negotiations on the establishment of the Provincial Statistical Office in Czech Lands, from which leads straight development line to today's Czech Statistical Office. A special attention is paid to the immediate predecessors of the Provincial Statistical Office – to the Statistical office of the Agriculture Council of the Czech Kingdom. The presented essay also points out some mistakes and inaccuracies in the existing literature, which should be mentioned and never forgotten.

**Key words:** Czech Provincial Council, Central Statistical Commission, Provincial Statistical Office, Historical Statistics, Karel Kořistka

**JEL Code:** B31, B41, J18

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## Introduction

“Historia magistra vitae” was known already to the antic classics. In modern times it is widely recognized that a part of every discipline is also its history. Several historian statisticians had been publishing at different times about the development of statistics in our country, but the elaboration of history of this discipline in our country is still totally insufficient. Therefore, the authors of this paper aim to contribute to the improvement of this situation by a series of partial studies on the development of statistics in the XIX. century and in the first half of XX. century (see e.g. Závodský and Šimpach, 2014; 2015; or Kodera, Závodský and Šimpach, 2015).

This year there is 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the decisive negotiations on the establishment of the Provincial Statistical Office (PSO) in Czech Lands, from which leads straight development

line to today's Czech Statistical Office (CZSO). In February, 110 years have passed since the death of the builder PSO and its first head – prof. PhDr. Karel Knight Kořistka, dr. h. c. Despite that the development of the official statistics in the Czech Lands concerned several authors (starting with Kořistka) in last decades of XIX. century, there are still occurring entirely mistaken proclamations in the publications of CZSO that we are trying to correct our contribution.

## **1 Statistical Service in Austria-Hungary**

In the Austrian part of the Habsburg monarchy there were all important fields of statistics (except of agricultural) concentrated to the central offices in Vienna. It was primarily the E. k. Central Statistical Commission (K. k. statistische Zentralkommission) classified under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education. Official statistics in Cisleithania were dealt by a number of ministries that set up their own statistical offices or chairs. It was especially a statistical service of the Ministry of Commerce having in its competence the statistics of external trade, “intermediate trade” (i.e. trade with Hungary), statistics of industry and transport, and labour statistics<sup>1</sup>.

Reporting requirement was defined in monarchy by laws only in four cases: census, census of agricultural and trade establishments, trade statistics and intermediate trade statistics. The Central Statistical Commission had no territorial authorities or affiliates, although, it could turn to the local government authorities in particular countries, i.e. to the Governor's Office, district office and at town and municipal councils.

Only agriculture statistics and then issues, which belonged to the limited competence of the provincial governments, were left to the provincial government, represented by the provincial councils and their executive bodies – provincial committees. Agriculture statistics in particular countries of the monarchy was dealt first by the economic societies, which foundation was already initiated by the Maria Theresa. Provincial Committee increasingly impose to its officials to keep the statistics of activities of various provincial departments (charitable, healthcare, education, etc.), public works paid by the country, the elections to the provincial assemblies etc. Unsystematic of such statistical work carried out by officials without statistical training and experience, often provoked criticism and proposals for the establishment of at least a small office that would be devoted exclusively to provincial statistics.

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<sup>1</sup> See Závorský (1997, p. 94).

At the beginning of the year 1894 landtags (in Czech: zemské sněmy) in Silesia and Moravia proposed that the deputies of particular land authorities jointly with Vienna Central Statistical Commission should call the conference, which would discuss the unification of methodology in statistical surveys in different countries and also possibilities of cooperation of provincial statisticians with Central Statistical Commission. Such meetings actually took place in November 1894 in Vienna, which began the twenty-year work of the Conference for Provincial Statistics (Konferenz für Landesstatistik). This conference was organized at first meeting in Vienna, since 1904 alternately in different countries of Cisleithania. Already at a meeting in year 1895 were approved some unified tables, according to which the statistical surveys should be held in all countries since year 1897. The recommendations of the Conference were a major impetus for the establishment of Provincial Statistical Offices in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. Then since year 1900 Viennese Central Statistical Commission published the statistical yearbook of the provincial governments (Statistisches Jahrbuch der autonomen Landesverwaltung in den im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreichen und Ländern).

## **2 Beginnings of the office statistics in Bohemia**

The agricultural statistics in Bohemia was dealt already since the end of XVIII. century by E. k. Patriotic-Economic Society (PES), initially not too systematically. In its journal it published the results of various statistical surveys – particularly about the development of the weather, sowing areas and harvest of various crops and the prices of agricultural products. The first concrete proposal for the establishment of specialized statistical work was presented at the meeting of the Central Committee of PES in January 1853<sup>2</sup> by A. Oppelt<sup>3</sup>. The proposal was adopted unanimously and after several years of preparations PES established the Central Committee for Statistics of Agriculture and forestry in the Czech Kingdom, whose first meeting was held on 30 November 1856. It was an advisory body of PES, to which was subordinated the statistical office as the executive body.

The statistical office started its operations at the beginning of the year 1858 under the guidance of prof. Jonák<sup>4</sup>. When he resigned after ten years of his activity at the end of the year 1867, prof. PhDr. Karl Kořistka (1825–1906) took over the management of the statistical office. He was one of the leading representatives of science in the Czech land in the second half of the

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<sup>2</sup> Verhandlungen und Mittheilungen der K. k. Patriotisch-Ökonomischen Gesellschaft im Königreiche Böhmen, 1853, vol. III, iss. 9, p. 69. The existing literature mentions year 1842, or „probably 1852“ (Krejčí, 1905, p. 7; Podzimek, 1974, p. 26).

<sup>3</sup> Antonín J. Oppelt (1789-1864) was a landowner and one of the most active representatives of PES.

<sup>4</sup> Eberhard A. Jonák (1820-1879) was a university professor of statistics and political economy.

XIX. century, professor of mathematics and geodesy at Prague Polytechnic (after its division into Czech and German continued to teach at a German polytechnic). In the long term, he participated in the reorganization and modernization of technical education in the monarchy and especially in Prague, where he also had a credit on the establishment of the general department, where during his life was founded the study of actuaries, the predecessor of study of statistical-insurance engineering<sup>5</sup>. Besides Kořistka, another qualified worker of statistical offices was its secretary JUDr. Josef Bernat (1834–1907).

**Fig. 1: Karel Kořistka**



Source: Personal archive of Karel Kořistka

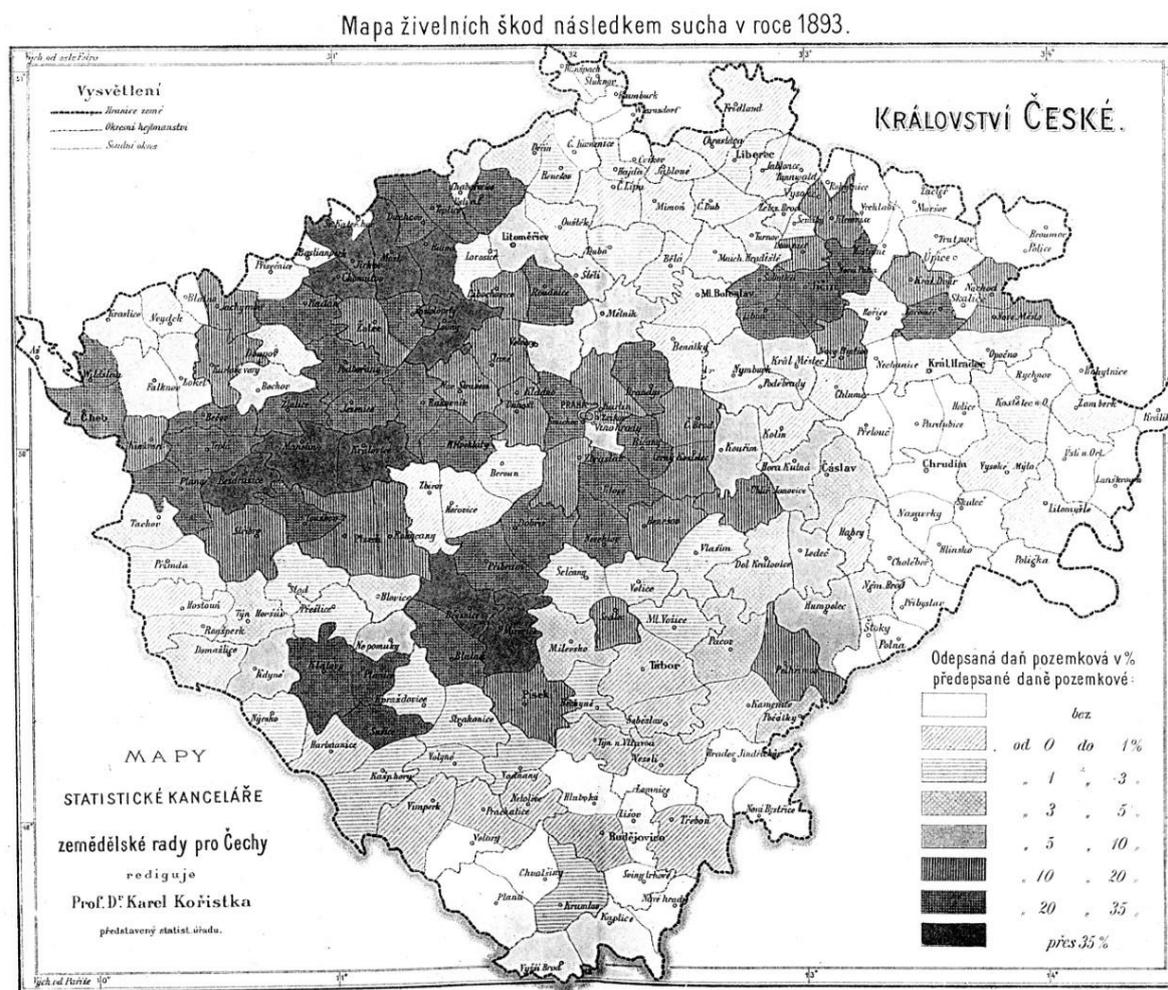
Statistical office had during all period of its forty-year existence only few employees. Data on agriculture were collected by a system of delegates, which were unpaid correspondents in the districts (economic officials, landowners, foresters, pastors, etc.). Their enthusiasm for official statistics was often not high. Yields of individual crops were usually estimated using data on sown areas; these estimates were then confronted with the results of other municipalities and districts. In order to set solid foundation to this check, in year 1871 Kořistka performed the division of the whole territory of the Czech Lands on 11 so-called natural landscapes, involving always judicial districts with similar conditions for agriculture (elevation and shape of the terrain, soil conditions, climate and usual crops).

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<sup>5</sup> See Závodský (2013, p. 368).

Since year 1867, a Central Committee and its statistical office annually published report on its activities<sup>6</sup> in German and Czech, including an overview of the activities in the previous year and tabular reports and factual analysis of the examined factors. Starting from the third report (for year 1868) there are the results of the harvest and agricultural production in general. Since the report for the year 1870 the tables with average prices of cereals, meat and bread, accompanied by averages for the whole country and for a number of recent years were added.

**Fig. 2: Cartogram of the consequence of draughts on agriculture in Bohemia in year 1893<sup>7</sup>**



Source: Reports of statistical offices of Agricultural Council for the Czech Kingdom for 1894–1895. Prague, 1895.

Unlike the vast majority of other statisticians of XIX. century and the first decades of the next century, Kořistka was not lawyer by education, but a mathematician and geologist. Kořistka's exact thinking was reflected in all its activities – in the exact definition of measured

<sup>6</sup> Central Committee – Czech (1867–1906) and Central Committee – German (1867–1906). Detail bibliography can be found in Podzimek (1974).

<sup>7</sup> Original is in colour, zoomed.

indicators, compiling well-arranged tables, calculating the averages and ratios etc. Kořistka had written himself the history of our statistics also as a pioneer of modern graphical illustration in statistics<sup>8</sup>.

Already in the Activity Report for the year 1868 there are in six colour cartograms printed, whose author is professor Kořistka. Similar cartograms Kořistka created for some other volumes Activity Reports. They express not only the yields of various crops, but also the distribution of damages caused by natural disasters, the intensity of forestation individual districts, the ratio of the number of cattle per 100 inhabitants, etc. (see also Fig. 2).

Starting with Report for year 1872 there are published linked graphs in some years which illustrate long-term time series, mostly the development of prices of various agricultural products. Here Kořistka had been using for vertical axis a logarithmic scale in some cases, what he justifies in detail in the text.

The activities of statistical offices were funded by both, PES and from provincial funds and since year 1869 also by the Vienna government (Ministry of plowing), which was interested in mainly harvesting statistics. Despite its limited financial and personnel equipment the statistical office sometimes took various surveys beyond the agriculture and forestry statistics.

Patriotic-Economic Society was cancelled by Governor's Office for political reasons in the spring of 1872. From all its parts only the statistical office continued its work that was affiliated in the following year to the newly established Agricultural Council. Since the 60's years the proposals to transform the statistical office to the Provincial Statistical Office often appeared in the Czech lands. Particular form and real hope to be accepted appeared in the 90's.

### **3 Provincial Statistical Office of Czech Kingdom**

A proposal of the Czech council on the establishment of the Provincial Statistical Office gave first in 1892 MEP Karel Adámek<sup>9</sup>. An unsuccessful proposal was then submitted to reassess every year. Finally, on February 14, 1896 a resolution on the establishment of PSO was adopted. Draft of the statute, prepared in the same year by prof. Kořistka, was approved on March 6, 1897 by landtag and from the beginning of the year 1898 PSO started its activity.

PSO consisted of Provincial Statistical Commission (initially 10-membered)<sup>10</sup> as a consultative authority (to the Provincial Committee) and a constituting authority (to the

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<sup>8</sup> The overview of the graphical illustration in statistics is given especially by Beniger and Robyn (1978) or by Taylor et al. (1997).

<sup>9</sup> Karel Adámek (1840–1918) was long-term member of Czech assembly. On the proposal also participated, among other things, T. G. Masaryk, i.e. also a member of the provincial committee and Adámek's party colleague.

<sup>10</sup> It was established in November 1897.

statistical office) and of Provincial Statistical Chair as an executive authority. The statistical office was established by taking over the personnel and equipment of the statistical office of the Agricultural Council and in the early years remained in the building of Agricultural Council (Wenceslas Square. No. 799 / II - opposite today's Hotel Jalta – see Fig. 3).

**Fig. 3: Original seat of the Provincial Statistical Office at Wenceslas square. no. 799/II<sup>11</sup>**



Source: Viktor Puci

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<sup>11</sup> Current state (photo).

As the head of the statistical office was appointed prof. Kořistka<sup>12</sup>, secretary dr. Bernat and gradually being adopted several new workers, especially young lawyer JUDr. Dobroslav Krejčí (1869–1936), who in the later years became the soul of the statistical office and then its boss and builder. At the time of its adoption, he had no statistical expertise or experience.

PSO got under §1 of its status a task “to cultivate statistics in all matters that are commanded to the provincial autonomy by applicable laws”. (By D. Krejčí words, “*byl svou kompetencí omezen na pouhé paběrky po statistice státní* – its competences were limited only to mere pickings of the government statistics”). As we noted above, the decisive statistical branches were concentrated in the Vienna offices.

CSO stated on its website: “On March 6, 1897 was then established the Provincial Statistical Office of the Czech Kingdom, which became the first truly Statistical Office on the territory of today’s Czech Republic. The first time was the centralization of all statistical departments that until then operated under different ministries and other institutions”<sup>13</sup>. This is utter nonsense, no concentration of the statistical departments was there, and the current statistical office was joined only by four new officers. What “ministries and other institutions” the (unsigned) author means is not clear. Even a high-school student knows that in Prague for the period of Austro-Hungarian Empire was not any ministry. And from Vienna to Prague no offices or their competencies were transferred<sup>14</sup>.

In Moravia was established the Provincial Statistical Office in 1899, (commonly referred year 1893 is incorrect)<sup>15</sup>. Provincial Statistical Service (Landesstatistischer Dienst) in Silesia started its activities in 1898. While the Provincial Statistical Office in Bohemia became in 1919 the foundation for building the Czechoslovak State Statistical Office, Office of Moravia was destroyed during the First World War and the Silesian was cancelled in 1925.

## Conclusion

Our paper summarized the circumstances of the origin of the Provincial Statistical Office in Bohemia including the establishment and progressive development of the statistical offices PES (later Agricultural Council). Exactly from this statistical office there is a direct line to today’s

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<sup>12</sup> He was raised to knighthood by the emperor in 1879.

<sup>13</sup> History of statistics in Bohemia [2] – *Historie statistiky v Čechách do roku 1918* and also *Statistika: Od historie po současnost* [8], p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> There are many mistakes in quoted text. In the same column, for example there is incorrectly stated that mother tongue was among surveyed data.

<sup>15</sup> e.g. in Podzimek (1974, p. 53).

Czech Statistical Office – all offices from middle of XIX. century until today originated by take-over of the previous one.

Due to the requested scope of the article, we had to limit our text about the development of statistical methods, the beginnings of Czech statistical terminology in the observed period, we resigned also to the dealing with the development of official statistics in the Czech Republic outside of the area of agriculture – particularly in industrial union, the provincial trade commission, in trades and trade chambers etc. Also notes, common in historical works, had to be limited.

The history of official statistics in our country and the development of methods used have not yet been satisfactorily elaborated, e. g. provincial statistics in Moravia would deserve a more detailed analysis that is included in the works of Podzimek (1974) and Závodský (2004).

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*Zpráva o činnosti ústředního výboru pro statistiku polního a lesního hospodářství v království Českém.* Praha 1867–1906.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> 11The report was published annually, and in that period many times changed its name. The same applies to the German issues – source: Rechenschafts-Bericht über die Thätigkeit des Central-Comité für die land- und forstwirthschaftliche Statistik Böhmens. Praha 1867-1906.

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