

# **The Real Junta Particular de Comercio of Barcelona: A Model of Mediation between Central Power and Local Economic Bodies (18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries)**

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## ABSTRACT

Economic development is the result of various factors operating in space and time. For some time now, economics has been looking more closely at the role played by institutions as a driving and propelling force behind economic development. More recently, the action carried out by intermediate institutions has been highlighted, i.e. those bodies placed between government institutions and social actors, often originating from below. The case of the Real Junta Particular de Comercio (Royal Council of Commerce) in Barcelona, represents quite accurately the functioning and role of an intermediate institution, the result of the centralising action of the Spanish monarchy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but constituted through absorption of instances and elements of the urban social fabric. In particular, the study tries to highlight the action carried out by this institution to redistribute public goods such as knowledge, technology and rights to an audience made up of enterprises that wouldn't otherwise have obtained them.

## **Introduction**

Since the dissemination of classical economics, the market has been considered as the only institution responsible for economic performance. However, with the passage of time, studies have also emphasised the importance of additional factors – i.e. property rights, enterprise, transaction costs, technology, up to and including

knowledge – in order to deeply understand economics itself.<sup>1</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, Oliver Williamson’s studies highlighted the role played by transaction costs in the functioning of economic institutions, recognising the existence of a plurality of forms of economic governance; later, Douglass North also emphasised the importance of the cognitive frameworks of ideologies and rights.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson have linked economic development to the structure of institutions, attempting to make a synthesis of what Williamson and North theorised.<sup>3</sup> Following this path, economic research has mainly focused on the role of government institutions in growth policies; in particular, following the spreading of Keynesian intervention policies, the state and its action have become a focal point of development theory. The overcoming of the centralised model of intervention and the appearance of new phenomena of economic development, such as the industrial district, have stimulated new lines of research aimed at deepening the action carried out by “intermediate” institutional bodies, both public and private.<sup>4</sup>

This has shown how the action of institutions takes place at least

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<sup>1</sup> L. von Mises, “Economic calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth”, in S. Littlechild (ed.), *Austrian Economics*, Vol. I, Cheltenham, 1990; R.H. Coase, “The Institutional Structure of Production”, Nobel Lecture, in Id., *Essays on Economics*, Chicago, 1994; F. von Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society”, in *The American Economic Review*, no. 35/4, 1945, pp. 519-530; Ead., *Individualism and Economic Order*, Chicago, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> O. Williamson, “The Economics of Organizations: The Transaction Cost Approach”, in *American Journal of Sociology*, no. 87/3, 1981, pp. 548-577; Ead., “Comparative Economic Organization: The analysis of Discrete Structural Alternatives”, in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, no. 2, 1991, pp. 269-296; D. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge, 1990; On the evolution of the concept, see O. Habimana, “From Coase to Williamson: evolution, formalization and empirics of transaction cost Economics”, in *Journal of Social Economics*, no. 3/1, 2015, pp. 36-42.

<sup>3</sup> D. Acemoglu and J. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, New York, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> A. Arrighetti and G. Seravalli, *Istituzioni intermedie e sviluppo locale*, Roma, 1999; P.R. Tomlinson, “Industry institutions, social capital, and firm participation in industrial development”, in *Industrial and Corporate Change*, no. 21/1, 2011, pp. 1-29. On the industrial district see G. Becattini, M. Bellandi, G. Dei Ottati and F. Sforzi, *From Industrial Districts to Local Development. An Itinerary of Research*, Cheltenham, 2003.

at two levels: at the central level (central institutions) and at the local level (economic actors).<sup>5</sup> Between these two levels, a set of intermediate institutional bodies can operate.<sup>6</sup> Intermediate institutions can be defined as those to which the provision of locally differentiated public goods is delegated. The action of central and intermediate institutions is very different. The logics, instruments, objectives and target groups of action are different.<sup>7</sup> Enterprises demand highly differentiated regulation and public goods from institutions, which corresponds to an equally differentiated institutional offer. Central institutions essentially operate stabilising interventions. Their actions aim to reduce uncertainty and contain conflicts.<sup>8</sup> Intermediate institutions, however, produce selected public goods that are distributed in packages, that is, to enterprises that share the use of the same technology, the same location or the same end market. Such goods include, i.e. research, education, consultancy, credit facilitation, technical certification, etc.<sup>9</sup>

The provision of these goods tends to benefit mainly small enterprises, which are unable to develop this type of activity at national level. It should be noted that the action of intermediate institutions is often territorially limited. This implies that the ability to coordinate the mobilisation of collective resources is not uniform, but may differ considerably from one area to another, because more or less

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<sup>5</sup> W.D. Godsey, "Habsburg Government and Intermediary Authority under Joseph II (1780-90): The Estates of Lower Austria in Comparative Perspective", in *Central European History*, no. 46/4, 2013, pp. 699-740; D. Takahashi et al. "The Role of Formal and Informal Institutions in Farmland Consolidation: The Case of Shiga Prefecture, Japan", in *International Journal of the Commons*, no. 12/2, 2018, pp. 80-107.

<sup>6</sup> W.R. Scott, *Institutions and Organizations*, Thousand Oaks, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> A. Arrighetti and G. Seravalli, "Sviluppo economico, convergenza e istituzioni intermedie", in Id., *Istituzioni intermedie e sviluppo locale*, pp. 25-50.

<sup>8</sup> E. Hartmann and P.F. Kjaer (eds.), *The Evolution of Intermediary Institutions in Europe*, London, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> P. Samuelson, "The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure", in *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, no. 36/4, 1954, pp. 387-389; K.D. Goldin, "Equal Access vs. Selective Access: A Critique of Public Goods Theory", in *Public Choice*, no. 29/1, 1977, pp. 53-71; B. Coriat and O. Weinstein, "Organizations, firms and institutions in the generation of innovation", in *Research Policy*, no. 31/2, 2002, pp. 273-290.

efficient and coordinated intermediate institutions may exist. This may be a key to explaining, at least in part, the extraordinary development of some areas (such as industrial districts) and the fact that this development is based on small and medium-sized enterprises.<sup>10</sup>

### **Mercantilist policy and economic mediation**

The first examples of institutions explicitly conceived with the aim of negotiating between the demands of the merchant and productive classes and the needs of the state were the result of the spread of proto-mercantilist policies in Europe. The forerunner in this respect was France where, as early as 1602, Henry IV had appointed Barthélémy de Laffemas *contrôleur du commerce* (trade supervisor). The Bourbon sovereign had been a proponent of an economic project based on an early mercantilism aimed at incentivising agricultural production, trade and certain valuable manufactures such as silk in order to increase the inflow of precious metals into the coffers of the Crown. At the end of the century, in 1691, it was instead Jean Baptiste Colbert, as part of the measures undertaken to reform the administrative structure of the state, who instituted the *Chambre de Commerce* with specific tasks to encourage trade and manufacturing, tasks that were reinforced in 1722 with the creation of the *Bureau de Commerce*.<sup>11</sup> The Bureau had been established as early as 1700 under the name *Conseil de Commerce* with the specific task of studying and reporting on all trade and manufacturing reports of the Kingdom of France. On these reports, the Conseil (and later the Bureau) was to report to the king, through the Prime Minister Secretary of State.<sup>12</sup> Also, in

<sup>10</sup> W.W. Powell, "Neither Market nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organisation", in *Research in Organizational Behavior*, no. 12, 1990, pp. 295-336; A. Arrighetti and G. Seravalli, "Sviluppo economico, convergenza e istituzioni intermedie", pp. 39-43.

<sup>11</sup> M. Rothbard, *Economic Thought before Adam Smith. An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought*, vol. 1, Cheltenham, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> E.C. Lodge, *Sully, Colbert and Turgot: A Chapter in French Economic History*, London, 1970.

England in 1622, a technical committee specialised in trade matters was established within the Private Council. This committee was stabilised in 1696 and called the Board of Trade.<sup>13</sup> In 1662, in Portugal, thanks to the cession of the privileges of the *Companhia do Comercio do Brasil* to the Crown, the *Junta do Comercio do Brasil* was constituted with the aim of stimulating the development of trade with the South American colony. In 1755, the Marquis of Pombal transferred the Junta's competences to the newly established *Junta de Comercio de Portugal*, which, in the light of the new mercantilist and reformist policy of the Portuguese Prime Minister, had the aim of developing national manufactures and trade in colonial products.<sup>14</sup>

### **The establishment of the Real Junta Particular de Comercio of Barcelona**

The *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* of Barcelona finds its ideal antecedents in the medieval institutions aimed at regulating commercial activities, such as the commercial consulates and certain mercantile magistracies that acted as a privileged forum. To some extent, the guilds of arts and crafts may also be considered as the ancestors of this institution since their functions included the propulsion and encouragement of manufacturing. In fact, all these institutions – albeit very different from one another – stood, from their foundation, as a mediating element between the political power and economic instances. Within them, they counted the substantial presence of merchants and artisans, i.e., stakeholders in the formation of political decision-making. It was in the capital of the Principality of Catalonia that the *Consulado y Magistrado de la Lonja del Mar* was originally established in 1258 and reorganized in 1348. This office consisted of two consuls, two assessors, a scribe and two gatekeepers.

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<sup>13</sup> P. Laslett, "John Locke, the great recoinage and the origins of the board of trade: 1695-1698", in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, no. 3, 1957, pp. 370-402.

<sup>14</sup> V. Magalhães Godinho, "Portugal and her Empire, 1680-1720", In J. Bromley (ed.), *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 509-539.

Of the two consuls, one had to be a merchant.<sup>15</sup> In this way, the body could, internally, mediate between the demands of the administration and the needs of the commercial bourgeoisie, which represented an important part of the city administration.

Following the unification of the crowns of Aragon and Castile and, above all, following the bureaucratisation and standardisation of decision-making processes by Philip II, the mediation between different instances, both territorial and in terms of interests, shifted to the *consejos* (councils).<sup>16</sup> This system, which characterised the life of the Spanish administrative monarchy for a long time, allowed for the compensation of the different political instances that would otherwise have engaged the court in exhausting mediation work. However, the consequence was the slowing down of deliberative action and a substantial de-empowerment of the decision-making bodies, diluting competences and responsibilities within the bodies themselves.

Precisely because of this mechanism, Charles II preferred to delimit tasks and responsibilities regarding such a strategic matter as trade and manufacturing, to a streamlined body with rapid decision-making procedures and, above all, that would act as a mediating body between public (Crown, Treasury, foreign affairs) and private (merchants and artisans) bodies. The idea was to create a *Junta*, a more agile body with different mechanisms and operating practices compared to those that had hampered the deliberative action of the *consejos*. In addition, the *Junta* included the presence of representatives of the royal councils to avoid jurisdictional conflicts over the attribution of competences. Representatives of the Councils of Castile, War, Finance and Indies, as well as a representative of the municipal administration of Madrid, were to be present within the *Junta de Comercio*.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Archivo de la Corona de Aragon (hereafter ACA), Real Patrimonio, BGC, Volúmenes no. 1869, *Libre de la Real Audiència y Lotje de Mar. Real Governació*, 1635.

<sup>16</sup> I.A.A. Thompson, "The Armada and Administrative Reform: The Spanish Council of War in the Reign of Philip II", in *The English Historical Review*, no. 82/325, 1967, pp. 698-725; C. Jago, "Habsburg Absolutism and the Cortes of Castile", in *The American Historical Review*, no. 86/2, 1981, pp. 307-326.

<sup>17</sup> W.J. Callahan, "A note on the Real y General Junta de Comercio", in *The Economic History Review*, no. 3, 1968, pp. 519-528.

The *Real y General Junta de Comercio* was established by decree on 29 January 1679, with competence on all the Spanish Peninsula territory. The establishment bill stipulated that the Junta should meet frequently in order to provide concrete results quickly. In fact, the work of the *Junta* began a few days after its creation with an enquiry aimed at acquiring all information regarding the degree of modernisation of manufacturing and agriculture in the main European countries.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, the *Junta* instructed the Spanish representations abroad to acquire as much information as possible on economic conditions in their countries of residence and to transmit it back home.

Immediately afterwards, the Junta discussed the possibility of recruiting foreign technicians and artisans (which was not put into practice until thirty years later) and setting up *montepios*. These were financial institutions on a mutual basis, created by the associations of artisans, guilds or small manufacturers – and with royal approval – aimed at collecting a common capital to be allocated to the members in order to provide them with the necessary financial means for technological updating and the improvement of production.<sup>19</sup> The Crown often endowed these *montepios* with additional financial resources coming from certain municipal and local taxes to increase their available capital.<sup>20</sup>

As pointed out by W. Callahan, the idea of having up-to-date reports on the major European economies almost immediately crashed “on the rock of administrative lethargy and indifference.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, the action of the *Junta de Comercio* came to a halt within a short time and by April 1680 there were no more sessions. However, the Crown did not give up at the first difficulties and with a decree of 25 De-

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<sup>18</sup> Archivo Historico Nacional Madrid (hereafter AHN), Consejos, libro 779, 1679.

<sup>19</sup> AHN, Consejos, 1288, Exp. 1, *Las cuentas presentadas por Ventura Rodríguez, maestro mayor de Madrid, para sufragar las obras ejecutadas en las habitaciones ocupadas ahora por las cinco Salas del Consejo de Castilla, las Secretarías de la Junta de Comercio, Moneda y Minas y del Montepío de Viudas y la Contaduría de Gastos de Justicia en su nueva ubicación*, 1782.

<sup>20</sup> A. Rumeu de Armas, *Historia de la previsión social en España*, Barcelona, 1944.

<sup>21</sup> Callahan, “A note on the Real y General Junta de Comercio”, p. 520.

ember 1682 Charles II reaffirmed the *Junta's* competences and the mechanisms for its operation. Also in this second attempt, the members of the *Junta* immediately set to work with even more ambitious goals than those set three years earlier.<sup>22</sup> The *Junta* focused its efforts on developing internal trade and revitalising the Spanish merchant marine. Again, these efforts were unsuccessful, mainly due to the lack of available resources to invest in the development of trade and manufacturing. Charles II did, however, make a further attempt to restore the functionality of the *Junta* in 1691, to no appreciable avail.

Philip V's accession to the throne brought new impetus to Spain's manufacturing policy, as the sovereign clearly intended to change the country's economic structure. The establishment of the *Junta* for the re-foundation of commerce alongside the *Real y General Junta de Comercio*, which had not in fact been abolished, should be seen in this light. The new *Junta* was expressly constituted to tackle national economic policy problems with a broader membership.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the new body included three members of the *Consejo* of Castile, five members of the *Consejo* of the Indies, two members of the *Consejo* of Finance and one fiscal (the king's procurator). In this way, the traditional structure that the *Junta* had inherited from the *consejos*, with the exclusive presence of councillors appointed by the king, an expression of the nobility or the "technocracy of the to-gaed", was supplemented with the input of economic stakeholders operating in the different territories of the monarchy.<sup>24</sup> The real innovative element was the presence within the *Real y General Junta de Comercio* of merchants' representatives from Seville, Cadiz, Puerto de Santa Maria, Malaga and La Coruña. This was a first attempt to create a bottom-up institution that could reconcile the needs of the Crown with the demands of the categories involved in the process

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<sup>22</sup> Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI), MP-Libros\_Manuscritos, 66, *Historia de la Junta de Comercio y Moneda*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Archivo Histórico de la Nobleza, Parcent, C.125, D.7, *Real Cédula de Felipe V, en la que se aprueba la escritura del acuerdo de la Junta General de Comercio para el envío de ocho "Avi-sos" anuales a Tierra Firme y Nueva España*, 25.06.1720.



of economic policy reform and to reaffirm the centrality of the great mercantile centres of the peninsula. This new structure of the *Junta*, however, did not recognise a primary role for Barcelona and Catalonia, which, although endowed with partial autonomy, seemed not to be considered in the economic and mercantile projection made by the crown.

Nevertheless, the new institution had a troubled life as the previous *Junta*. Bourbon Spain's involvement in the long and costly War of Succession and the substantial instability on the throne of Philip V until the Treaty of Utrecht were the elements that prevented the *Junta* from functioning. However, the end of the war and the establishment of the House of Bourbon on the Spanish throne did not change this situation. Only later did the *Junta* become involved in the administrative reorganisation process brought about by Philip V to modernise Spanish institutions and was united with the pre-existing *Junta de la Moneda*, which had jurisdiction over the royal mints and monetary policy.<sup>25</sup>

The members representing the other *Consejos* were joined by two *fiscales* (one for monetary matters and another for trade matters).<sup>26</sup> The administrative reorganisation of the Kingdom finally brought the first results; the work of the *Junta de Comercio* became more regular and it was able to start taking measures in favour of the development of trade and manufacturing. In particular, it began to grant subsidies and rewards to those enterprises engaged in the use of new technologies to increase productivity, especially in those sectors considered strategic for Spain's manufacturing growth (wool, cotton, silk). In addition, the *Junta* acted as a representative body for commercial and manufacturing interests, characterising itself as the political counterpart of the financial administration. The *Junta* was

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<sup>25</sup> AHN, Estado, 647, Exp. 14, *Real Orden comunicada por el Marqués de la Ensenada al Secretario de la Junta, Miguel de Oarrichena y Borda, informándole de su continuidad en el cargo, a pesar de que dicha Junta se haya suprimido e incorporado a la de Comercio y Moneda*, 21.12.1748.

<sup>26</sup> A. Ruiz y Pablo, *Historia de la Real Junta Particular de Comercio de Barcelona (1758 a 1847)*, Barcelona, 1919.

very active in demanding the imposition of protective duties on domestic production and the abolition of those tariffs that still existed on domestic trade, to achieve a liberalisation of the market, which was still subject to numerous constraints of feudal origin.<sup>27</sup> Historians have long questioned why the *Junta General de Comercio* did not start functioning until the 1830s, without arriving at a unanimously agreeable result. What is certain is that the institution's previous failures fell at a time of deep economic crisis for the country, while the 18<sup>th</sup> century renaissance was associated with a period of economic growth. Probably, the mercantilist measures of Philip V shall not be underestimated because, alongside their markedly fiscal features, helped to protect certain national productions (textiles in particular). Finally, we can also mention the renewed cultural climate that developed around the *Junta* and trade policy in general with the publication of the works of Jeronimo de Uztariz (who was also secretary of the *Junta*) and Bernardo Ward (also later secretary of the *Junta*).<sup>28</sup>

The functioning of the institution benefited from the coordination carried out by its secretary who, after Philip V's reform, was an official from the secretariat of state. With the full functioning of the *Junta General de Comercio*, the sovereign – with a view to modernising the administrative structure – also obtained the limitation of the role of the other *Consejos* whose representatives assumed a secondary role in the decision-making process.<sup>29</sup> The sovereign disempowered the *consejos*, without officially abolishing them, which produced a growing hostility by the nobility attached to them. Furthermore, in order to improve the effectiveness of the *Junta's* action – modelled on what Colbert had already done in France – close collaboration was arranged with the intendants (royal territorial officials) and the

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<sup>27</sup> Callahan, "A note on the Real y General Junta de Comercio", p. 522.

<sup>28</sup> D. Jeronimo de Uztariz, *Teoría y práctica de Comercio y Marina*, Madrid, 1742; B. Ward, *Proyecto económico*, Madrid, 1779; P. Molas Ribalta, *La Junta de Comercio de Barcelona: sus precedentes y su base social (1692-1808)*, Seminario de Historia social y económica, Anuario de historia económica y social, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Madrid, Madrid, 1975.

<sup>29</sup> Callahan, "A note on the Real y General Junta de Comercio", p. 523.

commercial consulates present in the main mercantile cities, in charge of enforcing the *junta's* decisions.

As it can be understood, the *Junta General de Comercio* model evidently responded to the needs of a centralist state interested in an unambiguous national co-ordination of trade policy in a mercantilist sense; however, this need had to be mediated with regional economic demands. The exemplary case is that of Catalonia, characterised by a consolidated mercantile and manufacturing tradition and which, after a phase of deep economic crisis, had embarked on a growth curve following the end of the war for the Spanish Succession. Evidently, the demands of Catalonian economic players could not be delegated to a central body far removed (even geographically) from those needs. For this reason, in 1758, at the request of the merchant communities (city guilds and the Consulate of Commerce), Fernando VI, with a royal *cedula*, authorised the creation of a *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* of Barcelona, subject to the supervision of the central *Junta General de Comercio* in Madrid.<sup>30</sup> This was warmly welcomed by the Catalan commercial and manufacturing network, aware that the establishment of a local *Junta* could act as a stimulus to the slowly recovering regional economy after the crisis of the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> However, it was only thanks to Charles III that, in 1760, the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* de Barcelona fully developed its operational potential.

### **Between corporations, mercantilism and Enlightenment reformism**

Fernando VI's original provision envisaged the establishment of three separate bodies in Barcelona: the *Cuerpo de Comerciantes*, the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* and the *Consulado de Comercio*. In the

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<sup>30</sup> Biblioteca de Catalunya (hereafter BC), Fons Junta de Comercio, Libro JC 142, *Reales cédulas de erección y ordenanzas de los tres cuerpos del Comercio*, Barcelona, 1763; Ruiz y Pablo, *Historia de la Real Junta Particular de Comercio de Barcelona*, pp. 26-30.

<sup>31</sup> Molas Ribalta, *La Junta de Comercio de Barcelona*, p. 241.

sovereign's ideas, the *Cuerpo de Comerciantes* would have had an exclusively representative function, while the Junta would have been delegated to actions supporting the development of manufacturing and trade. Finally, the *Consulado* was envisaged as the institution in charge of settling disputes.

All three institutions were explicitly removed from the jurisdiction of the *Real Audiencia*, while they could have recourse, as their exclusive forum, to the *Junta General de Comercio* in Madrid. According to the royal provisions, the basis of the *Cuerpo de Comerciantes* was to be composed of those traders "naturales de estos Reynos"; of marked honesty and rectitude and, above all, who practised wholesale trade, demonstrating that they had the capability to do so. At the same time, the cedula reiterated that: "no por esto se excluye, ni priva a ningún otro individuo de traficar o comerciar en grueso, o por menudo aunque no estén incluidos en la matricula."<sup>32</sup> In this way, a positive free access to productive activities was established, i.e. access governed by a general rule. The *Junta* would be formed by 13 members: three consuls, as already provided for in the previous statute, one of whom would act as president, two "Cavalleros Hacendados y Cosecheros" (businessmen; entrepreneurs) and seven merchants elected by the *Cuerpo de Comerciantes*. The organisation chart was completed by a secretary, a *contador* (accountant) and a treasurer, always chosen among the matriculated merchants, but without voting rights.<sup>33</sup> The *Junta* had the specific task of putting in place all the necessary actions to stimulate the development of agriculture and its trade and the development of manufacturing. In addition, the *Junta* was to draw up all the rules and regulations deemed necessary. The provisions thus produced, again according to the cedula of Fernando VI, would be approved within a year by the three bodies separately.

The idea of the sovereign, probably, was to adapt the institu-

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<sup>32</sup> BC, Fons Junta de Comercio, Libro JC 142, *Reales cédulas de erección y ordenanzas de los tres cuerpos del Comercio*, Barcelona, 1763.

<sup>33</sup> Ruiz y Pablo, *Historia de la Real Junta Particular de Comercio de Barcelona*, p. 26.

tional level of the Spanish monarchy to the renewed needs of an economy in profound transformation, also through a greater effectiveness of the processes of mediation and negotiation between different actors. In this sense, it was not a matter of liberalising economic processes that, as we have seen, still remained regulated by essentially corporatist mechanisms. Nevertheless, this action came up against the provision of extremely complex and, arguably, inefficient bureaucratic processes in which three separate bodies (*Cuerpo de Comerciantes*, *Junta Particular* and *Consulado*) had competing competences. Furthermore, the *Junta* was part of a rich productive fabric, specialised in textiles, which already in the Middle Ages had seen the operation of a specific guild of *fustaneros*, weavers of wool and cotton whereas the guild of *terciopeleros* which dealt with the production of velvets was active starting from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Barcelona's guilds, in the case of cotton textile manufacture, did not have specific competences, but retained some prerogatives in the manufacture of velvets, the dyeing of cloth and the making of trimmings. This caused continuous tensions between the *Junta* and the guilds, which were worried about losing their prerogatives.<sup>34</sup>

In spite of the difficulties inherent in the very model conceived by Fernando VI, the *Junta de Comercio* managed to produce a series of ordinances for its functioning and the development of the economic activities of the Principality of Catalonia, which in 1763 were approved by Charles III who succeeded to the throne after the death of his brother. In this new formulation, the *ordenanzas* modified the original layout desired by Fernando VI, identifying the Barcelona merchant community as the reference subject for the *Junta's* ac-

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<sup>34</sup> J. Clayburn La Force, "Technological Diffusion in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century: The Spanish Textile Industry", in *Technology and Culture*, 5/3, 1964, pp. 322-43; J.K.J. Thomson, "Explaining the 'Take-off' of the Catalan Cotton Industry", in *The Economic History Review*, 58/4, 2005, pp. 701-735; S. Ogilvie, "Guilds and Governments", in *The European Guilds: An Economic Analysis*, Princeton University Press, 2019, pp. 36-82. On the complicated relationship between the *Junta* and the city's guilds fabric, see: J. Carrera Pujal, *La Lonja del Mar y los cuerpos de comercio de Barcelona*, Barcelona, 1953.

tions.<sup>35</sup> All naturales (national) traders in Catalonia were included in this *universitas*, provided they had these characteristics: over 18 years of age; able by age and capacity to administer goods; if children of the family, authorised by their father; if a married woman, authorised by her husband; if a widow, admitted as fully entitled. On the other hand, retail traders, hawkers and *Corredores de Lonja* could not register with the community. The latter were a kind of stockbrokers, specialising in the intermediation of letters of exchange and financial and credit transactions on different markets within the kingdom. These early *ordenanzas* highlight the dualism of the Bourbon economic policy as well as the complexity of the economy and its players. On the one hand, an economic system is maintained that is still rooted in the guild model. From this point of view, the principle of representation and the existence of a privileged legal forum are typical legacies of the “guild economy”. On the other, there is a modernising opening, with the recognition of women as entrepreneurs, not only as the wife of a merchant, but as autonomous subjects capable of acting in the market. What is more, a clear differentiation is envisaged, as far as possible, between commercial and manufacturing activity on the one hand and financial activity on the other, with *Corredores de Lonja* being denied registration. Finally, the model adopted presents the typical structure of mercantilist policies, since the government delegates to the *Junta* the task of supporting technological innovation and the development of manufacturing.<sup>36</sup> In a way, we are faced with an “intelligent mercantilism” in which there is actually a cession of power, a delegation of coordinating powers to an intermediate body, with a pattern that appears to be the opposite of the centralising Colbertian model.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> BC, Fons Junta de Comercio, *Caixa 17, Ordres originals, reials cèdules, pragmàtiques, decrets i edictes* (1772-1793).

<sup>36</sup> P. Deyon, P. Guignet, “The Royal Manufactures and Economic Progress in France before the Industrial Revolution”, in *Journal of European Economic History*, no. 9/3, 1980, pp. 611-632. E.F. Heckscher, “Revisions in Economic History: V. Mercantilism”, in *The Economic History Review*, no. 7/1, 1936, pp. 44-54.

<sup>37</sup> In more recent times, the concept of mercantilism, as a combination of protectionist

In essence, the *Junta* was aimed at those who mainly exercised commercial or manufacturing activity, pursuing the aims of the neo-mercantilist policies adopted by the Bourbon monarchy. Moreover, the *ordenanzas* themselves made it clear that there was no limit either to the number of those registered or to the social class to which they belonged. At the same time, it was reiterated that neither the *Junta* nor the other institutions could discriminate against matriculates. However, this was not a liberalisation of the market achieved by dismantling the guilds. Rather, as far as cotton production was concerned, the textile guilds were emptied of their competences and powers. Powers that were attributed to a body to control and regulate production with the general task of promoting all manufacturing activities.

### **The functioning of the Real Junta Particular de Comercio of Barcelona**

The action of the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* was coordinated by the president, who, according to royal provisions, was to be the Intendant of Catalonia. The president was to participate in institutional activities and in the formulation of the *ordenanzas*, having the right to a vote *de calidad*, i.e. a vote with greater weight to be exercised in the event of an equivalence of votes. In particular, the president was required to indicate the names proposed for each office within the *Junta*, whether definitive or temporary, providing a shortlist of six names for each vacant position, to be submitted to the *Comunidad de Comerciantes* for election. Naturally, he had power of signature for every act promulgated by the *Junta* and power of control, also through persons he trusted, to be exercised at least annually

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actions and political centralisation in order to implement the formation of a national market, has been questioned. Several studies are attempting to redraw the connections between mercantilism and centralisation with a view to identifying different forms of territorialisation of the economy, redefining the role of local institutions. In this respect, the eventually published results of the project edited by Klemens Kaps and Manuel Herrero Sanchez, *Decentring Mercantilism*, could be interesting.

over each office.<sup>38</sup> As to this visit, the president was to report to the *Junta General de Comercio* of Madrid. In case of absence or unavailability, the president's duties were to be carried out by the most senior *cavallero hacendado*. The figure of the president of the *Junta* was the only expression of monarchical power within the institution. In this lies one of the major differences with respect to the old *consejos*, where the composition was the result of court balance. In the case of the *Junta*, the president, who was a royal official, was also the sole representative of the sovereign within a council in which he numerically represented a minority, being the holder of a single vote, albeit a *de calidad* one (heavy). Nevertheless, he was the somewhat direct link between the demands of the economic actors represented within the *Junta* and the royal power.<sup>39</sup>

The president's work was assisted by the *cavalleros hacendados*, who – coming from the productive world – had the task of formulating proposals for the development of agricultural production, improvement of cultivation techniques and irrigation systems, advancement and refinement of manufacturing systems and production methods, adoption of technological innovations and, finally, liberalisation and development of trade. On a closer look, this was an eminently technical role, based on the ability of the two *cavalleros* to understand the evolution of economic dynamics and to identify the spaces within which the *Junta's* action could be carried out. In the two apex figures of the *Junta*, the mediation mechanism designed by the Bourbons is clear, through a direct and competing but not conflicting relationship between the president, expression of the government, and the *cavalleros*, expression of the Barcelona's economic fabric.

The functioning of the *Junta* was completed by the consuls, i.e., the 7 matriculated merchants who were part of the council and who,

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<sup>38</sup> Archivo de la Corona de Aragón (hereafter ACA), Real Patrimonio, BGRP, Procesos, 1736, n. 4, B, *Autos sobre una real cédula sobre restablecimiento de una Junta de Comercio en Barcelona por su presidente Jaime de Duran, vecino de Barcelona*, 1736.

<sup>39</sup> ACA, Real Patrimonio, BGRP, Procesos, 1773, n. 7, Ab, *La Real Junta Particular de Comercio de Barcelona. Competencia*, 1773.



in addition to having the same competences as the *cavalleros hacendados*, were supposed to have knowledge of the litigation in progress and the positions taken by the Junta in the various matters of interest. As mentioned earlier, the *secretario*, *contador* and *tesorero* assisted the work of the *Junta* through the management of the administrative offices. They were chosen among the matriculated merchants and their appointments were perpetual. The founding ordinances of the *Junta* regulated the tasks of the administrative offices and the manner of bookkeeping, with which the appointees were to comply. The *Junta* also had the possibility of appointing two *asesores* (advisers) in the person of two lawyers in order to obtain assistance in legal matters. Finally, the *Junta* could count on a representative appointed at the *Junta General de Comercio* of Madrid for all coordination actions between the two institutions.

**TABLE 1**  
Wages paid at the Real Junta de Comercio Particular de Barcelona (1788)

Charge	Annual wage (in reales de ardite)*	Yearly Total
President	6,000	6,000
Consuls (x 7)	4,000	28,000
<i>Cavalleros hacendados</i>	2,500	5,000
Secretary (with the obligation to pay an officer)	7,000	7,000
Advisers x 2	4,000	8,000
Accountant + 1 officer	4,000	4,000
Treasurer + 2 collectors	4,200	4,200
Representative in Madrid	5,600	5,600
<b>Total wages</b>		<b>67,800</b>

\* The real de ardite was a Catalan money of account equal to 1 real or 2, 30 maravedis.

Source: BC, Fons Junta de Comercio, Libro JC 266, *Llibre de sous, salaris i despeses* (1788-1803).

### **The Real Junta de Comercio of Barcelona an intermediate institution in the cotton textile sector**

The birth of the *Real Junta Particular* of Barcelona could be considered

as a sign of a change of mentality on the part of economic agents. With the *Junta*, in fact, an end was put to the prohibitionist system based on the granting of individual franchises in favour of a system in which individual franchises were extended to all producers or merchants, thus attempting to create equal basic conditions for all and stimulate positive competition. The change – in the case of cotton manufactures, for example – was dictated by a new logic, based on the need to support an entire fledgling industry with measures defined as “industrial mercantilism”, and by the crisis of individual franchises, which in fact consisted of a short-term competitive advantage and did not allow for a stable increase in productivity.<sup>40</sup> An action to change the corporate system, based on a centralised mercantilist model to a more liberalist one, can be envisaged, even through a partial unloading of the guild system.

In this phase, Spanish mercantilism takes on a more pregnant connotation, not limiting itself only to the defence of the domestic market, but penetrating the territory, involving agricultural and manufacturing production and, in a broader sense, mobilising society. There is a redefinition of the political space that coincides with the economic space. As Biagio Salvemini has pointed out, the figure of the merchant (considered here as a paradigm of the entire economic system), after having passed through the centuries with alternating fortune, is re-qualified by the recognition of the founding character, for the political community, of the individual action involved and of the rights connected to it: that of property in the first place.<sup>41</sup>

The *Junta* can be seen as a coordinating body of enterprises with a view to collective action.<sup>42</sup> Economic theory has delved into incen-

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<sup>40</sup> E. Lluch, *El pensament econòmic a Catalunya (1760-1840). Els orígens ideològics del protectionisme i la presa de consciència de la burgesia catalana*, Barcelona, 2009, pp. 99-107.

<sup>41</sup> B. Salvemini, “Virtù, mercantilismi e mercanti dell’Europa settecentesca. Qualche considerazione introduttiva”, in *Storia Economica*, no. 19/2, 2016, pp. 369-384.

<sup>42</sup> M. Olson, *The Logic of collective action. Public goods and the Theory of Groups*, Cambridge MA, 1965, pp. 29-35; E. Ostrom, *Governing the commons: the evolution of institutions for collective action*, Cambridge, New York, 1990.

tivised cooperation contracts, highlighting their sub-optimality and the limitations by which they are affected. Of course, the central theme is information asymmetry and the “principal-agent” problem constituted by the relationship between the actor and the incentive/coordinating organisation. Several studies have highlighted how the principal possesses imperfect information on the actions of the actors. This asymmetry means that free-riding behaviour can be generated, as agents are tempted to limit their efforts, because of an incentive mechanism that provides everyone with the same selected goods.<sup>43</sup>

The customs policy measures taken since the time of Charles II, reconfirmed and extended by Philip V had insulated the national market from foreign competition. These measures coincided with the increase in agricultural production, the demographic turnaround – following the decrease in the 17<sup>th</sup> century – and the growth in demand for consumer products, including cotton goods. Finally, the royal decrees of 1718, 1719 and 1728 – aimed at protecting national textile production – did not contemplate the establishment of royal manufactories. In this way, the Crown seemed to favour the stimulation of private capital investment in a sector with ample scope for expansion, benefiting from the import-substitution effect.<sup>44</sup>

In June 1752, individual franchises were extended to all manufacturers of calicoes; in this way, the monarchy met the demands of the manufacturers and was in line with the ideas of enlightened reformism.<sup>45</sup> It was precisely the qualification of manufacturer that became the centre of an interpretative debate that was only resolved

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<sup>43</sup> E. Rasmusen, *Games and Information: An Introduction to Game Theory*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001.

<sup>44</sup> J.K.J. Thomson, “Explaining the “take off” of the Catalan cotton industry”, in *Economic History Review*, no. 58/4, 2005, pp. 701-735.

<sup>45</sup> BC, Fons Junta de Comercio, Caixa 26, *Memorial presentat al rei per tal que es redueixin els drets que paguen a Barcelona i a les Índies els vaixells que salpen cap a Amèrica des del port de Barcelona (1773 y 1819)*; J.M. Delgado Ribas, “De la filatura manual a la mecànica. Un capítol del desenvolupament de la indústria cotonera a Catalunya (1749-1814)”, in *Recerques. Historia, economia, cultura*, no. 23, 1990, pp. 161-179.

in 1767 by the intervention of the Junta de Comercio with the sovereign, which established:

“Solo se reputan por fabricas y podran gozar de las franquicias quel es tengo concedidas y tuviere a bien concederles aquellas que a lo menos tengan 12 telares corrientes, prado propio u alquilado para blanquear, moldes, mesas para pintar, calderos para hervir, calandria, bruñidor y demas utensilos necesarios.”<sup>46</sup>

Bearing in mind the characteristics of the *fabricante* (entrepreneur) identified by the ordinance regulating Barcelona’s cotton factories; considering that these companies were characterised by production processes that were highly labour-intensive and poorly automated; limited need for fixed capital; limited economies of scale at the level of the entire production process and innovation mainly linked to learning-by-doing processes, it is possible to hypothesise the formation of an industrial district based on minimum size requirements.<sup>47</sup>

The *Real Junta Particular de Comercio*, with the approval of this measure, established itself as a negotiating body between the demands of calicoes producers and the fiscal needs of the monarchy. This was achieved by defining the subjects who would benefit from the exemptions by inventing, so to speak, the figure of the *fabricante*, i.e. the cotton entrepreneur who, to be considered as such, had to meet minimum requirements. Unlike the corporative model, there was no longer a bureaucratic process or the submission to a qualitative check by a control body, more simply a basic parameter of company size was established in order to be considered a *fabricante*.

Barcelona’s productive fabric is a fundamental element in understanding the active role played by the Junta Particular de Com-

<sup>46</sup> BC, Fondo Bonsoms, n. 13177, *Ordenanzas que el Rey Nuestro Señor manda observar los fabricantes de indianas, cotonadas y blayetes del Principado de Catalunya*. Barcelona, 4 octubre 1767.

<sup>47</sup> G. Becattini, *Il distretto industriale. Un nuovo modo di interpretare il cambiamento economico*, Torino, 2000; A. Guenzi, *Cutlery trade. Le origini corporative dei distretti industriali in Europa (secoli XV-XX)*, Torino, 2014.

ercio. The high concentration of both cotton, wool and silk textile manufacturers determined the presence of different demands for the different types of production, but all converged on the need to protect the domestic market from foreign competition and allow for orderly development also through technological innovation.<sup>48</sup> There was also a problem of political balance between the demands produced by the new and more modern *indianas* factories and the traditional wool and silk manufactures. This dichotomy was also reflected in the outward projection of Barcelona's manufactures, as the *indianas* factories looked to the entire peninsular and colonial markets, while the wool and silk producers had a more limited regional market as their reference.<sup>49</sup> Somehow, therefore, not only the commercial policy of the monarchy, but also the action of the *Junta* had to balance these different drives.

The printing of cotton fabrics began to spread in Europe during the seventeenth century. In particular, Marseille was the first cotton printing manufacturing city, thanks to the techniques imported by Armenian artisans in the Provençal town.<sup>50</sup> Technical knowledge

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<sup>48</sup> The economic and manufacturing structure in Catalonia and Barcelona has been extensively studied. It is impossible and inappropriate to cite all the existing scientific production here, since the present work aims to deal with something else, so I will limit myself to mentioning just a few works. A. Sánchez, "La era de la manufactura algodonera en Barcelona, 1736-1839", in *Estudios de Historia Social*, no. 48/49, 1989, pp. 65-113; Ead., "La indianeria catalana en perspectiva historiográfica", in *Revista de Historia Industrial*, no. 1, 1992, pp. 213-228; Ead., "Crisis económica y respuesta empresarial. Los inicios del sistema fabril en la industria algodonera catalana, 1797-1839", in *Revista de Historia Económica - Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History*, no. 18(3), 2000, pp. 485-523; J. Maluquer de Motes, "La estructura del sector algodonero en Cataluña durante la primera etapa de la industrialización (1832-1861)", in *Hacienda Pública Española*, no. 36, 1976, pp. 133-148. Ead., "En torno a los orígenes de la industrialización en España. El caso de la industria textil catalana", in *Boletín Informativo Sindical Nacional Textil*, no.100, 1977, pp. 43-50; Ead., *El ascenso de la burguesía industrial: el caso catalán*, in *Burguesías e industria en América Latina y Europa meridional*, Madrid, 1989, pp. 181-201; J. Maluquer de Motes, J. Nadal, R. Martínez Fraile, *Catalunya La Fàbrica d'Espanya: Un Siglo De Industrialización Catalana: 1833-1936*, Barcelona, 1985.

<sup>49</sup> A. Sanchez, F. Valls-Junyent, "The cotton market in Barcelona during the crisis of the Ancien Regime (1790-1840)", in *Revista de Historia Industrial*, no. 24, 2015, pp. 61-93.

<sup>50</sup> J.K.J. Thomson, *A distinctive Industrialization: cotton in Barcelona, 1728-1832*, Cambridge, 2003.

had spread quickly establishing, in a decade, a significant manufacturing framework, especially characterized by the presence of Huguenots technicians. Only in the following decades the technique of cotton fabric dyeing spread in England and the Netherlands, stimulating the creation of productive centres. The printing technology then passed from France to neighbouring Catalonia, especially after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and the consequent abolition of religious freedom. Many technicians left the motherland to move to countries where there was more religious tolerance. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes was accompanied by a series of policy measures for the protection of national traditional French textile manufacturers such as wool and silk, penalizing the printing of cotton.<sup>51</sup>

In Catalonia, printing and colouring of *indianas* and *calicoes* spread belatedly in the eighteenth century, while in other parts of central Europe this occurred already in the last decades of the previous century. The delay in the transfer of technical knowledge in Catalonia is also justified by the state of war between Spain and France in the period 1672-1678 that made Catalonia the main battlefield, with significant implications for the production and the economy of the area. The introduction of *indianas* and *calicoes* manufacture in Catalonia was further delayed by the considerable resistance from textiles manufacturers of traditional fabrics such as silk and wool, who saw cotton fabrics as dangerous competitors in consolidated market segmentation between the two fibres. At first, even in Catalonia, there was an attempt to safeguard the traditional textile fabric manufacturing, ushering in a protectionist policy for the protection of wool and silk, preventing the import of cotton fabrics "a la chinesca" (chinese style). The War for Spanish Succession aggravated the situation causing an abrupt interruption of the economic recovery experienced by Catalonia in the last two decades of

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<sup>51</sup> O. Raveaux, A. Sanchez, "La adaptacion tecnologica como factor de localización industrial. Una revision de las investigaciones sobre la industria de hilados de algodón en Cataluña (1772-1885)", in *Investigaciones de Historia Economica*, n. 17, 2010, pp. 65-94.

the seventeenth century. This combination of events can be considered as the origin of the delay in the spread of cotton textiles printing in Catalonia until the 30's of the eighteenth century, when *indianas* and *calicos* were still an imported product.<sup>52</sup>

Charles III's accession to the throne initiated a new phase in Spanish economic policy, reinforced by the appointment of the Marquis of Squillace as head of the superintendency of the Real Hacienda. The rigidly protectionist model was set aside in favour of policies of industrial mercantilism, with the idea of inserting Spain into the international trade circuit. In fact, with the edict of May 15th 1760, the national market was opened to imported products against payment of low duties, taking advantage of the favourable world trade situation. Barcelona's calicoes manufacturers also benefited from this measure, since raw cotton could once again be imported into the Spanish market (together with coloured and uncoloured cotton fabrics) from the East (India and Ottoman Empire), paying a duty of 20% on the value of the product.<sup>53</sup> This measure, according to the ideas of the Marquis of Squillace, was to have a limited duration of ten years and the customs administration would be in charge of monitoring the trend of imports in order to verify any damage to national production. However, through the *Junta de Comercio*, Barcelona's cotton producers managed to negotiate with the Crown the import of 250,000 pounds of raw cotton a year from the East, free of duty, in order to ensure the proper functioning of the city's calicoes manufactories.<sup>54</sup>

By the end of 1768, the action of the *Junta de Comercio* became more incisive towards the Spanish government's customs policy,

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<sup>52</sup> M. Vicente, *Clothing the Spanish Empire. Families and the Calico trade in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, New York, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Archivo Histórico de la Nobleza, Michelena, C.18, D.100, *Real Cédula de Carlos III por la que se manda cumplir la resolución tomada por la Junta General de Comercio y Moneda, para que tenga efecto el tanteo de lanas concedido a los fabricantes de paños y demás tejidos del Reino*, 23.04.1784.

<sup>54</sup> BC, Fons Junta de Comercio, Caixa 26, *Real Ordre de l'11 de juliol sobre exempció de drets de sortida i entrada de tots el productes d'espert que s'envien a Amèrica des d'Espanya*, 1780.

when, in a request submitted to the sovereign, the *Junta* demanded the repeal of the Royal Decree of 15 May 1760. In the document sent to the King, through the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio*, the cotton producers asked for the importation of raw and spun cotton to be freed from taxes and duties, as well as the possibility of exporting

**TABLE 2**  
Manufacturers and looms in the city of Barcelona (1761)

Name	N. of Looms
<b>Privileged factories enjoying franchises by royal order</b>	
Bernardo Gloria & Comp.	60
Mariano y Juan Pablo Canals	100
Jaime Canet	54
Joseph Canaleta	50
Miguel Fomenti	75
Juan Pongem	40
Melchior Guardia	66
Joseph Franc. Sagui	48
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>493</b>
<b>Non-Privileged factories enjoying franchises by royal order</b>	
Name	N. of Looms
Armen Burges	30
Sebastian Salomo	21
Castarell y Pujol	50
Capalino y Thomas	12
Matheo Farrà	18
Joan Torres	16
Joseph Sala	30
Joseph Font y Vall	15
Eulali Llorens	12
Francisco Magarola	44
Gaspar Soler	20
Angli y Sabater	12
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>280</b>
<b>Total Looms</b>	<b>773</b>

Source: Fons Barò de Castellet 79/1, *Relacion total de los telares e texidors de algodón y mixtos alo que se hallan existentes*, Barcellona 28 Enero de 1761.



their products free of duty. The request for the repeal of restrictive regulations on the import of raw cotton was accompanied by a statistical survey conducted by the *Junta*, to demonstrate to the sovereign the size of the industry.

We must add 48 individual printers to the number of looms found in Table 2, for a total of 177 looms. These were small artisan and family enterprises, essentially engaged in printing and dyeing fabrics on behalf of larger factories. From the data collected by the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* through the distribution of questionnaires to the manufacturers and the control of the factories within the urban fabric, the same institution was able to represent to the sovereign the overall situation of cotton manufacturing in Barcelona.

**TABLE 3**  
Weaving looms in the city of Barcelona (1761)

616 looms for <i>calicoes</i>
63 looms for <i>blavetes</i>
52 looms for <i>cotonadas</i>
3 looms for <i>basues</i>
55 looms for <i>vomes</i>
46 looms for <i>lonas</i>
42 looms for <i>flamulas</i>
12 looms for <i>cotonadas a flous</i>
10 looms for <i>damasquillos</i>
2 looms for <i>pañuelos</i>
6 looms for <i>ermosillas</i>
<b>Total Looms 907</b>

Source: Fons Barò de Castellet 79/1, *Relacion total de los telares e texidors de algodón y mixtos a lo que se hallan existentes*, Barcellona 28 Enero de 1761.

Statistics play a crucial role by giving measurability and visibility to the object of government, in the context of the transformations brought about by the spread of Enlightenment ideas and, above all, the rationalisation of government. In 1785, the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* of Barcelona carried out a further statistical survey of en-

terprises producing “Chinese-style” printed cotton fabrics to find out their size and the technologies used.<sup>55</sup> It was a product that was more and more in demand, richly decorated and coloured and which had supplanted the traditional single-colour fabrics.

The role of intermediate institution exercised by the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* of Barcelona was not limited to representing the interests of cotton producers to the crown, but also played an active role in the transfer of technology and knowledge, which can be considered as packages of goods to be distributed to enterprises.<sup>56</sup> Technology transfer implies the process of moving proven technologies, including tools, information, skills and routines from consolidate users or developers to recipients. This process mainly depends on enablers, such as the market for technology, government authorities, human resources and training, and the technological abilities of providers and recipients, but also on intermediate functioning.<sup>57</sup> The intermediate institutions such as the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* of Barcelona can so be considered as facilitators of the technology transfer process.<sup>58</sup>

The first textile printing machine was imported to Catalonia from Marseille by an anonymous Catalan weaver with the help of a French printer in 1736, while 10 years later a textile printing machine for blue was introduced (in this case, wooden templates were used). In both cases, the introduction of technological innovations in the production process was carried out by Catalan manufacturers, thanks to agreements with foreign technicians, with the (often financial) assistance of the Madrid government. Progress in the mechani-

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<sup>55</sup> ACA, Real Audiencia, Consulado y Tribunal de Comercio, C.13259, *Expedientes sobre visitas de fábricas de pintados a la chinesca ordenada por la Real Junta Particular de Comercio de Barcelona*, 1785.

<sup>56</sup> T. Nicholas and H. Shimizu, “Intermediary Functions and the Market for Innovation in Meiji and Taishō Japan”, in *Business History Review*, no. 87/1, 2013, pp. 121-149.

<sup>57</sup> D.J. Sánchez Preciado, B. Claes and N. Theodorakopoulos, “Transferring intermediate technologies to rural enterprises in developing economies: a conceptual framework”, in *Prometheus*, no. 34/2, pp. 153-170.

<sup>58</sup> R. Smith and N. Sharif, “Understanding and acquiring technology assets for global competition”, in *Technovation*, no. 27/11, 2007, pp. 643-649.

sation of spinning was even slower, with the first Jenny machine introduced only in 1785 with the help of a subsidy from the *Junta Particular de Comercio* de Barcelona while it would be necessary to wait until 1828 to see the first mechanical loom, introduced by manufacturer Joan Villaregut.<sup>59</sup>

The delay in technology diffusion made the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* very active in the transfer of technology to Barcelona manufacturers to make available all the production and technological innovations developed abroad.<sup>60</sup> The spread of technology and mechanisation not only meant saving labour and speeding up production processes, but also standardising them. Standardised products would open up new markets through higher product quality and consumer confidence.<sup>61</sup> Between 1784 and 1785, for example, a new cotton spinning machine was built by two French technicians, Pradel and Pomtet. Although the operation was completed, the machine remained at the Junta's premises and was not used by spinners.<sup>62</sup> The explanation lies in the substantially lower labour costs compared to the machine, which is corroborated by the budget presented for the operation by *Junta Particular*.

In 1792, in an attempt to respond to the strong Anglo-French

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<sup>59</sup> J.K.J. Thomson, "Transferencia tecnológica en la industria algodonera catalana: de la indianas a la selfactina", in *Revista de Historia Industrial*, no. 24/2, 2004, pp. 13-49; Ead., "La introducció de les màquines jenny a Barcelona (1784-1789): les primeres etapes en la creació d'una tradició de construcció de maquinària", in *Recerques: Història, Economia, Cultura*, no. 42, 2001, pp. 125-46.

<sup>60</sup> AHN, Consejos, 5534, Exp. 4, *Licencia de impresión de la obra traducida del francés al castellano "Colección general de máquinas" solicitada por su traductor Miguel Jerónimo Suárez y Núñez, 1773.*

<sup>61</sup> H. Jiang, S. Zhao, S. Zhang, X. Xu, "The adaptive mechanism between technology standardization and technology development: An empirical study", in *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, no. 135, 2018, pp. 241-248; On the importance of trust and brand in consumption, see: E.P. Becerra and P.K. Korgaonkar, "Effects of trust beliefs on consumers' online intentions", in *European Journal of Marketing*, no. 45/6, pp. 936-962; A. Guenzi, *Mito e Brand tra Est e Ovest*, Bologna, 2022.

<sup>62</sup> E. Deu, J. Maluquer de Motes (eds.), *La construcció de la maquinària tèxtil a Sabadell i Terrassa. In Tècnics i tecnologia en el desenvolupament de la Catalunya contemporània, Enciclopèdia Catalana*, Barcelona, 2000, pp. 276-279.

**TABLE 4**  
**Expenses for the construction of a spinning machine by the Real Junta Particular de Comercio of Barcelona (1784-85)**

Gasto	Cantidad (en lliures y dinars catalanes)
For the three months' rent of the workshop	87.10
For the payment of three months of work to the technicians	562.10
For 2 accounts of Mr. Pomtet	38.19
To the locksmith	15.14
To the forge	55.12
Viola strings	3.11
To the other locksmith	21.10
1 cauldron	31.10
For the acetic acid	1.10
To the turner	42.10
To the carpiner	293.2
Private expenses	13.10
To the forge	42.14
Other expenses for May, June and July	57.16
For one basket	13.6
The forge	1.6
Boards, bags, glue, ropes	76.14
For the journey and secret	1,046.6
To Mr. Pradel for 3 months at 5 pesetas daily	618.15
To Mr. Pomtet	408.15
For the travel and expenses of a Frenchman and his wife	289.17
Rent a house to work and establish the machine	650
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,380.1</b>

Source: BC, Fons Junta de Comercio, Arx 35, lligal XXIII, Gastos hechos para la construccion de la maquina de hilar algodón, 1784 y 1785.

manufacturing competition, which was rapidly mechanising the cotton spinning process, the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* of Barcelona had a machine made to spin cotton, linen and silk. The machine was exhibited in the hall of the *Casa Lonja* for six months and was at the disposal of manufacturers who wished to understand

its benefits.<sup>63</sup> The display of the machine inside the Junta building can also be interpreted on two levels. On the first level, the display showed that everyone could freely access a given technology and thus, implicitly, support the idea of greater liberalism. At a second level, the exposition made the machine understandable and transmissible, as well as the technology behind it. In this way, the Junta reserved for itself the role of knowledge-transmitting body, bypassing what had been done, up to that point, by the guilds. The process of technology transfer also passed through the acquisition of knowledge and information, which is why the operation initiated by the *Junta* in 1792 with the involvement of various correspondents abroad to send news and information regarding advances in technology and science is interesting. All this information would be published in a forthcoming periodical called *Correo Mercantil de España y sus Indias*.<sup>64</sup>

Ultimately, the Junta seemed to implement a nationalistic economic effort aimed at protecting differentiated local economic interests that were not only industrial but also commercial. In this sense, several interventions were made to protect the Catalan market in a constant attempt to hold together the two “economic souls” of Barcelona and Catalonia.<sup>65</sup>

### **The *Escuela gratuita de diseño* (free school of drawing)**

The production of calicoes and printed cotton textiles was based above all on the quality of the design and colouring of the fabric.

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<sup>63</sup> BC, Junta de Comercio, Ms. 3668/81. *La Real Junta de Comercio de este Principado, ocupada siempre del deseo de promover el uso de las maquinas, que facilitando á los artefactos la baratura y perfeccion que conviene, quiten ó minoren el consumo que logran los extrangeros con grave daño de nuestras fabricas, que es de su instituto fomentar, 1792.*

<sup>64</sup> BC, Junta de Comercio, lligall LIX, C. 83, núm. 40 (16), *Apunte de las noticias que suplicamos á nuestros correponsales, y á todo sugeto instruido y amante de la patria, nos envien semanalmente desde primero de setiembre próximo para la formación de un periódico intitulado Correo Mercantil de España y sus Indias, 1792.*

<sup>65</sup> L. Calosci, *Nacionalisme econòmic i comerç mediterrani: pensament i acció de la Junta de Comerç de Barcelona, 1763-1847*, Barcelona, 2007.

Soon, many Barcelona's enterprises gave up weaving cotton cloths, preferring to buy semi-finished ones from rural producers in order to devote themselves exclusively to printing. Moreover, this phase was the one that provided the most added value, so the interest of the enterprises focused on this process. One of the major problems encountered in the early stages of the establishment of the calicoes factories in Barcelona was the shortage of skilled labour, especially in the processes of dyeing and printing fabrics, which is why many enterprises hired foreign technicians, especially French and English, to overcome this gap. The *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* also took steps to provide the manufacturers of calicoes with better technical skills and, between the 1750s and 1760s, hired several foreign technicians.<sup>66</sup> However, soon, the growth in demand for coloured and printed cotton fabrics and the need to increase production made these policies ineffective.

For this reason, in 1775, the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* established the *Escuela gratuita de diseño* (free school of drawing), which was to provide the necessary technical training for cotton cloth printers on an ongoing basis, using the most modern knowledge.<sup>67</sup> The *Escuela* was structured to provide both theoretical and practical knowledge, as it had special training workshops.<sup>68</sup> There is no trace of the detailed curriculum taught at the school in the first years after its foundation. There are, however, numerous traces of the reward system that regulated the students' educational activities, incentivising them with weekly, monthly and annual cash prizes. Associated with these ordinary prizes were extraordinary prizes to be awarded to particularly deserving students, aimed at financing a postgraduate stay in Rome or Madrid. As early as the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century,

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<sup>66</sup> R. Rossi, "Mobilità senza confini: tecnici e tecnologia nella manifattura catalana delle indianas nel XVIII secolo", in *Società e Storia*, no. 148, 2015, pp. 231-256.

<sup>67</sup> M. Ruiz Ortega, *La Escuela Gratuita de Diseño de Barcelona, 1775-1808*, Barcelona, 1999, pp. 82-86.

<sup>68</sup> BC, Fons Junta de Comercio, Llibre JC 303, *Continuación de las actas de la Escuela Gratuita de las Nobles Artes*, por Francisco Suria y Burgada, Barcelona, 1803.

the school was enrolling around 250 students per year.<sup>69</sup> Already three years after its establishment, the *Escuela* was able to provide its students, who attended it free of charge, with the possibility of training abroad, mainly in France and in the Italian peninsula. In 1787, the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* of Barcelona was able to finance three additional scholarships for the most deserving students, recognising the determinant role of technical education in economic development<sup>70</sup> while at the beginning of nineteenth century the most brilliant graduate from the *Escuela* were granted a money prize.<sup>71</sup> The school was organised with the collaboration of the *Colegio de Pintores* (painters' college), which already existed in Barcelona, for the artistic part and with the advice of foreign colourists for the technical part.<sup>72</sup> This measure constituted a further element of rupture with the corporatist model, taking away one of their main functions from the corporations, such as the transfer of know-how, and at the same time constituting an attempt to formalise and centralise knowledge and its dissemination.

## Conclusions

The study of economics has amply demonstrated how between the economic action of the central government and the actions of individual players in the periphery, the significant activity of intermediate institutional bodies has unfolded. To some extent, these players can be considered as those being assigned the differentiated local

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<sup>69</sup> A. Comalalda Negre, "Una escuela gratuita de diseño. La Llotja", in *Pedralbes: Revista de Historia Moderna*, no. 8/2, 1988, pp. 275-284.

<sup>70</sup> BC, Junta de Comercio, lligall CVI, C. 4, núm. 2, *Deseando la Real Junta General de Comercio de este Principado aumentar el estímulo entre los discípulos de su Escuela Gratuita de las Nobles Artes, y proporcionarles los medios de hacerles mas utiles al estado, ha acordado pensionar por una vez tres de ellos*, 1787.

<sup>71</sup> BC, Junta de Comercio, Tor. 1073/16-8º, *Noticia de los premios generales que en el Fomento de las Nobles Artes ofreció, con edicto de 1º de abril de 1803, la Real Junta de Comercio de Cataluña, y de los ordinarios y extraordinarios que se han adjudicado en el mismo año a los alumnos de su Escuela gratuita*, 1803.

<sup>72</sup> Ruiz Ortega, *La Escuela Gratuita de Diseño de Barcelona, 1775-1808*, p. 112.

supply of public goods in order to govern the relative scarcity of local resources. The case of the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* showed how the supply of public goods, characterised by increasing returns, is marked by a necessarily uniform and general coordination. That is, a distribution mechanism for the same goods that includes as many consumers as possible. On the other hand, when it comes to selective public goods – such as the customs protection and incentive mechanisms granted through the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* – the expected benefits are greater compared to a limited number of beneficiaries.<sup>73</sup> As a result, intermediate institutions appear to have a greater information advantage regarding the production of these public goods compared to central institutions. An example of this can be seen in the customs protection mechanisms introduced with the new Bourbon mercantilist policy and the changes requested by the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* in order to improve the effectiveness of these measures. The *Junta* played a decisive role in promoting institutional change, implementing the elements of growth in the cotton sector in Barcelona since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. In a fairly embryonic way, the *Junta's* efficient functioning allowed it to modify and adapt its functions according to the different market demands.<sup>74</sup> In this sense, we can consider action in favour of customs changes, then the introduction of new machinery and technology and, finally, training activities. What appears from the analysis of the foundation and functioning of the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio* is an evident complexity of the scenario, with multiple actors in motion and with often competing interests. To this complexity, the state reacts, even in the modern age, with equally complex institutions capable of ensuring the reduction of transaction costs.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> A. Arrighetti and G. Seravalli, "Introduzione", in Ead., *Istituzioni intermedie e sviluppo locale*, p. XIX.

<sup>74</sup> A. Guenzi, "Istituzioni intermedie e sviluppo locale: un approccio di storia economica", in A. Arrighetti, G. Seravalli (eds.), *Istituzioni intermedie e sviluppo locale*, pp. 86-90.

<sup>75</sup> A. Guenzi and G. Seravalli, "Lo sviluppo locale italiano: storia, economia, politica", in *Impresa e Stato*, 63/64, 2003, pp. 45-53.



Ultimately, the *Real Junta Particular de Comercio*, as an organisation of interests on a territorial basis, would have performed a double task: representing the mediating body between the demands coming from the central government – in terms of fiscal policy and manufacturing incentives – and the local economic players, while at the same time reducing coordination costs.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> A. Grandi, *Tessuti compatti. Distretti e istituzioni intermedie nello sviluppo italiano*, Torino, 2007.

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