

Chapter 8. Shift from proto-industrialization to industrialization

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This paper attempts to discuss the significance of both ‘traditional’, handicraft or domestic manufacturing and ‘modern’ or factory manufacturing on the debates of the Industrial Revolution, and presents how this combined process of adapting or disappearing ‘traditional’ manufacturing activities and attracting ‘modern’ manufacturing activities during the subsequent phases of industrialization played a large role for the later location of industry. Drawing on data for the Low Countries, it suggests how regional and temporal differences influenced the location of older manufacturing activities and newly emerging manufacturing activities. When taking a look at the emerging textiles sector in the Eastern Netherlands, we find that both handicraft-based employment increased simultaneously with factory-based employment, while often handicraft-based employment evolved to factory-based employment in this region which industrialized relatively late. However, when taking a look at the region where the ‘proto-industrialization’ debate took off, Northwestern Belgium experienced a sudden decline of the handicraft manufacturing sector after the 1820s which could not be absorbed by the rise of employment in the factories. Thus, the region was only able to overcome this shock in the labour market after the 1880s and as a consequence the location of factories did not emerge in the towns where initial handicraft companies were active.