



Thomas Roslyng Olesen, *Da værfterne lukkede. Transformationen af den danske værftsindustri 1975-2015*, Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2016, 375 sider, Ill., ISBN 978-87-7674-851-7.

The success of a nationally important industry brings about heavy-weight studies of widespread interests. Downfall of the once successful business is possibly even a more intriguing topic for an historian of industrialization. Thomas Roslyng Olesen's book examines the downscaling and restructuring of large Danish steel shipyards, B&W in 1980, Naskov Shipyard in 1986-1987, Allborg shipyard 1987-1988 as well as the closures of the reconstructed B&W shipyard in 1996, and Danyard Frederikshavn in 1999. In concert with the large array of maritime economic histories, the author demonstrates the complex interconnections between the locally concentrated industrial cluster and the international market forces. Yet, the author does not stop his presentation when the last ship leaves the building berth and the

shipyard gates are closed. He goes further examining what happened to the shipyard employers and production facilities after the closure. Through the original research setting, Olesen contributes to central questions in history of industrial transformation and longevity.

The background for the story is the European shipyard crisis caused by global overcapacity in shipbuilding and competition against the cost-efficient Asian shipyards. In comparisons with other western European shipyards, Denmark endured in the stiff competition reasonably well and long thanks to the technical specialization, efficient production, and close connections to the Danish shipping companies. Yet, in the 1980s, accumulated difficulties together with the unfeasible price level forced also the well-established shipyard owners to reconsider their possibilities to continue in business. The timing and the direct cause of the shipyard closures may have varied in different countries and at different shipyards but everywhere the termination of the shipbuilding was experienced as a great tragedy for the local community. In this historiographic genre of the shipyard crisis, Olesen's study strikes the reader as a rather optimistic story pointing out that there is life after the end of a business.

The study is based on Olesen's PhD thesis completed in 2012. As is typical for books originating from doctoral projects, the study has a pedantic style, carefully considered arguments, and clear conclusions. The author builds his theoretical framework on the foundation of Joseph

Schumpeter's concepts of creative destruction and innovative entrepreneur. The length of the theoretical part is restricted in the published work. Unlike doctoral thesis, published history books seldom accommodate extensive literature reviews or theoretical discussion. If something, one would have hoped some words about the modern innovation studies after the 1940s.

For Schumpeter, an innovative entrepreneur is the primus motor of the creative destruction that drives the industrial transformation. This study focusses on the creative part of the entrepreneurial activities after the global market forces have taken care of the destruction and forced the managers to run down shipbuilding. The large shipyards and concrete building berths manifest the material dimension of shipbuilding but Olesen concentrates on the human part of the business: entrepreneurship and knowhow.

Through the five case studies, Olesen is able to scrutinize the variance among the shipyard closures. He calculates altogether twenty-seven spin-off companies that were established after the five shipyards were closed. The spin-off companies are classified into four categories based on their field of business and relations to shipbuilding: 1) new companies continuing shipbuilding of some sort, 2) companies engaged in shipbuilding as sub-contractors such as producing steel constructs or machinery, 3) companies establishing power plants, 4) consulting business and 5) repurposing the shipyard facilities as business parks.

The analysis demonstrates the importance of place and time in the industrial transformation. The yards which were closed in 1980s were large production sites with several activities and provided suitable launching pads for new business. As a contrast, the yards in the 1990s were already streamlined production units. This is clear especially when comparing the B&W shipyard in the 1980s and the reconstructed B&W shipyard in the 1990s. The shipyard's marine engine production and power plant that continued despite the shipyard closed in the 1980s, were already outsourced in the 1990s.

The spinoff activities were funded by the old owners, local businessmen, or foreign companies. When the shipyard had a strong owner with sufficient capital reserves, the ownership of the spinoff companies usually remained in Denmark. In other cases, the investors came from western Europe. What is remarkable, as Olesen points out, is the lack of governmental financing. The absence of the state strikes as a great contrast to the historiography of the shipyard crisis in Sweden.

With the help of statistical follow-up study on the shipyard workers, Olesen converts the downscaling of the Danish shipbuilding from a tragedy to a story of industrial transformation. Of the blue-collar workers, the majority moved to the other branches of steel and machine industries, or directly to the service sector. On average, from 60% to 70% of the shipyard employees had found a new job in three years after the closure. Their pos-

sibilities to move to other industries were shaped by the geographical location and economic situation. Engineers typically continued selling their knowledge and expertise through consulting. Old managers and local businessmen were active in business that employed or repurposed the real estates or machine shops at the closed shipyards and required more capital. In overall, the story resonates well with the overall switch from labour-intensive blue-collar industry to knowledge-intensive business of highly educated engineers.

Through the five cases, the two decades, versatile source material, and research setting that combines qualitative and quantitative analysis, Olesen provides the historiography of European shipyard crisis with a valuable contribution. The study underlines how the creative destruction is always characterized with breaks as well as continuities. It is also a surprisingly human story: The shipbuilders might have been lucky when they succeeded, but they were certainly not stupid when they failed.

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