

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIKA TOWN AND BIRMINGHAM CITY AS CENTERS OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

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Abstract

The current study explains the relationship between Thika Town and Birmingham City as centers of the industrial revolution. The main goal of this study is to understand the similarities in the development of the industries within Thika and Birmingham. The study also examines the similarities in the factors that led to industrialization in Thika and their effects on industrial growth. During data collection, the current study adopted an interpretive research paradigm where relevant data was collected using a literature review design. The data collection design involved identifying keywords and themes from existing literature on industrial development in Thika Town and Birmingham City. The data was later analyzed using thematic analysis, where information from the secondary data was grouped based on common themes. The study concludes with the research conclusions and recommendations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The review of Kenya's cities and towns shows how similar they are to popular towns and cities in the United Kingdom. According to Salat (2011), the influence of British colonization in developing urban centers in Kenya is among the key reasons for the existence of many similarities between the cities and towns in Kenya and those in the United Kingdom. Most of the British expatriates who settled in Kenya modeled the towns based on their hometowns in the United Kingdom. Among the key towns developed by the British expatriates who settled in Kenya include Thika. The town's industrial nature has been compared to Birmingham City and referred to as the Birmingham of Kenya. According to Salat (2011), Birmingham city has been the center of the industrial revolution since the 18th century. As a result, the city has been declared the first manufacturing town in the world over the years. Nowadays, Birmingham falls second after London in terms of the industrial revolution. Birmingham city's industrial revolution is comparable to that of Thika Town, which started in the 19th century after Europeans established farms, flour milling, vehicle assemblies, and retail businesses in the region. A study by Ndung'u (2014) indicates that Thika's industrial development is similar to Birmingham's in terms of the industrial revolution. Thika's position in industrial improvement is undisputable as it entails the purviews of industrial development over the years. The industrial environment of Thika is similar to that of Birmingham in terms of population, which provide the required manpower for industrial development. A study by Ndung'u (2014) indicates that Thika was designed similarly to Birmingham city due to its limitless similarities. Another major company in Thika is Bidco Oil Refineries which produces various consumer products found in Kenyan kitchens. Such consumer products include Elianto, Cowboy, Ufuta, Power boy, and Nuru soap. In comparison, Birmingham has a reputation for being the top producer of food and consumer products in the United Kingdom. Retail companies such as the Bullring are Birmingham's largest shopping centers (Allen, 2018). The retail entity acts as the largest retail center in the United Kingdom, where it makes up a great part of the city's economy. Companies such as the British American Tobacco (BAT) are also a key industry in Thika. British settlers established the industry and implemented British policies in production activities (Allen, 2018). British American Tobacco (BAT) is the foremost threshing point for the greater BAT Kenya situated alongside Thika-Garissa Highway. Moreover, BAT Kenya is a subdivision of the bigger British American Tobacco, whose headquarters are in London, UK.

1.1. Research objectives

This research aimed to explore the relationship between Thika Town and Birmingham City as centers of the industrial revolution. In other words, the study aims to understand the industrial developments of manufacturing and processing industries in Thika and Birmingham. The study objectives will be attained by collecting and analyzing data to answer the objectives identified below:

1. Examine the similarities in the factors that led to industrialization in Thika and their effects on industrial growth.
2. Investigate the similarities in the development of the industries within Thika and Birmingham.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical framework

2.1.1. Theory of Modernization

According to Clark (2013), modernization theory uses different elements to explain industrial development. The theory indicates that some cities and towns started to develop after the disintegration of European colonial empires. These European colonials adopted their development model in these cities to promote economic and political reasons. According to the modernization theory, structural differentiation among the cities has increased their functional capacity, improving their industrial growth. According to Clark (2013), the modernization theory was applied in Towns such as Thika as it offers a solution for the promotion and development of industries. The theory also explains that the European colonials offered productive investments to major towns in Kenya, which was a major challenge. Technology was also a major problem for industrial development in Thika Town; hence, some British settlers used their native technology to establish manufacturing and processing industries. According to the modernization theory, Third World countries such as Kenya were traditional, while countries such as the United Kingdom were modern (Kent, 2010). Third-world countries needed to adopt development values from their colonizers to achieve industrial development.

2.2 Empirical literature

According to Jones (2017), the significance of Birmingham's manufacturing industry has been rising since the early 1870s. Over the years, the industry has advanced from manufacturing and processing to other sectors, such as service, retail, and tourism. Thika town has followed a similar suit by encoring the development of other industries ranging from retail, tourism, and service industries. According to Kent (2010), Birmingham has the second largest economy in the UK after London and remains relevant in manufacturing and engineering.

Kent's (2010) studies indicate that Birmingham produces over £2,000,000,000 goods yearly. Consequently, industries in Thika also provide vast quantities of goods for local and international consumption yearly. As a result, these industries act as the major government revenue providers. According to Jones (2017), the two industrial centers have employed many people who labor in different industries. Jones (2017) states that both cities are the key locations for motor vehicle assembly, components production, and accessories. Birmingham is the home of major car factories such as Jaguar and MG Rover, while Thika is more of a car assembly center. Additionally, Birmingham is well-known for its renowned Jewelry quarter, which produces a third of the UK's jewelry.

Today, Birmingham and Thika still live up to their reputation as the major industrial towns in Kenya and the United Kingdom. The two industrial centers act as the production areas of numerous products, including plastics, chemicals, glass, and food. One of the major retail centers in Birmingham is Bullring, a retail destination where customers can access manufactured products (Kent, 2010). Compared with Bullring, Delmonte Group is the main industry in Thika as it contributes a large share of revenue to the Kenyan economy.

2.3 Literature Gap

Despite the above evidence on the relationship between Thika Town and Birmingham City as centers of the industrial revolution, the study only investigates the manufacturing and processing industries. The study does not indicate whether the two industrial centers share the same industrial setting and policies. Furthermore, studies relying on understanding the relationship between the two industrial centers are scarce. For this reason, the proposed study will reveal the factors that led to industrialization in Thika in relation to those in Birmingham city.

3. Methodological approach

3.1. Research paradigm

An interpretive research paradigm was relied upon to identify how Thika Town and Birmingham relate to their roles as centers of industrial revolutions in their respective countries. The interpretive paradigm was implemented with the use of secondary research that exists on the history of the two towns. An interpretive research paradigm examines the facts supervised by various theoretical non-tangible dynamics such as social and economic factors. The current study also used the interpretivism paradigm to investigate the factors that led to industrialization in Thika and their effects on industrial growth. The research paradigm was also convenient in determining the development of the industries within Thika that affected their industrial growth. Since the interpretive paradigm explores speculative non-tangible dynamics, it was crucial in determining the connection between Thika Town and Birmingham City as centers of the industrial revolution.

3.2. Data collection

The current study used secondary data sources to collect data. The use of the secondary data approach was due to numerous books and journal articles that have reviewed the role of two towns in bringing industrial revolutions. The secondary data was collected using a literature review design where keywords on the histories and roles of Thika Town and Birmingham cities. The keywords were later searched on the internet using online databases such as Google Scholar. Online databases allow easy access to data with a click of a button. The process consumes little time, unlike collecting data from public libraries. However, the data should be acquired from a reliable source accredited by a legal act. One must identify the study topic to categorize the required sources to achieve relevant data from the internet. The data is later linked to distinguish if there is any duplication. Afterward, the data collected is analyzed to create more meaningful insights.

3.3. Data analysis

The current study relied on a thematic analysis where information from the secondary data was grouped on common themes. Thematic analysis was the most suitable data analysis method since it can be used in epistemological and hypothetical frameworks. According to Vaismoradi & Bondas (2013), thematic analysis enables the researcher to monitor subsequent steps that require one to search for developing themes that require additional investigation. The first step of thematic analysis is data familiarization, followed by identifying the key themes using a literature search table. The next stage includes searching the data for themes matching the study objectives. The last step consists of defining the themes and concluding the report.

4. Research findings

4.1. Similarities in the factors that led to industrialization in Thika and Birmingham

The study shows that Birmingham City and Thika Town have similar factors that led to their industrial revolution. Birmingham City and Thika Town are viewed as both industrial and commercial centers. According to Allen (2018), Birmingham City and Thika Town have been singled out as the major centers for production, inventions and manufacturing industries. In the sixteenth century, Birmingham City was the midpoint of the UK's metalworking industries which consisted of a large population of iron managers. During the English Civil War, the manufacturing industry in Birmingham city mass-produced over 15,000 sword blades for the Parliament militaries. By the 18th century, Birmingham city had developed into one of the greatest industrial cities in the United Kingdom (Clark, 2013). These findings on Birmingham's industrial revolution are comparable to that of Thika Town, which started in the 19th century. Thika Town was established by Europeans who established farms, flour milling, vehicle assemblies, and retail businesses in the region. The findings also indicate that Thika is one of the leading industrial centers in Kenya and its industrial development is unquestionable. According to the study findings, the industrial nature of Thika is apparent in its population, which consists of the Kikuyu tribe, who form the biggest population. The availability of industrial establishments in Thika town also enhances rural-urban migration as people from different parts of Kenya migrate to seek employment. After migration, the Kikuyu and other tribes are employed in industries operating in Thika, such as Delmonte Group, Bidco Kenya, and BAT. These findings put Thika in a similar position to Birmingham City, which also has a huge population. The population presents Birmingham with the required workforce for the industries.

The findings also state major differences between Birmingham and Thika regarding infrastructure. The study indicates that Birmingham is an inland city that relies greatly on its canals to transport manufactured goods easily. In comparison,

Thika is surrounded by well-connected roads such as Thika super highway and Thika-Garissa Highway. The two major roads and a well-connected railway line enable easy transportation of raw materials and finished products. The study also indicates that Birmingham is situated at the center of the Grand Junction Railways connecting London and Birmingham. According to Clark (2013), the railway enabled Birmingham to acquire an extremely skilled workforce from other parts of the country. The railway line enabled Birmingham to expand as the skilled workforce could craft and manufacture trade goods.

4.2. The similarities in the development of the industries within Thika and Birmingham

The current study also investigates the similarities in the development of industries in Thika and Birmingham. The study findings indicate that in the 18th century, Birmingham factories relied on workshops and factory-based steam power. However, small workshops employed a large number of Birmingham's population (Jones, 2017). There was also the establishment of industries that provided chinaware and metal tongs. Thika Town, on the other hand, was surrounded by productive agricultural areas such as Kiambu and Murang'a. These regions acted as the source of raw materials for the industries located in Thika town. According to Wanjau (2017), the appropriateness of agriculturally productive soils and encouraging weather conditions in these regions accelerate the easy production of fruits such as pineapples, vegetables, and oranges vital for industrial development. These agricultural products enhance industrial development in Thika.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The presence of Bidco group, the largest producer of cooking oil and detergent products in Kenya, has enabled Thika to develop and grow economically. In contrast, Birmingham is also the top producer of food and consumer products, with companies such as Bullring being the largest retail center in the United Kingdom. The retail conglomerate is a great part of the city and the United Kingdom economy. Bidco oil refineries, located in Thika, is a prominent manufacturer of edible oil, detergents, and baking powder dealer with more than 30 brands. Bidco oil refineries and Bullring create employment for people in Thika and Birmingham, respectively. The industrial establishments in Birmingham city and Thika Town offer employment opportunities to many people in their respective countries. The industries also provide revenue to the local government and improvement of infrastructure. Industrialization development in Thika town has led to construction of many roads that allow easy transportation of raw materials from regions like Kiambu town and Murang'a. The roads also enable easier transportation of finished products to the target market. Birmingham, on the other hand, relies mainly on canals for easier transporting of raw materials and manufactured goods. Birmingham also relies on the railway, which enables Birmingham to acquire raw materials and a skilled workforce.

For that reason, employment opportunities lead to these towns' development as it improves the lifestyle and economy. Since only the retail, manufacturing, and production industries were investigated, the current study recommends that future studies investigate other industries operating in the industrial centers. These industries include tourism, healthcare, and financial industries, among others. Financial industries are essential in these industrial centers as they offer credits and loans that enhance industrial development.

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