

THE CENTURY-OLD COMPANIES AND BRANDS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

The article provides basic desk research on the oldest and still existing Czech companies and corporate brands. This pilot and exploratory research mapped century-old business entities in various sectors, from their establishment to the present day. The study analyses the factors that contributed to their sustainability and adaptation in changing political and economic conditions. The article provides a descriptive overview of Czech companies that are over, or very close to, a hundred years old and still in existence. Desk research is made by web scraping and by AI-assisted knowledge exploration. The findings demonstrate that, despite significant historical upheavals, including two world wars (1914–1918, 1939–1945), the period of communism (1948–1989), and the transformation following 1989, a diverse range of companies in various economic sectors have still operated in the Czech Republic. It underlines the importance of corporate traditions and brand identity in the long-term perspective of business.

Keywords: Company Longevity, Company Resilience, Company Biography, Czech Republic, Century-old Company

<https://doi.org/10.11118/978-80-7701-082-5-0226>

JEL Code: L25, M14, N84

Introduction

Since 2017, the Czech Statistical Office has been compiling a Register of Economic Entities (RES) – companies, sole traders, corporations, and legal entities – established in the Czech Republic. Economic entities have been recorded here since 1951. The RES can be used to find out the dates of establishment and dissolution of Czech companies and corporations. The RES tracks the economic demographics of organisations in the Czech Republic over time. However, the RES does not register companies (corporations) that are still active, whose brand existed before 1951 and continued in various forms throughout the 20th century until today. Some companies were established during the Austrian Empire (before 1867), during the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867–1918), or during the Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1939). Due to political circumstances, these companies had to change their business activities, ownership, or name. The continuity of their development was often interrupted. That is why this pilot and exploratory research was initiated, mapping century-old living companies and living brands. The research used open-access scanning methods to examine information on the Internet. The first comprehensive database of century-old Czech companies and Czech corporate brands was created. The topic of century-old companies is now becoming part of economic and sociological research, under various labels such as “corporate resilience” and “corporate sustainability.” The research is supplemented by a pilot analysis of the most important areas in which century-old Czech companies operate and conduct business.

Micro and Macro Approaches to Business Demographics

Macroeconomic statistics track the survival rate of companies (i.e., company mortality and birth rates) and the lifespan of companies. This provides important information about the real state of the economy. Current approaches include this type of research in corporate demography or the business ecosystem. For example, the average lifespan of companies listed in the S&P 500 has decreased significantly, from over 60 years to 15 years (Ernst and Young, 2023). By examining the ratio of newly established to defunct legal persons, the findings demonstrate critical trends in corporate sustainability and survival rates, which serve as indicators of broader economic health and the resilience of the Czech business environment (Nesiba and Čuhalová, 2024).

From the perspective of a micro approach to individual companies, we talk about corporate or company history and company biography. Micro approaches examine developments and processes within individual

companies. Micro approaches show how the length of a company's existence affects its ability to survive economically in the macro environment. Business history is a standard part of management theory (Wilson *et al.*, 2017). Basic management approaches in the 20th century came to the conclusion that the history of a company and the length of its existence influence corporate decision-making in the present (Chandler, 1962; Carroll and Hannan, 2000; Bucheli and Wadhvani, 2014).

Business demography primarily maps the formation and dissolution of firms (Kintner *et al.*, 1994; Ahmad, 2008; Yusuf and Swanson, 2010; Markowicz, 2014). Just as social demography studies the natality and mortality of individuals, business demography examines enterprise survival rates (Rannikko *et al.*, 2019; Almeida, 2023; Afín *et al.*, 2025). Since the beginning of the 21st century, an index examining one-year and five-year business survival rates has become prevalent (Coleman *et al.*, 2013; Ejermo and Xiao, 2014). Following the model of environmental sciences on sustainability, the biology of corporate survival has been discussed (Reeves *et al.*, 2016).

The natural increase in the social world has found an analogy in the business world in the form of the so-called “business rate” between established and defunct organisations (Cressy, 2006; Brown *et al.*, 2013). Just as social demography determines the active population of individuals, business demography determines the population of active enterprises. Business demography is not a separate discipline but rather cuts across a number of areas. It can therefore be found in concepts such as corporate history, the company life cycle, longevity science, the longevity industry, corporate genealogy, and business and entrepreneur ecosystems. Ecosystem approaches from environmental science bring together social, ecological, and economic sciences, as the fields of ecology and economics share a focus on exploring cyclical fluctuations and recurring waves (Ayres, 2004; Weidema *et al.*, 2018; Zhang, 2022).

The study of companies that have existed for a century is therefore closely related to the topics of business history and business ecosystems. Century-old companies are used as a benchmark for evaluating the overall health of the economy. Century-old companies often engage in traditional manufacturing that is linked to the traditions of a given country. Some of the brands of the largest corporations are also part of the collective memory of a nation (e.g., chocolate factories and banks in Switzerland, wineries and cheese factories in France, textile companies in Italy, various traditional car brands). Therefore, companies engaged in activities that emerged less than a century ago due to technological developments (e.g., the electrical engineering industry, IT) will not be included.

The demographic data of society is regularly recorded to include the number of centenarians and to examine the proportion of centenarians in the population of a given area. The centenarian index is used to indicate the number of centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants in the population. Consequently, a proportion of centenarians can be indicative of the overall health status of the population. In the Czech Republic, for the first time since 2024, this number exceeded a total of 1,000 individuals, which is equivalent to one tenth of a percent of the population. Following the example of society's demographics, it is possible to examine the business ecosystem in a similar way. For example, the number of century-old companies (or brands) in a given country can be compared to the number of all economic entities. Similarly, a certain number would be an indicator of the health of the entire macroeconomic environment.

Corporate Longevity

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on rankings of the oldest surviving companies in individual countries, especially in Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Japan, South Korea, and the US. The term “blue zones” is used to describe regions with a high proportion of centenarians. There is currently no term in existence for countries with century-old companies. Potential names for the initiative could be “Company Blue Zones” or “Golden Zones.” Some institutions, including the Bank of Korea and Tokyo Shoko Research, publish regular statistics on century-old companies in their respective regions. In Japan, the term “shinise” (老舗) has become established to refer to traditional businesses with a long history. The issue of the age of a company or brand is becoming increasingly interesting from a marketing perspective (Collins and Porras, 2004). The most effective way to demonstrate corporate sustainability is by the length of a company's existence.

The Latin term “long vitae,” used for population factors, gave rise to a similar concept of corporate longevity. Corporate longevity is evidence of intergenerational stability and continuity in company management. The term Corporate Sustainable Longevity (CSL) has been adopted within research circles to study corporate longevity and has become integral to sustainability concepts. The factors for corporate longevity are related to the current implementation of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) principles, as both emphasise stability and balance (Kozak, 2018; Li *et al.*, 2021; Wirba, 2024).

In the corporate world, established companies and brands are often grouped into traditional associations, where they can maintain their status, cooperate with each other, and provide mutual support. The Tercentenarians Club, based in London, is a prominent association that brings together companies with a history spanning 300 years. The Henokiens Association, based in Paris, is another notable organisation

in this field. It is a membership body for companies with a history spanning 200 years. New York is home to The Hundred Year Association of New York, which recognises century-old companies that contribute to New York City. The Club der Österreichischen Traditionsbetriebe is headquartered in Austria, and its parent organisation, the Österreichischer Gewerbeverein (ÖGV), was founded in 1839. Its objective is to facilitate connections between businesses that prioritise tradition.

Sustainability is defined as the ability of a company to maintain its viability and relevance over an extended period. This temporal aspect is widely regarded as the most important criterion in organisational management, serving as an indicator of sustainability in firms and organisations (Markley, 2012). As stated by Engert and Baumgartner (2016), corporate sustainability is inextricably linked to the overarching concept of sustainable development.

The longevity of a company is one of the main indicators that can be used to assess its sustainability. The concept of Corporate Sustainable Longevity focuses on examining the reasons and connections behind the long-term existence of companies in a particular industry, thereby touching on issues of sustainability, ethics, and corporate resilience (Gangi *et al.*, 2022). General social theories about management, which are dependent on historical development, show similarities in individual and corporate development (Organizational Path Dependence or Institutional Persistence). Historical decisions have a significant impact on the future of companies, in the same way that life experiences shape an individual's biography.

Corporate longevity is terminologically related to longevity in a medical context. Longevity is examined in organisations and firms as the firm lifespan (firm demographics and mortality). Longevity is emerging as a new sustainability indicator in the corporate environment (Becker, 2014; Pater and Cristea, 2016). Longevity (durability and resilience) indicates long-term healthy management that is more resilient to negative external influences. Following the model of medicine, the health of an organisation has been referred to as the organisational immune system (Cremer and Sixt, 2010; Hilaire *et al.*, 2011). Longevity decreases the mortality rate of firms (Morris, 2009; Mayson, 2023). In the organisational world, time is included in the SMART criteria as a time-related factor (sometimes referred to as time-oriented or time-sensitive). This indicator suggests a higher level of resilience and, consequently, sustainability (Shahin and Mahbod, 2007; Bjerke and Renger, 2017). The past of an organisation translates into its future sustainability. It is often associated with the modern, popular concept of environmental stewardship or “sustainability.” There is talk of intergenerational sustainability (Shahen *et al.*, 2021).

Longevity is synonymous with stability because it exceeds the expected length of a phenomenon. In general usage, longevity is often used to refer to long (or longer than expected) life (Lexikon of Longevity, 2025). In this respect, the basic criterion for determining the degree of sustainability is the length of time that the phenomenon under study has existed (i.e., the relationship between natality and mortality). Evidence of sustainability can be found by examining the sustainability index in terms of the ratios of mortality, natality, and natural increase (Bognar, 2019; MacLean, 2024). Since the beginning of the 21st century, terminology has gradually developed in the sociology of organisations that follows the model of demography and uses analogous terms for organisations and firms. Unlike social demography, where the focus is on individuals, business demography focuses on organisations (firms, institutions, and business entities). The term “firm life cycle” has become an integral part of strategic and sustainability planning in management (Zhou *et al.*, 2016; Hasan and Cheung, 2018; Cremers *et al.*, 2024).

Just as the calculation of firm life expectancy has inspired the calculation of firm longevity, the longevity index of individuals has inspired the longevity index of firms. The age of firms in a particular territory is therefore becoming a new focus of sustainability research (Panza *et al.*, 2017; Takahashi, 2017; Bakker and Josefy, 2018; Coad, 2018; Hiemann, 2022). The methodology used to calculate the probability of mortality in society for individuals can be applied to calculate the probability of mortality for firms in the business environment. The demographic profile of a population can be transformed into the demographic profile of firms. In the construction industry, an example of sustainability is a building's long-term functionality without repairs or external interventions. Urban sustainability is an area in which longevity and functionality are measurable features of sustainability. The longevity of buildings, not just eco-architecture made of sustainable materials, is an essential feature of sustainability (Palacios-Muñoz *et al.*, 2019). Certifications such as BREEAM, LEED, and DGNB focus on a building's longevity without the need for interventions (Ferreira *et al.*, 2023). Significant historical buildings from ancient times that have survived to this day are evidence of sustainability and longevity. Many buildings are part of cultural heritage and serve the same organisation for which they were built (e.g., medieval cathedrals).

Methodology

Currently, there is no Czech database that collects data on companies according to their length of existence. RES has been examining the survival rate of Czech companies as a percentage of all companies since 2013 (survival rate 1–5 years). Unfortunately, there is no information available on companies and brands that are 100 years old or older. Information on the date of establishment and date of termination of economic

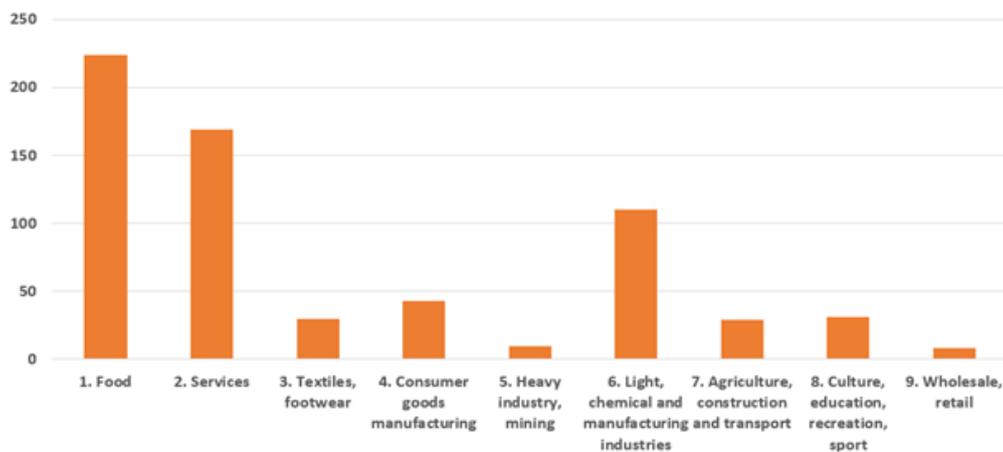
entities since 1951 is recorded mainly for state-owned enterprises and cooperatives. Between 1948 and 1989, the legal framework did not permit the establishment of independent companies, as private enterprise was subject to nationalisation. Consequently, this database, which focuses on private companies established before 1951, is incomplete. With regard to company history, after 1948, private companies became part of collective cooperatives and were renamed, and their ownership structure was changed (e.g., family farms became part of state agricultural cooperatives). Large private companies with extensive supplier and customer networks were transformed into state-owned and national enterprises. In this situation, RES statistics cannot be used. Therefore, web scanning from publicly available sources was used as a desk research method for data collection. The objective of the research was to create a database of companies. There are a number of scenarios for the development of a specific company biography for an individual company. The most common of these scenarios include: interruption of the company's existence during World War II (1939–1945), nationalisation during the communist government (1948–1989), and brand restoration after 1989.

Consequently, research into the continuity of companies and brands necessitates a combination of web scraping and desk research approaches from company websites and publicly available databases of professional associations. Desk research was conducted by screening companies through publicly available Internet sources. AI-assisted knowledge exploration was used in desk research. Research into changes in corporate brands, corporate ownership, and names is becoming part of socio-economic topics. In the fields of brand heritage, brand revitalisation, and corporate or brand genealogy, researchers employ various methods of conducting brand research. These include desk research and web scraping (see Balmer, 2011; Volpert and Michel, 2022; Sammour *et al.*, 2022). There is currently no scientific article on this topic for the Czech environment that would map Czech companies with regard to their length of existence. This exploratory pilot study combines historical analysis with sociological and economic approaches. A thorough review was conducted of data concerning company presentations on websites, as well as information regarding the date of establishment of the company or brand. The AI-assisted knowledge exploration method examined all Internet mentions of Czech companies related to detecting the possibility of a century-old brand.

Results

The results of pilot and exploratory research provide an overview of identified Czech century-old companies and brands. Due to structural changes in the genealogy of companies and brands during the 20th century, it is not possible at this stage of research to divide the two categories (brands and companies) into separate databases. Within individual brand heritages, the two categories often overlap. The presented research results provide a pilot overview of Czech companies and brands that are 100 years old. The basic classification of companies and brands according to economic and industry sectors is shown in Fig. 1.

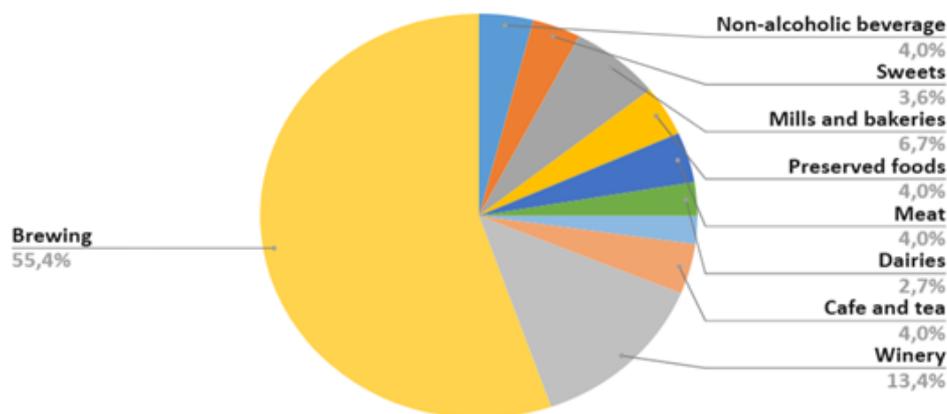
This classification consists of preliminary data collection using web scraping and desk research. The purpose of individual classifications is to group similar sectors of the economy together. The file thus brings together a variety of companies, both large and small, and of varying degrees of importance. The pilot study examined the number of active century-old companies and brands without further detailed differentiation. Please refer to the additional subchapters for comments on individual categories.



1: Classification by Industry Sectors
Source: own processing

Food Industries

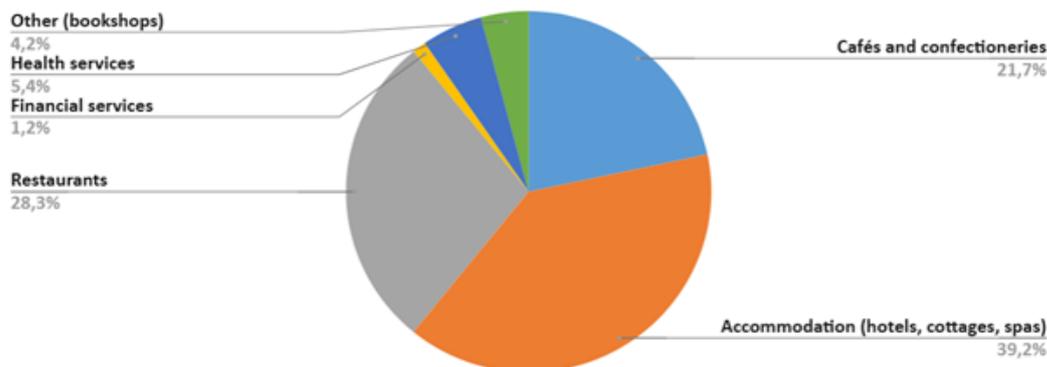
Among individual producers, there are companies producing various sweets and non-alcoholic beverages. There are also companies such as mills and bakeries, smokehouses and butcher shops, and dairies. Other producers include coffee and tea processing and production, and alcoholic beverage production (distillation and production of hard alcohol). Winemakers have a special status thanks to the tradition of vineyards in South Moravia and the Elbe River Basin. Thirty wineries boasting centuries-old traditions were found. The most represented category is companies engaged in beer brewing. A total of 123 breweries were found.



2: Share of Companies and Brands in Food Industries
Source: own processing

Services

Hotels and hospitality establishments (restaurants, cafés, pastry shops) are among the most numerous businesses in the service sector. This sector also includes the oldest companies in existence. One of the best-known examples is the oldest business, which is recognised in the Czech Republic's Museum of Records. This is a tavern in the village of Horní Těrlicko in Northern Moravia, which was founded in 1268. This also includes the oldest continuously operating hotel, the Zvon Hotel in České Budějovice (founded in 1533). There are 36 cafés and pastry shops with a century-old tradition, and 65 hotels (including mountain chalets and spa houses). Web scraping and AI-assisted knowledge exploration have identified 47 restaurants. However, this number may be higher, as only a certain group of operators use the century-old history of their business in their promotion. Another limitation of the research is the fact that cafés can be part of hotels or spa houses. This is often the case with traditional cafés that change operators but continue under the same brand name. Another case is the location of a building where the operator changes. Only those operating under the original brand name were included in the research. In cases where a hotel (mountain chalet) belongs to a public owner (city, region, state) but is leased under its original name and purpose, it was included in the research. A specific category of services includes bookstores (3), printing shops (3), small businesses (e.g., watchmakers), pharmacies (9), and financial services (e.g., there are two banks with more than a century of tradition that still operate as brands).



3: Share of Companies and Brands in Services
Source: own processing

Footwear, Textiles

During the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia were recognised as leaders in the textile industry (for example, the Moravian city of Brno was known as “Moravian Manchester”). The rationale behind the separation of this category is to address these concerns. The most prominent century-old brand is undoubtedly Baťa, a footwear manufacturer. However, there are 29 other century-old brands operating in the Czech Republic, whether in the production of textiles, sewing machines, hats, or textile dyeing. Some are even protected as part of the intangible cultural heritage (e.g., textile blueprinting).

Consumer Goods Manufacturing

This area of production is the most diverse, with 30 companies or brands boasting a century-long history. These include cosmetics manufacturers (3), jewellers and goldsmiths (6), musical instrument manufacturers (3), furniture manufacturers (4), and toy manufacturers (5). It is probable that there are other century-old regional brands and manufacturers in this area, for example with a family tradition. However, they do not have a trace in their web presentations.

Heavy Industry, Mining

Following a thorough investigation, ten companies and brands in the heavy industry and mining sector were identified as meeting the specified criteria. These companies have a proven track record of operating for over a century and are privately owned. These are large corporations with an international reach (7), but this sector mainly involves the extraction of mineral resources (9). Mining companies have taken over mining licences from the original mining companies. In essence, it is more a matter of maintaining licence continuity.

Light, Chemical and Manufacturing Industries

The light and chemical industry sector comprises a range of diverse activities. A total of 102 companies and brands were identified. These include the manufacture of measuring instruments (11) and the manufacture of stoves and boilers for households (7). Centenary brands also include the ironworks manufacturing industry (2), arms manufacturing (2), ceramics companies (6), the woodworking industry, and stationery (7). Other areas include the petrochemical industry (6), sugar refineries (6), lime works (6), dye production (13), and brickworks (7). The glass industry is the largest sector (24). In addition to textiles, the glass industry has the longest tradition in the Czech Republic. Some glassworks established in the 18th century are still in operation today and are therefore aspiring to be included in the category of 200-year-old companies.

Agriculture, Construction and Transport

This is a medium-sized group of century-old companies and brands (29). The sector is dominated by leading Czech corporations, including Škoda and Tatra, which are prominent players in the passenger car manufacturing industry. In addition to road and rail transport, air transport (8), shipping (2), and construction (4) were also analysed. Agriculture and forestry are specific areas. The majority of producers were transferred to state-owned enterprises during the 20th century, leading to the dissolution of the original companies. The restoration of the original companies has only a negligible impact on historical numbers. It is also worth noting that family farm brands (11) are being restored.

Culture, education, recreation, sport

The education sector is primarily overseen by the state or regional municipalities, which are responsible for establishing schools at all levels. However, there are private schools with a hundred years of history that have restored their original brand and name after 1989. These are primarily church primary and secondary schools (11). A small but significant group are publishing houses that build on a century-old brand history (3). This area also includes century-old private cinemas and theatres (5), travel agencies (1), and the entertainment industry (2). As part of the research desk, private century-old sports clubs that operate as private companies were also included in the database. These include football clubs with a century-long history (8) and motor clubs with a century-long history (4), as well as gymnastics clubs (4).

Wholesale, Retail

The final category encompasses century-old department stores (seven in total) and a cooperative that has been operating a network of small shops since 1847. In this category of retailers, there is a strong possibility that there are more companies and brands with a century-long tradition in the regional environment. No information regarding other companies has yet appeared on the web. It should be noted that only the above-mentioned number was detected during the web scraping process.

Discussion and Conclusion

The article focuses on century-old private Czech companies and brands operating in the Czech Republic. As this is the inaugural research in this area, the methodology was limited in terms of data collection possibilities. The research desk was used with web scraping and AI-assisted knowledge exploration. This scanning approach enabled the creation of a preliminary database of companies and brands. There is no official Czech database of companies and brands that have existed for a hundred years or have been revived and are still operating today. It should be noted that the research is subject to a number of limitations. The primary limitations of the research are outlined in points I–III.

1. Due to the political changes of the 20th century (World War I 1914–1918, World War II 1939–1945, and the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia 1948–1989), companies do not operate continuously under the same brand name. Current companies continue family or professional traditions under a different brand name. A situation could arise where the company was acquired by an investor, who subsequently changed the logo, but the production continues at the same location with the same production equipment. Therefore, the research does not distinguish between the brand and the company.
2. Due to the political climate of the years 1948–1989, private ownership of companies was prohibited in socialist Czechoslovakia. The conditions for restoring a company brand or company after 1989 were linked to the return of private property from the state. The property passes to the descendants of the original owners, who may change the form of business.
3. The research included companies that state their year of establishment as 1939 or earlier. These are companies with a history dating back almost a century. The research revealed that there was a negligible number of such companies. For the purposes of the database and to gradually meet the requirement of a hundred years of existence, they were left in the survey.

Current research on century-old companies focuses on corporate biographies (Esteve-Pérez *et al.*, 2017; Lawless and Studnicka, 2024). In the case of countries such as the Czech Republic (but also other countries of the Eastern Bloc in Europe), where the continuity of company development was not possible in the second half of the 20th century, this approach is not applicable. Research in the specific environment of Eastern Europe should focus primarily on brands that operated as independent private companies and their revival after 1989. This approach will ensure a more objective view of the development of century-old brands and companies in the Czech Republic.

Abbreviations

CSL – Corporate Sustainable Longevity

RES – Register of Economical Subjects

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