Independent Invention in Italy during the Liberal Age, 1861-1913
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ABSTRACT: in this paper we examine the phenomenon of independent invention in Italy during the liberal age (1861-1913). We make use of a new dataset comprising all patents granted in Italy in five benchmark years: 1864, 1881, 1891, 1902, 1911. We carry out the following exercises. First we examine the relative shares of independent and corporate and foreign invention and their evolution over time and across industries. Second, by exploiting the peculiarities of Italian patent legislation which established a maximum patent length of fifteen years and a flexible renewal scheme which allowed inventors to maintain a patent “alive” for almost any specific duration, we assess the relative quality of independent and corporate patents. Our results indicate that in Italy independent inventors provided an important contribution to technological change but the quality of their patents was significantly lower than that of large firms and of foreign patentees.
In this paper, we explore the origins and evolution of corporate patenting in Spain in order to reflect on how multinationals managed patent strategies at the European periphery in the late nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. Corporations initiated their international expansion from 1880 onwards, just when the political and entrepreneurial interests related to patent protection also started to become a global issue. Thus, firms from the most advanced countries began to systematically spread their patents throughout the world, demonstrating the increasing concern and influence of corporations and networks of agents, employed by the former, in reaching transnational rights in order to safeguard intangible assets. By means of a thorough and detailed analysis of the Spanish patent system from 1880 to 1939, the distinct strategies followed by foreign corporations, the effects of domestic patent institutions such as compulsory working clauses, and the consequences of all this on technology transfer to the Spanish economy will be clarified.
Abstract

In this article we argue that institutional change in Sweden such as the new patent legislation of the 1880s created a larger market for patent agencies by making it harder for inventors and firms to use the patent system by themselves. Although foreign patenting already required the use of agents, we show that the new patent law of 1884 significantly increased the use of agents domestically. Using patent data from a unique dataset comprising 1/3 of all patents granted in Sweden 1885-1914 (in total 14,772 patents) and with archival data from three leading patent agencies we show that patent agents played an instrumental, but hitherto neglected, role in firms’ and inventors’ use of the new property rights system, that just had been put into effect. Our findings demonstrate that patent agents were tightly intertwined with different actors using the patent system in different networks. We also find slightly higher quality, in terms of lifetime, of the patents that used a patent agent. In contrast to previous studies in the U.S., we show that a few large patent agencies remained dominant in the market over the entire period in Sweden. These findings show that intellectual property rights intermediaries, such as patent agencies needs to be accounted for in analyses of firms’ technology strategies and more general economic and technological change involving property rights systems.