

Sociocultural change, memory, heritage, and identity contexts of deindustrialization

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Deindustrialization conditions both the present and future of countries, communities, and regions around the world. Alterations in the economic order and in the social and cultural circumstances that are caused by the processes of deindustrialization demand a closer look by researchers. Interdisciplinary perspectives are required to promote a deeper analysis of the causes, and, above all, to delve into the consequences brought about by the profound changes to the life of people. The perusal of the collective aftereffects caused by the disappearance or dislocation of industries should go beyond strictly economic parameters of analysis. Even if they may be a valid point of departure, they prove to be insufficient in order to understand processes of deindustrialization and their impact on the affected communities in all of their complexity. This is due to the intrinsic connection between the problems of social depression, production dismantlement, generation change, urban degradation, the weakening of sociopolitical organizations and of institutions in general, or the change of cultural models and references, among many others.

The University of Oviedo organized the Conference “Memory, History and Identity in contexts of deindustrialization: A comparative perspective” as part of the I+D+i project “Sociocultural change, memory, heritage, and identity contexts of deindustrialization” (HAR2017-82591-R). Initially supposed to be held in Mieres from 20th to 23rd October 2020, it finally took place online due to the exceptional circumstances of the current pandemic. The meeting aimed to share and deepen, from different perspectives and academic disciplines, ongoing research on economic and social policies, and on cultural representations of the deep cutting deindustrialization processes that have changed the life of millions.

The aim was to further deepen our insight through comparative analyses and fresh perspectives to understand the social and economic politics as well as the cultural representations generated by profound transformations in industrial work. The discussion covered the following topics:

- Cultural creation and the meanings of deindustrialization
- Memories and narratives of deindustrialization
- Social change: The transition from industrial to post-industrial societies from a historical perspective
- The heritagization of the legacies of deindustrialization
- De/constructions of gender identities in deindustrialization processes

Our starting point was that processes of industrial decline mean a traumatic change for affected societies. The cracking of their economic foundations comes together with deep social and cultural changes in situations in which the relation between past and

future is rendered particularly complex. The vast legacy of memories and the culture of work, characteristic identities, as well as the material traces of built heritage are in danger of disappearing, while simultaneously acting as patrimonial sites that can obtain new meanings and continue to act as collective reference.

North American and European literature offers a wide variety of studies regarding this phenomenon, but that's not the case for Spain, where industrial crisis, dismantlement of factories, and decline have not deserved the same attention, with a remarkable lack of connection between the available theoretical tools and the perspectives adopted by researchers. Most authors in deindustrialization studies have not been translated into Spanish and Spanish scholars often do not refer to their work. Given the relevance of the issue, the production of research on deindustrialization in Spain is too narrow and not innovative enough. The conference organizers, who are experts in the field and have enjoyed working in European networks, have sought build a bridge between Spanish and international scholars. The conference has been fruitful in that regard, as it lead to new perspectives of the Spanish examples in the history of deindustrialization , and novel comparisons with other European as well as South American cases.