

The European Industrial Town: Understanding (post)industrial transitions through local narratives

Track 6 - Cultural Cities

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Dublin, June 2019

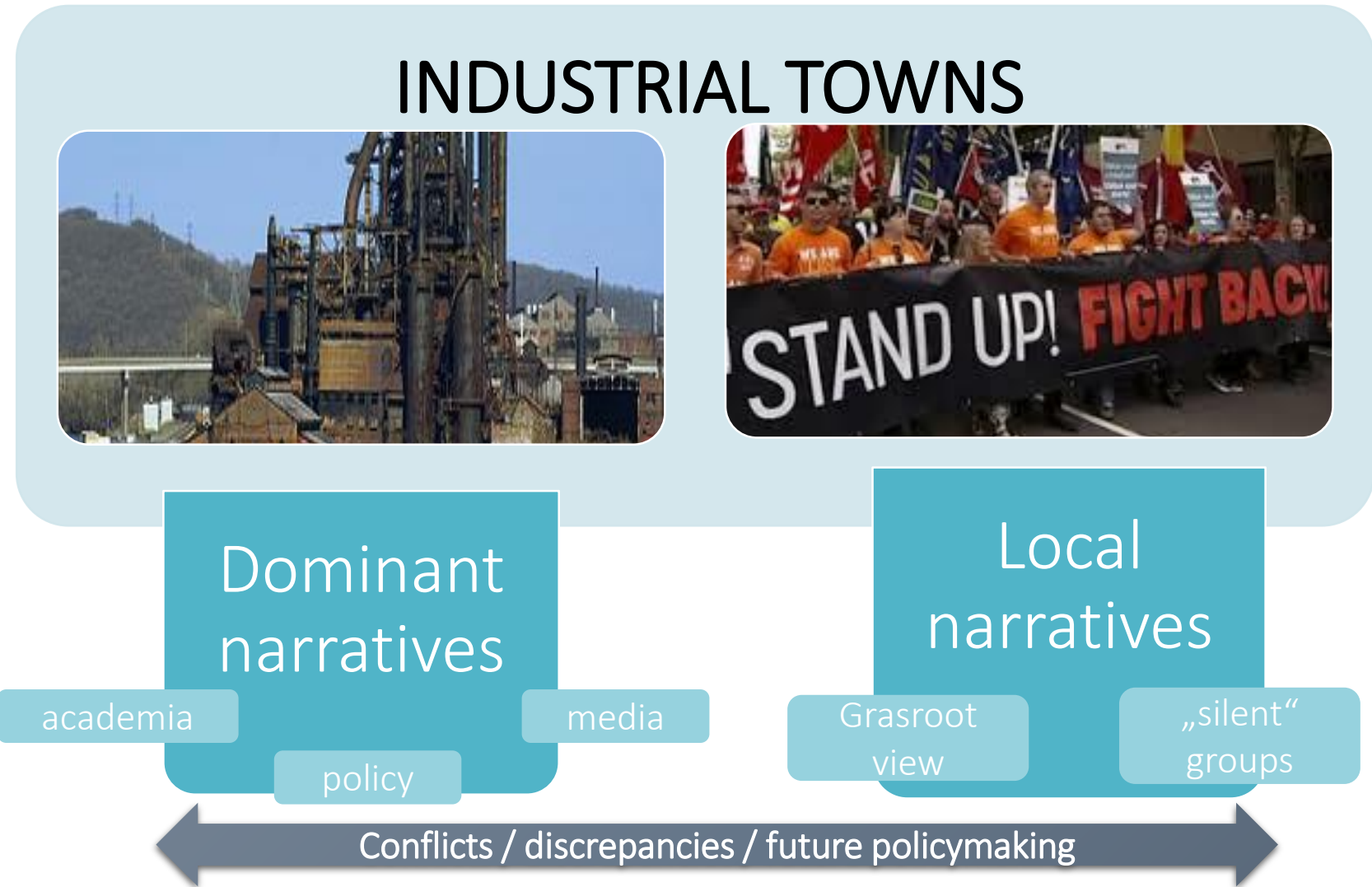
Why is it important?

- 27 % of EU population lives in towns, industry is ,over-represented' in them (*Servillo et al. 2017*)
- The small industrial town is iconic to Europe, part of its heritage
- Subjectivities of culture-led/creative-led development in traditional industrial town have lead to some conflicts in the past (*Cruickshank et al. 2013, Gainza 2016, Gribat 2013*)
- No specific policies for smaller towns, let alone industrial ones
- In reality, we do not know the local perspectives on the (post)industrial transition – sociocultural specificities, needs, problems



Research aim

(post)industrial transitions of towns explained through:



Research design

- Case study based
 - ✓ Traditional industrial (Velenje, SI)
 - ✓ Re-industrial (Corby, UK)
 - ✓ Neo-/post- industrial (Kajaani, FI)
 - ✓ Post-industrial/shrinking (Fieni, RO)
 - ✓ Post-industrial/service-based (Heerlen, NL)
- Dominant narratives
 - ✓ Academia / research
 - ✓ Policies, media
 - ✓ Semiotics, townscape, observation
- Local narratives
 - ✓ Short (Gallup style narrative interviews)
 - ✓ Long semi-structured narrative interviews



Dominant narrative on (post)industrial transitions: ACADEMIA

❑ D. Bell (1972): The coming of the post-industrial society

„... life, work, production will be fundamentally changed by new technologies and new innovations...“

Decline of manufacturing, less industrial jobs, more professional and skilled jobs that ultimately lead to „more highly developed societies“.



❑ The informational city (*Castells 1989*), the global city (*Sassen 1991*), the cultural city (*Scott 1997*), the creative city (*Landry 2000, Florida 2003*)

❑ The invisible industrial (small) city?

✓ Industrial SMSTs are particularly prone to urban decline (*Fol and Cunningham-Sabot, 2010*)

✓ industrial urban areas are ‘economically disadvantaged’ and prone to demographic shrinkage (*Wolff and Wiechmann, 2018*)

Dominant narrative on (post)industrial transitions: (URBAN) POLICY

- ❑ How are dominant narratives of (post)industrial development „imported“ into local urban development policies?



- ❑ Velenje: out of 10 valid strategies (youth, spatial planning, social, ...) ONLY one mentions industry (the tourism strategy)!
- ❑ Common WORDS in strategies (innovativeness, cultural industries, flagship cultural projects, green environment ...)
- ❑ Narratives of factory closure, decentralisation (Kajaani paper mill), narratives of ‚fighting back‘, phoenix from the ashes (Heerlen, Corby), narrative of shrinkage (Fieni)

Dominant narrative on (post)industrial transitions: (URBAN) POLICY

□ Common symbols in the townscape



Heerlen (regeneration through demolition)



Corby



Velenje

„yellow symbolizes the youth and optimism of the town and green the good quality of environment and responsible attitude towards nature“

Local narrative on (post)industrial transitions: the alternative view

1st common narrative: **THE GLORIOUS INDUSTRIAL PAST**

- ❑ Industry is connected with fond memories (*prosperous, successful, cosmopolitan ...*)
- ❑ Generational gap (*first-hand experiences vs. transmitted experiences of the young*)
- ❑ The pride of the industrial past is particularly told through specific town semiotics



Local narrative on (post)industrial transitions: the alternative view

2nd common narrative: **POSITIVE ASPECTS OF INDUSTRIAL DECAY**

- ❑ Deindustrialisation brought positive ,human' aspects: *comradery, volunteer work, Union movement, feeling of empowerment and unity in the local community*
- ❑ Dominant narrative: unemployment, crime, drugs ...
Local narrative: helping the neighbours, gender equality, positive aspects of ,smallness' or small-town culture, resilience
- ❑ Better environment: *new and cleaner jobs, technological innovations, ...*



Local narrative on (post)industrial transitions: the alternative view

3rd common narrative: **FEAR OF CHANGE & GROWTH**

- Past practices & old conventions are preferred
- Corby, Velenje: *rise of populist movements*
- Heerlen: *fear of gentrification with new culture-led investments*
- Fear of globalisation, fear of new foreign investors: *social responsibility of big industrial companies is endangered*
- Duality: *pride over multinationalism, cosmopolitanism vs. Radicalisation of certain social groups*
- Result: *out-migration of young educated workforce*



(Possible) conclusions

Conflicts in narratives

- ❑ The dominant narratives do not address the ‚average‘ industrial town: „places that don‘t matter“ by *Rodríguez-Pose 2019*
- ❑ Industrial towns are just as diverse as large urban areas
- ❑ Contradiction between the official image of the town portrayed to the outsiders and the internal image of its inhabitants

Future policymaking

- ❑ Real issues of industrial towns: *radicalisation of certain groups, resistance to culture-led development, attracting the young to work & live*
- ❑ Untapped potential of industrial towns: ‚smallness‘ and ‚industrial culture‘ = *re-/neo-industrialisation*
- ❑ (National & Regional) specific context



Want to know more or to be involved?

- The full report: Joint report on alternative views of (post)industrial development and stakeholder analysis (Jussi Semi (Ed)).
 1. Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SI) – Lead partner
 2. University of Eastern Finland (FI) – WP responsible
 3. University of Bucharest (RO)
 4. University of Amsterdam (NL)
 5. Social Life Limited (UK)
 6. The Young Foundation (UK)
- Get involved: Special Issue "Alternative Futures of Small Industrial Towns,, in Urban Science Journal

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