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The Role of Sociocultural Assets in the Revival of Industrial Towns

David Bole

Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU)

Sociocultural assets in theory ...

- Assets are non-replicable and territorially bound
- They are responsible for *'...establishing a specific "culture" with routines and conventions that make the economic system function without much fuss'* (Maskell, 2001).

(i) natural (resources),

(ii) infrastructural and material (buildings, infrastructure),

(iii) industrial (technology and firm competencies),

(iv) human (skills, knowledge),

(v) institutional endowments (rules, routines, norms, values and culture)

Trippl et al. 2020

Problems:

- Well known: industrial assets, (negative) institutional assets
- "the black box": the elusive soft factors in economic geography
- Focusing on limitations and less on opportunities

Aims:

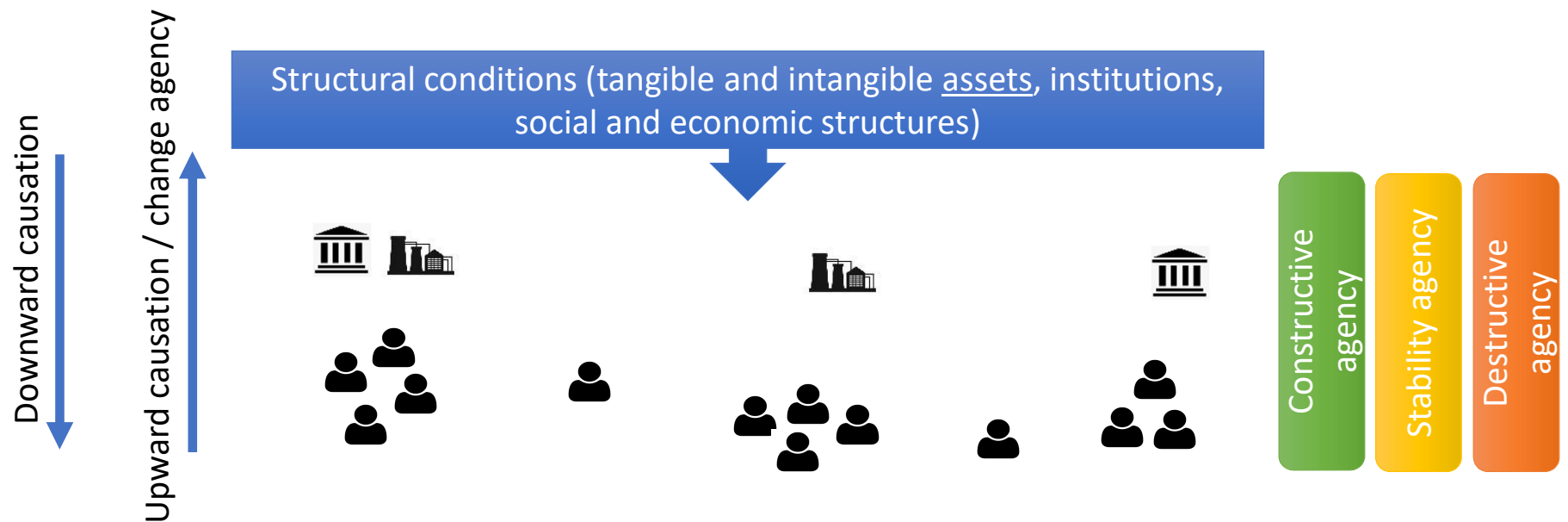
- To further unpack sociocultural assets in industrial towns
- To discover the causalities (assets vs. actors)

Looking for sociocultural assets – research design

How did sociocultural assets influence regional economic transformation (actors)?

- How are agents and soc.-cult. assets linked in practice?

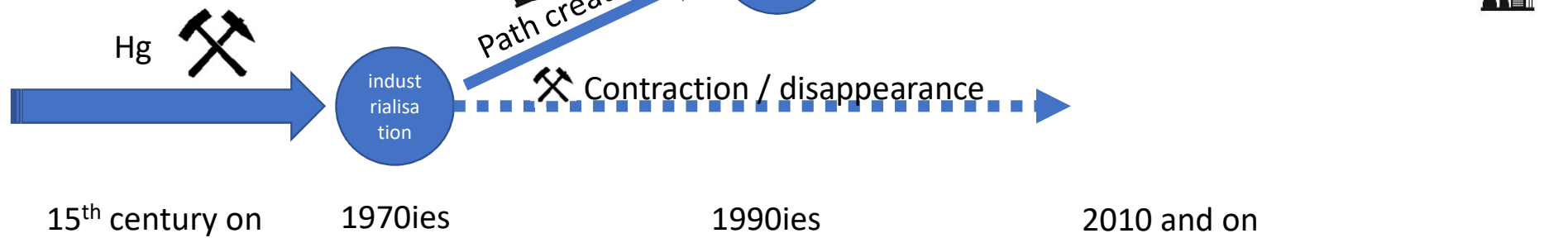
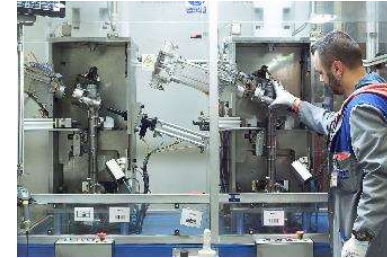
- *What were the capabilities / assets / traits of agents? What was the role of industrial traditions / history / experiences?*



Case study town: Idrija, SI



SKUPINA KOLEKTOR



Preliminary results: sociocultural assets

Example 1: RAPID INDUSTRIALISATION

(1977 / 1980ies)

- Seamless transition from mining to industry

Sociocultural asset	Influence on development
Traditional skills and knowledge, technological mind-set (ability to adapt to new tech)	Formation of “women’s factories” and quick adoption of new technologies (new industry)
Adaptability and loyalty of miners	No friction or strikes and great trust in leaders and organisations
Strategic thinking, risk taking (fearlessness)	Institutional entrepreneurs, place-based leaders steering new development

Constructive agency

Stability agency



Preliminary results: sociocultural assets

Example 2: FORMATION OF MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES (1990ies)

- Privatisation, internationalisation and exponential growth

Sociocultural asset	Influence on development
The norm of international orientation, openness	Internationalisation of companies, ease of mergers, take-overs
Strong local identity (industrial tradition)	Retaining local ownership of the companies, “soft transition” into market economy, no offshoring
Industrial values: equality, egalitarianity, solidarity	Social responsibility, equal social development, low unemployment



Stability agency

Constructive agency

Preliminary results: sociocultural assets

Example 3: DIVERSIFICATION AND TERRITORIAL “DETACHEMENT” OF FIRMS (2010 on)

- Financial crisis, hostile firm takeovers, related and unrelated diversification

Sociocultural asset	Influence on development
Narrative /myth of re-birth and industrial overdependence	Institutional push towards non-industrial activities (tourism, services)
Material industrial heritage	UNESCO site, other initiatives, tourism initiatives, diversification
Narrative of internationalisation, openness, “history of pragmatism”	Delocalisation or “detachment” of two multinationals, first signs of regional disparity / distrust

Constructive agency

Destructive agency



Deconstructing sociocultural assets

Material:

“Industriekultur”, buildings, landscape, infrastructure

UNESCO (mining heritage, landscape)

Non-industrial diversification

Norms, rules & habits:

“Soft” institutions, work-related norms and conventions, company cultures

Culture of openness, internationalisation, patriarchy & pragmatism

Leadership, entrepreneurship, internationalisation

Experiences, stories:

Industrial narratives / past experiences, legitimacy

Narratives or myths of the mining past (openness to the world); fearlessness, narratives of re-birth

Legitimacy for internationalisation and diversification

Values, identities & preferences

Cultural values, way of life and “doing things”, specific lifestyle, industrial identity

Loyalty, sense of justice & solidarity, strong industrial identity

Trust in leadership, social peace

Tacit knowledge & skills

Non explicit latent knowledge and work-related attitudes (resourcefulness, vernacular creativity)

Technological mind-set, strategic visioning, intricate manual skills, diligence / rationality

Quick technological adaptation / importation

Possible conclusions / further research

- Sociocultural assets play a part in transformations of industrial towns
 - They can influence / legitimise agent's capabilities (motivations, knowledge, power ...)
 - The causality is ambiguous: downward or upward or both?
1. The need to better understand sociocultural assets; “fuzziness” and interdependencies
 2. The need to better integrate them into economic geography (min.: context, max.: independent research object)
 3. The need for more comparative research to understand long-term development & sociocultural assets

Further reading:

"Places that don't matter? Socioeconomic transformation of industrial towns in Switzerland and Slovenia"

ARRS and SNSF project (SI, CH)

Heike Mayer, Arnault Morrison, Ottavia Cima (University of Bern)

David Bole, Maruša Goluža, Jani Kozina (ZRC SAZU)

Bole, D. 2021: 'What is industrial culture anyway?' Theoretical framing of the concept in economic geography. Geography Compass 15(7).



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