

**Heterotopia of decline:
disentangling associations between old industries and
social exclusion**

EVA NEDOROSTOVÁ, PAVEL RAŠKA, SILVIE RITA KUČEROVÁ,
MARTIN ZUBÍK⁷²

The term heterotopia has been widely used by geographers to describe multiplicity in meanings assigned to places and their relationships (Foucault 1971; Soja 1976). While such multi-layered meanings may be evident to urban researchers, their differences may appear blurred in public perceptions, which may be further politicized and affect the use of specific planning instruments.

In this contribution, we explore the heterotopic meanings of decline in the old industrial region of Ústí nad Labem Region in NW Czechia (Central Europe). In many sites in the region and from different public perspectives, two narratives are spatially entangled (i.e. related to similar individual sites) and associated with decline, thus creating a heterotopia discourse. First, old industrial sites narrating the past industrial success and recent decline linked to economic restructuring of the region are frequently depicted as places for future creative use, with policy and financial instruments centred on their regeneration. On the other hand, places of social exclusion are mostly perceived as sites that originated without a significant contribution of structural failures and despite they are officially designated by

⁷² Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem (Czechia).

Czech government, the attitudes to centre policy and financial instruments to manage these sites are ambiguous and often hesitant. Importantly, many of these sites are located in a proximity and causal links between the paths of their decline may be assumed. To open the discussion on this heterotopia, we provide an explorative study with a tentative typology of spatial and functional relations between the old industrial sites and socially excluded localities and we canvas in a detail the narratives connected to them and their policy implications.

The industrial histories of the Ústí nad Labem region are intertwined with fundamental social transformations, most notably the population transfers during and after the Second World War and later extensive resettlements by labour force for heavy industries. These events formed the basis of today's socio-economic problems.

The industrial history of the region has been highly defining the perception by its dwellers and incomers for years. In times of the 19th and the 20th century, the industry played a crucial role in the development of the region. Today, the remnants of the defunct chemical industries, breweries, sugar, porcelain and other factories that the region was built on leave behind parts of their areas that are derelict, condemned to decay. Although there are examples of successful brownfield redevelopments that changed the image of derelict sites, a majority is still waiting for its chance to accept the challenges underlined by economic shortcomings and property law issues.

The brownfield sites are commonly associated with deindustrialisation (Tang & Nathanail, 2012). Besides the contamination, the derelict properties attract crimes and socially pathological behaviour (Seddon, 2006). Poverty and social exclusion interrelate significantly, strongly supported by high local unemployment rate. Such people are excluded from their social networks and do not have enough contacts outside the socially excluded locality. It is characteristic that falling to

the social bottom is not connected to a complex problem represented by an accumulation of reasons (Agency for Social Inclusion, 2018).

It is still unclear, however, how these social issues attach to space and, in particular, if and how are they causally and spatially associated to the physical remains of the old industrial sites. We argue that the aforementioned hazed and/or generalizing perceptions of decline pose a key challenge for planners as the planning instruments necessitate detailed understanding to the interrelated causes and effects between industrial decline and social exclusion.

References

Agency for Social Inclusion. (2018). What is Social Exclusion? Department for social inclusion of the ministry of the regional development. Retrieved from <https://www.socialni-zaclenovani.cz/en/>

Foucault, M. (1971). *The Order of Things*. Vintage Books, New York.

Seddon, T. (2006). Drugs, Crime and Social Exclusion. Social Context and Social Theory in British Drugs-Crime Research. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 46, 680-703. doi: 10.1093/bjc/azi079

Soja, E. (1996) *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Blackwell Publishers, Malden.

Tang, Y.T., Nathanail, P. (2012). Sticks and Stones: The Impact of the Definitions of Brownfield in Policies on Socio-Economic Sustainability. *Sustainability*, 4, 840-862. doi: 10.3390/su405840

