

# Uneven spatial development as a logic to understand the deindustrialization and urban regeneration of European post-industrial cities

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## Abstract

In the late 1960s and for the next twenty years, a process of deindustrialization took place in many large European cities that would completely change their future direction. After this period of economic decline, some of these cities were again able to attract capital and return to cycles of accumulation. Thus, we intend to understand this process of deindustrialization within a framework of the logic of uneven development and its resulting consequences for urban space. We will try to understand how 'actually existing neoliberalism' acts within the parameters of creation and destruction, to make urban space a productive element. The objective is to analyze how capital flows install their spatio-temporal productivity to revive and rehabilitate post-industrial European cities, and reposition them in the world market system. We also identify the manifestation of uneven spatial development (USD) in different socio-spatial dimensions in order to understand the practical complexity by which USD itself is structured.

**Keywords:** deindustrialization; spatial production; uneven spatial development; socio-spatial dimensions

**Resum.** *El desenvolupament espacial desigual com a lògica per entendre la desindustrialització i la regeneració urbana a les ciutats postindustrials europees*

A finals de la dècada de 1960, i durant els següents vint anys, es va produir en moltes grans ciutats europees un procés de desindustrialització que va canviar el rumb d'aquestes ciutats per complet. Després del declivi econòmic, algunes d'aquestes ciutats van saber fer retornar el capital per tornar als cicles d'acumulació. Així doncs, pretenem entendre aquest procés de desindustrialització en el marc de les lògiques del desenvolupament desigual i les seves conseqüències posteriors sobre l'espai. Tractarem de comprendre com el 'neoliberalisme realment existent' actua sota els paràmetres de creació i destrucció fent de l'espai urbà un element productiu. L'objectiu és analitzar com els fluxos de capital fixen la seva productivitat espaciotemporal per fer ressorgir i rehabilitar les ciutats postindustrials europees recol·locant-les en el sistema de mercat mundial. D'altra banda, identifiquem la cristallització del desenvolupament espacial desigual (DED) en diferents dimensions socioespacials per tal d'entendre la complexitat pràctica mitjançant la qual s'estructura el mateix DED.

**Paraules clau:** desindustrialització; producció espacial; desenvolupament espacial desigual; dimensions socioespacials

**Resumen.** *El desarrollo espacial desigual como lógica para entender la desindustrialización y la regeneración urbana en las ciudades postindustriales europeas*

A finales de la década de 1960, y durante los siguientes veinte años, se produjo en muchas grandes ciudades europeas un proceso de desindustrialización que cambió el rumbo de dichas ciudades por completo. Tras el declive económico, algunas de estas ciudades supieron hacer retornar el capital para volver a los ciclos de acumulación. Así pues, pretendemos entender dicho proceso de desindustrialización en el marco de las lógicas del desarrollo desigual y sus consecuencias posteriores sobre el espacio. Trataremos de comprender cómo el ‘neoliberalismo realmente existente’ actúa bajo los parámetros de creación y destrucción haciendo del espacio urbano un elemento productivo. El objetivo es analizar cómo los flujos de capital fijan su productividad espaciotemporal para hacer resurgir y rehabilitar las ciudades postindustriales europeas recolocándolas en el sistema de mercado mundial. Por otra parte, identificamos la cristalización del desarrollo espacial desigual (DED) en diferentes dimensiones socioespaciales con el fin de entender la complejidad práctica mediante la cual se estructura el propio DED.

**Palabras clave:** desindustrialización; producción espacial; desarrollo espacial desigual; dimensiones socioespaciales

**Résumé.** *Le développement spatial inégal comme justification pour comprendre la désindustrialisation et la régénération urbaine dans les villes post-industrielles européennes*

À la fin des années 1960 et pendant les vingt années suivantes, un processus de désindustrialisation a eu lieu dans de nombreuses grandes villes européennes qui changeraient complètement leur orientation future. Après le déclin économique, certaines de ces villes ont pu faire retour au capital pour revenir à des cycles d’accumulation. Ainsi, nous entendons comprendre ce processus de désindustrialisation dans le cadre de la logique du développement inégal et de ses conséquences ultérieures sur l’espace. Nous essaierons de comprendre comment le « néolibéralisme réellement existant » agit selon les paramètres de création et de destruction, faisant de l’espace urbain un élément productif. L’objectif est d’analyser comment les flux de capitaux fixent leur productivité spatio-temporelle pour relancer et réhabiliter les villes européennes post-industrielles, en les repositionnant dans le système de marché mondial. D’autre part, nous identifions la cristallisation du développement spatial inégal (DSI) dans différentes dimensions socio-spatiales afin de comprendre la complexité pratique par laquelle le DSI est lui-même structuré.

**Mots-clés :** désindustrialisation ; production spatiale ; développement spatial inégal ; dimensions socio-spatiales

### Summary

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction: Industrial boom and fall</li> <li>2. Commercial geography as advocated reasoning</li> <li>3. The basis of uneven spatial development: the “seesaw” theory and spatial production</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Uneven spatial development in the socio-spatial dimensions</li> <li>5. Overcoming uneven spatial development: the return of capital</li> <li>6. Conclusion and reflection</li> </ol> <p>Bibliographical references</p> |
|---|--|

## 1. Introduction: Industrial boom and fall

The industrial revolution that began at the end of the 18th century gave rise to the industrial societies of the 20th century, creating large urban agglomerations all over the world. Europe, as a colonizing, extractive and productive great power, made large profits and catapulted many of its regions and metropolises into economic wealth. Although not reflected equitably in the living conditions of their inhabitants (and much less so in the colonies), this turned the cities into large commercial and trade centres. Thus, cities such as Manchester, Glasgow, Bristol, Turin, Marseille and Bilbao saw their populations and GDPs grow exponentially during the 19th century and a good part of the 20th (Plöger, 2013; Gómez, 2008). Certainly, it would not be until the 1960s and 1970s, and the start of a turbulent period of change, that those traditional industrial cities would be forced to restructure their productive, socio-political and administrative systems. The so-called deindustrialization process, also known, euphemistically, as the ‘re-composition of industrial activity’ – because in no case has their industrial fabric been restored – put into question what had been the norm for the previous hundred years.

Accordingly, we take post-industrial cities as paradigms of the most visible changes that global trends and capital’s thirst for higher rates of profit have caused on a local scale. The example of post-industrial cities makes it possible to advance the idea that urban changes, in many cases, are not the product of consensual decisions, nor are they solely the consequence of the over-accumulation of capital. The dynamics that have occurred in these cities show that space and forms of spatiality have a great influence on the future of uneven development and the future of cities (Harvey, 1985; Smith, 2006). In other words, it is a matter of showing that, although there is a certain degree of independence between urban developments, the renewal of urban spaces in post-industrial cities specifically is subservient to the global economic interests of capital, and generates unequal developments at different speeds.

Industrial cities, where large chemical, steel, naval or automobile companies were concentrated, had a lot in common. In addition to the widely known similarities, many shared a community life nestled in an uneven urban structure, with solidarity networks in precarious living conditions. This socio-spatial structuring would change with the de-industrialization process, explained as a ‘natural’ process of internal-national and external-global logics (Bell, 1976; Saeger, 1997). Internal causes relate to the peak of manufacturing production and its progressive decline in favour of the service sector, despite the fact that this transition does not guarantee a return to growth (Cohen and Zysman, 1988). Externally, the large-scale decline in manufacturing employment coincided with tremendous growth in trade between developed and developing countries, making North-South trade the main suspect in the search for the causes of deindustrialization (Škuflić and Družić, 2016).

These are the most widespread readings for understanding the process of deindustrialization. Next, we present a radical assumption that includes deindus-

trialization under the logic of uneven spatial development (USD). This aims to explain how the capitalist system uses space as a means of production, developing certain areas more, at the expense of others; and taking into consideration the value of political institutions, territorial alliances, social movements or the inhabitants themselves. In other words, the theory of uneven development explains how capital moves towards where the rate of profit reaches its maximum point (or at least towards where it is higher), and these movements are synchronized with the rate of accumulation and crises at all levels. The mobility of capital leads, on the one hand, to the development of some areas with higher profit rates and, on the other, to the underdevelopment of other areas where the rate is lower (Brenner, 2004, 2009; Cox, 2002; Harvey, 2003; Smith, 1984; Soja, 1989).

Our main objective is to demonstrate how USD manages the evolution of urban trends. Despite having been used mainly to explain differences in global geographic development, socio-spatial complexity requires us to take into account the different dimensions that are involved in the manifestation of USD on the urban scale. Although the mainstream discourse is that industrial production 'migrated' to increase the rate of profit, there are certain views that see space as the core of the problem. Thus, we also intend to verify how the urban dichotomies of centre/periphery, the management and institutional responsibilities of deindustrialization, and the new structures and commercial interests produce new spaces that perpetuate the exploitation of urban spaces as a commodity without taking the inhabitants of these places into account.

## 2. Commercial geography as advocated reasoning

For years, environmental determinism has been the paradigm used by geographers to explain the development of some areas and the underdevelopment of others. In this way, it would be natural geographical conditions that would determine to a greater or lesser extent the type, shape and location of human activities, i.e., the way in which space, and more specifically urban space, would be structured.

Under this logic, regional and 'commercial geography' (Chisholm, 1889) would understand industrial urban development as the result of proximity to various raw materials and means of transportation. This would explain the growth of Glasgow, close to the Lanarkshire coalfields and crossed by the River Clyde, or the development of Bilbao, close to the Enkarterri iron mines and with privileged sea access to Europe. However although this logic could serve to explain the growth of both of these cities, it would not explain the poor economic development of the African or Latin American colonies during the colonial era, because, although they had natural resources, it was the colonizing metropolises which benefited from them. Furthermore, transportation made time and distance a mere formality, producing the time-space compression explained by Marx and Harvey (2019); while modernization increased productive forces and the sophisticated use of raw materials, which today are the result of a large number of previous work processes.

That said, we must understand the context in which the rise of commercial geography took place, and somehow validate a part of it, in order to comprehend the beginnings of industrialization and capitalist urbanization, since the processes of concentration and centralization of capital and population (and the consequent division of labour), in a way were produced where natural resources were extracted and processed. But we should also take into account that it was there, too, that the greatest accumulation of capital took place, which over time would lead to the equalization of natural differences.

Thus, we foreground the differences that result from the ‘uneven development of productive forces’. It is interesting to note that the main asset of differentiation is no longer the raw material or nature itself (or its place of exploitation), but instead the prior work processes that this raw material requires to become a consumable product. Similarly, it is possible to admit that the development of productive forces will be greater in cities and regions where “capitalism inherits a territorial division of labour rooted in natural differentiations” (Smith, 1984: 104), since the greater the concentration of means, the greater will be the use of the social capacity of production. Therefore, we affirm that there is a tendency towards the spatial grouping of capitals in already established places of production. This first industrial development would lay the foundations for the prosperity of localized capitalism.

### 3. The basis of uneven spatial development: the “seesaw” theory and spatial production

The concept of uneven development is not new. In fact, one of the first to popularize the idea was Leon Trotsky in the 1920s, through the “law” of uneven and combined development. Trotsky saw historical processes as a dichotomy whereby, on the one hand, development occurred unevenly but this, fortuitously, created the necessary conditions for the emergence of something new and of higher quality. Although this reading might be over-optimistic, it would lay the foundations for later critical philosophers and geographers, notably the work on geography, space, time and capitalism of Antonio Gramsci and later Henri Lefebvre, who undoubtedly laid the theoretical foundations of the survival of capitalism through space. That’s how the most recent transcendental thinkers such as Milton Santos, Eric Clark, Edward Soja or Samir Amin grew up, the latter concluding with the need to tend towards degrowth logics.

Taking into account the fundamental thinkers and critical geographers that have been mentioned, we support the theories that Neil Smith and subsequently David Harvey have offered throughout their published work regarding the phenomenon of uneven development. Smith (1984) would go on to use Nikolai Bukharin’s embryonic logic as the basis for his theory of the “alternative movement of differentiation and equalization”. So, spatial differentiation, referring to the imbalance in industrial development between places, has two causes: on the one hand, the spatial concentration and social centralization (in

a few hands) of capital; and, on the other hand, the cyclical profit rate of some subsectors. Both favour the differentiated development of spaces. It should be noted that this differentiation occurs at various geographical scales, not only at the local scale.

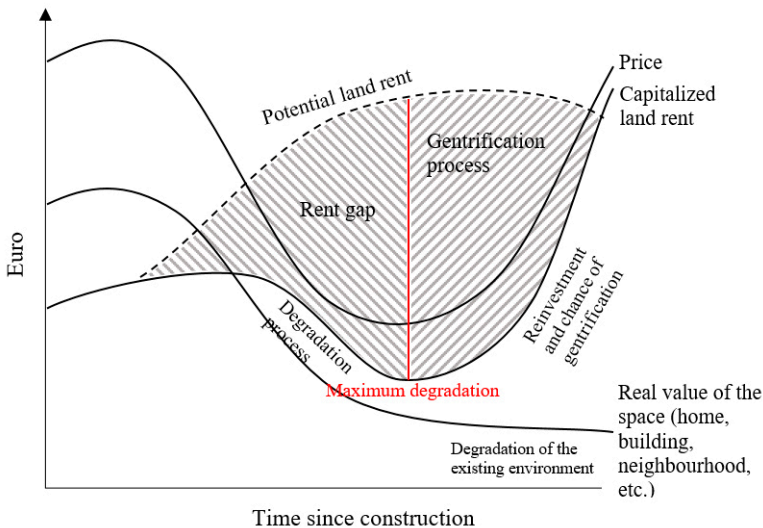
So, firstly nature, then the geographical division of labour and the pursuit of profit, and finally the accumulation of capital generate a spatial differentiation and an inequality in the development of geographical spaces. Thus, the city begins to play a major role in the development of modern industry as a centre for the production of knowledge (as a training point and a conditioning factor for the workforce) (Remy, 2000).

Similarly, Smith highlights the trend toward spatial equalization. Curiously, to the extent that the productive increase requires a greater productive force and fixed capital, it will require new spaces and the modernization of established ones, tending to equate less developed spaces with more developed ones, and moving accumulated capital from one place to another. According to Marcuse (1964), the equalization process involves the dwarfing of global space, minimizing geographic differences. The 'one-dimensional human being', therefore, would attend to a lowest common denominator which would be based on the equalization of conditions and the levels of production dictated by the development of technology and competitiveness.

This contrast (differentiation-equalization) reappears in Smith's swing theory (1984) or Harvey's creative destruction (2014). For Smith himself (*ibid.*), this theory is nothing more than the pendulum effect of capitalist exploitation. Following the primary idea of capitalism's co-dependency with external territories (Luxembourg, 1933) and observing the nature of capital, we understand that capital will be moved to where the rate of profit becomes higher, developing these areas while underdeveloping those areas where the rate of profit is lower. In this sense, the degree to which the resources that offer profits are unequally distributed will determine a certain natural principle of uneven development. If the resources are geographically differentiated, their appropriation will depend on spatial strategies to take control over them (Harvey, 2006). But contradictorily, it is the same development that will reduce the high rate of profit, since the increase in competitiveness, the reduction of unemployment, the increase in salary range, the appearance of trade unions and worker organizations, and in general, the regulation of production, will act as a brake on any returns from capital, with financial control appearing in the form of debt, in modern times, that will bring about depreciation of that capital. It is at this time that capital will move to the underdeveloped areas, exploiting their opportunities and their higher rates of profit. Thus, a see-saw movement will take place, through the continuous movement of capital between developed and underdeveloped areas. This could happen on all spatial scales. But Smith claims that it is on the urban scale that this pattern or principle of uneven development has been found most often.

In this way, industrialization led to the development of the central city and certain specific industrial zones, imposing a spatial division of labour (Massey,

Figure 1. Devaluation and re-valuation of profitable urban spaces for capital



Source: Own elaboration based on Smith (1979: 538-548) and Clark (1995: 1491).

1984). But due to the see-saw process and the subsequent decrease in the rate of profit in these areas, geographical abandonment and definitive de-industrialization occurred. After a period of progressive decline in the profitability of these areas, there would be an increase in the potential rent of land, or *rent gap* (Smith, 1979). This would imply a possible return of capital to the centre, to industrial areas and abandoned areas, initiating the process of redevelopment and occasionally gentrification, due to the well-known return of capital towards the second circuit of capital accumulation (formed of the finance, insurance and real estate and construction sectors), after the exploitation of the first (industrial) circuit (Lefebvre, 1970, 1974; López and Rodríguez, 2010; Stanek, 2011).

Similarly, Harvey (2006) takes the *Schumpeterian* concept of *Schöpferische Zerstörung* (“Creative Destruction”) and explains the localized and destructive over-accumulation crises characteristic of capitalist cycles as follows:

The most obvious contemporary example of such devaluation in the USA is Detroit. But many older industrial cities in all the advanced capitalist countries and beyond (even north China and Mumbai) have had to remake themselves [...]. The principle here is this: capital creates a geographical landscape that meets its needs at one point in time only to have to destroy it at a later point in time to facilitate capital’s further expansion and qualitative transformation. Capital unleashes the powers of ‘creative destruction’ upon the land. (Harvey, 2014: 155)

These processes of economic and socio-spatial restructuring are the means and at the same time the product of “spatial fixes”, which appear in order to



avoid such devaluation (Harvey, 2006; Jessop, 2006; Lipietz, 1996). The term plays on the different meanings of the word 'fix' in English. On the one hand, the literal sense of *fixation* refers to the lasting settlement of capital in a specific place. On the other hand, the more metaphorical meaning points towards the improvised and temporary *arrangement* or *solution*, based on spatial reorganization and/or spatial strategies, in response to specific crisis trends in capitalism, among which the above-mentioned deindustrialization and its consequences stand out (Lipietz, 1982; Jessop, 2006).

For several decades, the industrialization process entailed the consolidation of capital in certain European places and cities (literal spatial fix). But the over-accumulation produced by deindustrialization forced industrial capital to resolve the crisis through expansion and productive restructuring (metaphorical spatial fix) (Keucheyan, 2013). This solution would have dialectical consequences, on the one hand at an internal, national and regional level, and on the other, at an external or global level. First, the internal dialectic or solution required state or local and regional administration interventions, as discussed below. And, secondly, the external solution involved the external expansion of the capitalist system, in a form of imperialism, which created new productive spatial fixations. Thus, we could confirm that the new Asian tigers would become a new external space solution (Keucheyan, *ibid.*).

Ultimately, it would be about “the use of strategies for restructuring the space itself as a mechanism to create opportunities for added value” (Fransquesa, 2007: 125), making the city and its urban space a “growth machine” (Logan and Molotch, 1987), through both internal and external solutions.

Thus, we summarize uneven spatial development in post-industrial cities as follows: in the case of productively abandoned industrial enclaves, an urban emptying takes place, as well as a revaluation of the land through requalification to the need-and- desire of the real estate sector and the second circuit of capital, with the speculative purpose of obtaining profits, beyond any productive activity (Díaz, 2016). In this way, it would be confirmed that the second circuit of circulation of surplus value, that is, the one obtained through property rights and investments in fixed capital and referred to the production of urban space in capitalism, exceeds the first circuit of industrial activity<sup>1</sup> (Lefebvre, 1970, 1974). This process, extended over time, translates the slowdown in industrial production in the West and the global North into industrial investment in the East and the global South. After this dead-end in which space as a commodity loses exchange (and use) value on one side, and gains it on the other, the return of capital will begin when that space regains its profitability and rate of profit. This is

1. According to Harvey (1985b) this process would be called “capital switching” or “capital commutation”. On the other hand, Lefebvre would come to deduce, ultimately, that industrialization, as industrial organization and production, would be dominated by contemporary urbanization. In this way, industrialization and industrial capital, which were producers of the city, are being produced by urbanism itself.



why we affirm that capitalism annihilates space to ensure its own reproduction (Harvey, 2014).

'Solutions' or 'spatial fixes' would in this case explain how post-industrial cities have returned to prosperity by ensuring that capital has returned to the second circuit (belonging to fixed capital) and third circuit (belonging to social investments and R+D) of capital accumulation, in order to try and slow the crisis of deindustrialization. While this happens, other areas in the global framework are developing their economy through the first circuit (López and Rodríguez, 2010, 2013). This alternative process of oscillation, between differentiation and equalization, sustained over time, has also produced deep and continuous differences between the centres and the peripheries, since there is a correlation between what happens in one place and what happens in another, and there are always economic relationships that generate trends in population and production. One of the greatest empirical examples is that of the cities mentioned at the beginning, which suffered a collapse in their population and production growth after the decline of the industrial structure.

#### 4. Uneven spatial development in the socio-spatial dimensions

As we have seen, uneven spatial development is part of capital's strategy to obtain efficient and unlimited returns. This reflection leads us to the next point: as Weber (2002) affirms, it is all about understanding this process as something more than self-regulation of the market; we must understand it in its total geographic complexity. Thus, we must consider state structures and more especially, how the socio-spatial dimensions are organized, in order to understand the functioning and consequences of uneven spatial development.

The reproduction of uneven development and capitalist social relations produced a "social inequality blazoned into the geographical landscape" (Smith, 1984: 206). For this reason, Brenner (2009, et al., 2003) and Jessop (2009), refining and deepening the analysis even further, conceptualized USD as a "thousand leaves" (*millefeuille*) of different layers structured in four dimensions, leading to the TPSN analytical model based on the analysis of territory (T), place (P), scale (S) and networks (N) (Jessop, 2017). In this way, based on these dimensions, we will try to understand how the processes of socio-economic transformation in cities ultimately depend on the logic of uneven spatial development, and manifest themselves in different ways in the socio-economic dimensions of capitalism.

In reference to place, Brenner highlights what has been mentioned previously. First, he notes the horizontal differentiation within the cities themselves, due to industrial urban distribution characterized by functional residential segregation dependent on the spatial divisions of labour (Massey, 1994). The concentration of people, means of production and capital make the central areas primary places of capitalist accumulation and control over the means of production. The efficiency of spatial agglomeration in the exercise of political power and social control (in addition to a certain degree of cumulative causal-

ity in the location of accumulation derived from nearby production activities) makes regions and territories with a high degree of urbanization strategic places that favour the formation of USD and spatial differentiation. In this sense, the centrality that industrial cities had at the time is undeniable, also making their surrounding areas production and urbanization points. On the other hand, that industrialization would also deepen the urban-rural gap. At the same time, thanks to the colonizing accumulation process enacted by Europe, and the consequent exploitation and dispossession of the global South (Harvey, 2004), the differentiation between the global centre and the global periphery was deepened, continuously transferring value from the (sometimes precapitalist) peripheries, to those of the developed capitalist centre (Amin, 1985; De Sousa, 2009). According to Brenner, these three patterns of differentiation were restructured due to creative destruction, which destabilized USD at the interurban, urban-rural and global centre-peripheral levels. Finally, he emphasizes that place is the immediate battlefield to combat USD since there is deep-rooted resistance. Thus, the way in which USD is produced at place level is ultimately conditioned by social struggles related to capitalist creative destruction processes.

Regarding territory, we must understand territories as the spaces formed between the borders of states. During industrialization, state border regulation grew both inland (counties, regions, countries, etc.) and abroad (supra-state administrations or colonies), which required territorial infrastructures in various areas, whether peripheral or not. This meant the territorialization of political power.

The formation of borders and of territorial organization is closely related to the formation and advancement of USD. The fact of territorializing the state – or any other political institution – and of agreeing and imposing physical and geographical limits slows down the movement and free circulation of capital. Therefore, capital will always tend to invest in those areas with the best conditions of movement or infrastructure or with the highest possible rate of profit. Thus, uneven geographical development<sup>2</sup> is related to the state and institutional territorial structures themselves (Cox, 2002; Brenner and Theodore, 2002). This is why it would have different consequences in centralized states, with few regional borders, and in decentralized states, with autonomic borders and impediments to the volatility of capital processes. However, at local level it has its own consequences; the fact that industrial and post-industrial cities are close to or host useful infrastructures for the transport of people and goods, usually dependent on central governments, is an example of the importance of territorial distribution of power.

Similarly, political institutions can disturb and influence USD patterns by spatial fixes and through industrial policies, strategic investments, selective

2. The fact of referring to ‘uneven geographical development’ rather than ‘uneven spatial development’ simply refers to the breadth of scale and the territorialization of the difference. On the other hand, we consider that the fact of using the term “spatial” also emphasizes the radical vision of the problem.

industrial distribution, etc. This means that, like the dimension of the place, institutional territorial structures can become a field of political and strategic dispute (Cox, 1990). One of the major criticisms in this regard comes from Doreen Massey (2009), who explains that “in the United Kingdom, for example, it is quite possible to discern power-geometries in politics, in the economic sphere through the geography of the relations of production and distribution, and in the cultural formation” (p. 18). Thus, she blames the unbalanced centrality of London with respect to other British cities, which causes *unequal power-geometries*.

Third, we find scale as an arena based on a vertical hierarchical relationship of equals (local, regional, national and global, for example) (Collinge, 1999; Swyngedouw, 1997), where the imbalances produced by the territorial organization of capitalism itself are reproduced, but also fought (Smith, 1995).

As in previous cases, the progress and decline of industry also led to a restructuring of the scalar order of that time<sup>3</sup> (Jessop, 1998). In the first place, the urban and regional scales, the main concentrations of capital and labour, were repositioning, one above the other, in a hierarchical register of new socio-spatial forms, which later would see their position altered by deindustrialization and the appearance of other areas with greater influence. On the other hand, as mentioned above, the national scale was consolidated as a terrain of arbitrary mediation in capitalist growth processes (Smith, 1995). And finally, the global scale, understood as the ideal horizon in the capitalist consciousness, facilitated the expansion of capitalism to practically every corner of the world. It will be enough to recall the strategic role that the European institutions played in pushing for industrial reconversion programs, with the countries that already formed the European Economic Community able to move gradually, but others, especially the Spanish State and its northern regions, forced to comply with the required restructuring, causing irreparable consequences for the industrial structure in cities.

We underline that uneven spatial development influences and is influenced by scalar structures. In the first place, this is due to the scalar hierarchy itself, which facilitates, organizes and reproduces USD processes. On the other hand, when a scalar structure stabilizes over time, it tends to favour one of the scales over the rest; and in the same way, when it is destabilized, a re-scaling process occurs, altering the previous power distribution and reconfiguring the patterns

3. It is essential to point out that, in western industrialization processes, from the 18th century to the mid-20th century, each scale has been continuously relativized (Collinge, 1999). That is, during the beginnings of mercantile capitalism, there was a scalar equilibrium. But with the advance of trade and the agreements or struggles between territorial states, the national scale prevailed over the rest, consolidating during the 19th and 20th centuries. USD thus manifested itself on this scale. Today, in the era of global financial capitalism and commercial immediacy, it has produced a resignification or re-scaling of the national scale towards supranational and subnational scales (Brenner, 2003; Jessop, 2017). This new scalar architecture has caused USD to stop being configured in a single scale (Brenner, 2004; Jessop, 2000; Swyngedouw, 1997).

of USD. Finally, we must bear in mind that scalar organization is still a field of dispute for the agents involved in the regulation of USD, since to a greater or lesser extent it is influenced by both social and economic processes.

Finally, we come to networks (Brenner et al., 2003). Understood as sets of horizontal overlapped lines with different nodal points similar to an urban transport network (Brenner, 2004), networks are related and differentiated in a transversal or rhizomatic way (Jones and Jessop, 2010).

Like the previous socio-spatial dimensions, networks affect the processes and advances of USD. Networked business relationships and interdependencies (Castells, 1999) have been a fundamental element in the progress of uneven spatial development during periods of industrialization, which has favoured the concentration of capital in certain places and territories. Similarly, their reticular logic is also characteristic of the relations between political institutions of the state apparatus. This is identified with the emergence of urban entrepreneurialism (Hall and Hubbard, 1996; Harvey, 2006) and the promotion of competitiveness through practices that promote private investment, through different strategies of the new urban policies. As Jessop (2000) notes:

The nature of uncertainty and risk have been changing as market forces and the extra-economic environment for economic actors become more turbulent, more influenced by the strategic calculation of other actors, and more open to influence on a wide range of spatial scales. This puts a premium on forms of urban organization which enable economic actors to share risks and to cope with uncertainty through dense social and institutional networks. (p. 97)

These intergovernmental networks have served, as we have seen, to influence capital decisions in a certain way (state investment activities, provision of services, industrial regulation, etc.), and, therefore, influence or reproduce USD patterns. The appearance of different actors (with antagonistic interests) demotes democracy to more distant positions, which tends to open up deeper gaps in USD, and makes it even more difficult to change trends. Hence, we highlight that the possible internal structures of the networks can help in the manifestation of uneven spatial development.

That said, for comprehensive analysis we must take into account all the dimensions mentioned. We must understand socio-spatiality not only as a container for social processes (Brenner, 2009) but as a polymorphic structure of social space (Lefebvre, 1974), which influences and is influenced at the same time that it produces and reproduces USD processes. Limiting the analysis to a single socio-spatial dimension omits the abovementioned USD development patterns. Faced with the empirical evidence of the “hollowing out” or emptying of power of the territorial scale and of the states (Goikoetxea, 2018; Hardt and Negri, 2002; Sassen, 1996; Taibó, 2016), as well as the loss of the relative primacy of territory and place, we must consider re-scaling to higher and lower scales, and the primacy of scales and structures in networks or clusters of actors, as a new context in which uneven spatial development advances (Jessop, 2017). Brenner (2009), on the other hand, also points to uneven spatial development

as one of the indicators of the advance of “actually existing neoliberalism”,<sup>4</sup> which refers to historically specific regulatory frameworks in the territory, and the evolution of decisions taken in favour of the advancement of neoliberal strategies with the aim of facilitating freedoms for global capitalism through public privatization, financial deregulation or the weakening of trade unions and the strengthening of employers (Soja, 2000).

## 5. Overcoming uneven spatial development: the return of capital

As we have seen, the patterns of uneven spatial development manifest themselves in all the socio-spatial dimensions of capitalism. Industrialization and technological advance were the driving forces behind development and the spatial fixation of capital, but after the crisis of the former, capital disappeared from the old cities and industrial enclaves. This forced the territories to invest in attractive policies for capital investment. Thus, some cities and territories began their call-back through institutional fixes and by generating areas of opportunity.

According to Peck and Tickell (1994), the neoliberal alternative built from the crisis of Keynesian Fordism is too unstable temporally and spatially: “Business cycles swing ever more violently, while localised growth seems increasingly fragile and short-lived.” (p. 322).

Faced with this premise, the institutions, regardless of scale, have tried to regulate the system through institutional fixes. Against the idea that these arrangements have favoured the welfare state characteristic of Keynesianism, Jessop (1992) emphasizes that it has been replaced by the post-Fordist pattern of a *Schumpeterian* work state. In this sense, the state – local or national – would have strengthened its role in promoting competition, not only from national companies and businesses, but at all levels and sectors of the production system, as can be seen in the case of tourism and promotion through *city branding*. Therefore, institutional fixes, as patches of questionable durability, would focus their efforts on fostering institutional innovation in order to promote a structural competitiveness of their economies, dismantling the previous political frameworks with new models (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). This would certainly result in maintaining and reproducing the new and old patterns of USD, achieving the stability of one area at the expense of the instability of another, even when located in the same city (Jessop, 2016).

Thus, it is not that these arrangements were intended to contain or regulate the advance of USD, since in a way they would not even be capable of doing so (Dunford and Kafkalas, 1992). This is simply the logic followed by mostly local administrations with the intention of generating new spatial arrangements by creating good business environments for the return of capital and the repositioning of cities in the global market.

4. In a kind of reference to what Amin (1989) called “actually existing capitalism” in an almost satirical way, as opposed to the concept of “actually existing socialism”.

## 6. Conclusion and reflection

We can conclude by affirming that uneven spatial development is endemic to capitalism, due to the impossibility of achieving spatial equilibrium as a result of differentiation and the expansionist rational logic of accumulation, over-accumulation and its crises (Smith, 1984; Harvey, 2006). Starting from there, far from the paradigm of commercial geography, we show that geographic differentiation is mainly a product of the spatial division of labour, which generates “new sets of relationships between activities in different places, new spatial patterns of social organization, new dimensions of inequality and new relations of dominance and dependence” (Peck, 2000: 135), and so basically alters the balance in the socio-spatial dimensions.

On the other hand, we assume that trying to understand urban imbalances solely through uneven spatial development may be disingenuous. This is mainly because of the structure and inherent global character of USD, constituted through different socio-spatial dimensions and large institutional forms ranging from traditional states to transnational companies. However, USD is still an accurate tool for understanding the historical and inherited processes of deindustrialization and urban renewal within the framework of post-industrial European cities.

In fact, we have already seen how creative destruction works at the interurban level in post-industrial cities through networks of public-private collaboration, pioneered in cities such as Glasgow or Bilbao (Gómez, 2008) (where factors such as the abandonment of industrial land, the concentration of poverty due to the spatial division of labour or the lack of institutional fiscal tools play an important role). On the other hand, as places, post-industrial cities can play an important role in the global North and global South divide, due to the path dependence – promoted by nation states in Keynesian Fordism – that gives them a fundamental role in the concentration of capital (now in the real estate sector) (Roy, 2016). Finally, it should be noted that in post-industrial cities (where the centre has ceased to be industrial), the periphery and the rural area are the space for the occupation of new industrial technologies, e.g. science and technology parks.

We highlight the reflection on the “hollowing out” of the national state scale and the scalar restructuring that favours the role that post-industrial cities have today in the global economy (due to their aforementioned tendency to concentration, and because of an institutional commitment to urban entrepreneurship). It would be interesting to assess how this type of city, due to its characteristics of opportunity and centralization, can benefit in an easier way the creation of global cities, compared to other types of cities or urban trajectories.

Thus, following the discursive line of Massey (1984), we understand that the new patterns of USD manifest themselves at the interface between inherited socio-spatial configurations and emerging spatial strategies oriented to their transformation. Analysing USD more as a producer of differences between cities than as a product of these, we understand that, after the phases



of socio-spatial destruction caused by deindustrialization and neoliberalism, we are currently at the moment of creation guided by urban regeneration and urban entrepreneurialism (Telleria and Lekue, 2020; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015). Taking into account that spatial results are not simply the end of restructuring, but are also an active ingredient in subsequent rounds of industrial restructuring (Massey and Meegan, 1978), we demonstrate how the capitalist system, through USD, uses space as a means of production and as a commodity, mobilizing development from one place to another, beyond the logic of capital accumulation.

It is at this moment of creation in which phenomena such as touristification or gentrification appear, not only in old industrial areas or in abandoned urban assets, but also in areas close to the centre, sometimes old dormitory suburbs, where secondary circuits of accumulation are reproduced. Thus, it is striking how certain neighbourhoods in post-industrial cities such as Manchester (Northern Quarter and Chorlton), Bristol (the port area and Clifton Down), Marseille (La Plaine), Turin (Aurora and Quadrilatero Romano) or Bilbao (Bilbao La Vieja) become centres of cultural interest, major points of consumption (leisure) or rehabilitated places for the reception of tourists, as suggested in the cycles presented in Figure 1, and following the trends that affect all socio-spatial dimensions. There are several studies that present the situation in these places from the perspective of critical urban theory and that frame these dynamics in the context of the return of capital. In the case of Manchester, Peck and Ward (2006) see the transformation, and the commitment to the cultural industries by New Labour, as a mode of resurgence. This led to areas like the Northern Quarter, an industrially depressed working class neighbourhood, becoming a tourist attraction with increasing land appreciation (O'Connor and Xin Gu, 2010). Similarly, Harper (2016) points out how obtaining the European Green Capital award in Bristol produced the fourth wave of gentrification in the city, based on the use of ecology or the environment as a legitimizing tool for the process. The case of Turin is more curious (Semi, 2004, 2019): on the one hand, in the historic centre (Quadrilatero Romano) located in the poor neighbourhood of Porta Palazzo, a symbolic and discursive border has been built, separating the tourist area (of restaurants, shops and attractions) and high rental prices from the depressed and abandoned surroundings of Porta Palazzo. On the other hand, the semi-abandoned industrial zone of Aurora, with an outstanding anarchist tradition and humble identity, is being reoccupied by buildings and business headquarters that threaten the residents and the social structure of the neighbourhood itself. But perhaps the most paradigmatic case is that of Bilbao, where central neighbourhoods such as Bilbao La Vieja, a consumer space with low-value-added flows and a great predominance of low-income consumers due to its high rate of immigrants, are nevertheless multiculturally attractive, and are becoming ideal zones for socio-spatial transformation and gentrification.

Although these examples can serve to explain the return of capital, we must appreciate that when the capacity for return on investment is low, capital does



not have to come back, and it is likely that it will wait, move to more profitable nearby spaces or devalue space until it gets a higher rate of profit. This has happened with Glasgow, where the Keynesian settlement measures of the 1960s did not work (Robertson, 1998), and the Clyde Valley Regional Plan and its later equivalents led to the creation of the new towns, mobilizing the population and industry elsewhere. This explains why the “coexistence within and across western societies of both micro-diversity and macro-necessity has emerged because urban political systems are responding to a set of extra-urban transformations (economic, political, etc.) which provide structural and/or strategic constraints on local action.” (Jessop et al, 1999: 153)

This logic of renovation, rehabilitation or functional reorientation encloses a distortion of the urban space, whatever its economic efficiency, since it is no longer at the service of its inhabitants, but becomes an input for tourists and investors. They cause the displacement of residents in gentrified or touristified areas, preventing them belonging to the community and distorting the space built by themselves. In this sense, it is worth commenting that those colonized inhabitants must move to less profitable or underdeveloped places for the capital, thus continuing the spatial movement of urban destruction-creation.

Ultimately, the loss of industry in what today are considered post-industrial cities has produced certain structural changes that have caused processes of gentrification, and simultaneously reintroduced selected urban elements into the growth-crisis urban wheel (Ghertner, 2015). Wacquant (2008), in his study on “advanced marginality”, points out that in post-industrial cities the period of deinitialization has produced a concentration of the poorest in what he calls “neighbourhoods of relegation”, in reference to e.g. Parisian *banlieues*.

Faced with these dynamics that use spatial and urban production as a tool for uneven spatial development in post-Fordism, we believe it is necessary to rethink the local state and its regulatory capacities in the previously mentioned socio-spatial dimensions, claiming the power of these states themselves in the spatial strategies of regulation of urban spatial development (Jessop, 2016). In addition, we must take into account the global character and coordinating role of national and supranational authorities or states as actors relatively cut off from their most executive power. This can be translated into different public policies at the local level (or higher scales) that are based on the defence of the *right to the city* of Lefebvre. Thus, the solution probably lies in bringing decision-making closer and closer to the quiet and subordinate.

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