

## A step forward: metal-mechanic sector in Asturias facing the industrial restructuring, 1978-2000

### *Un paso al frente: el sector metalmecánico asturiano ante la reconversión industrial, 1978-2000*

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#### ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

Asturias was one of the most affected regions by the industrial restructuring in Spain as the impact of the implemented adjustments was especially strong on its three economic pillars: coal mining, steel industry and naval construction. Since that moment, the idea of Asturias as a deindustrialized territory has been steadily consolidating supported by the assumption that, as the result of the big traditional sectors' decline, the industrial activity was shut down. Nonetheless, figures seem to deny this belief.

This paper analyzes the evolution of the Asturian metal-mechanic sector between the industrial restructuring and the turn of the millennium, showing a revisited view of Asturias as an industrial wasteland. It also opens a new line of study about industrial regions in decline (whose economic development was mainly based on strategic industries related to the II Industrial Revolution), focused on those activities that manifested potential as viable options against deindustrialization.

The research is based on Input-Output analysis, enriched by additional quantitative and qualitative data. This approach helps both to rebuild the sector's path and to prove that its progress was possible due to the influence of a clustered environment.

The results confirm that the story of the Asturian metal-mechanic sector during the last quarter of the 20th century is the story of a dynamic and diversified manufacturing district, boosted by a long-term pattern of industrial development.

Since the mid-19th century, the agglomeration of processing activities around mining and metallurgy triggered the progressive generation of external economies, which ended up creating a clustered ecosystem. This scenario allowed the metal-mechanic sector to survive beyond the downturn of the steel industry, which had traditionally been both its main supplier and its main customer. The dynamics generated within the cluster allowed the different activities to benefit from the international markets' integration, and to reorient their activity abroad specialized in high-tech projects on demand. The leap was taken by a set of medium-sized companies that emerged in the hegemonic sectors' shadow, and that became from more to more involved in R&D initiatives by the hand of innovation actors.

For further research, a more holistic perspective about industrial restructuring could help to discover long-term patrons of growth for traditionally non-leading activities related to advance manufacturing and Industry 4.0. It would be interesting to delve into the Asturian metal-mechanic cluster's composition, and to evaluate its impact on the regional economy and its relation to global value chains. It could also be very illustrative to expand this research framework to other regions that showed a similar trajectory, so further comparative analysis can be carried out.

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