

THE SOCIO-SPATIAL REPERCUSSIONS OF THE CLOSURE OF THE ESPADRILLE FOOTWEAR INDUSTRY IN NOVA CRUZ – RN



<https://doi.org/10.56238/arev7n1-258>

Submitted on: 12/31/2024

Publication date: 01/31/2025

Isadora Duarte da Silva¹.

ABSTRACT

The process of productive and territorial restructuring of the footwear industry provided the spatialization of industrial establishments in the Northeast from 1970 onwards, transforming the socio-spatial reality of municipalities such as Nova Cruz in Rio Grande do Norte, Campina Grande in Paraíba and Santo Estevão in Bahia. The industries remain as long as they have found sufficient resources to expand their capital, since they do not credit conditions for permanence, they set out to relocate the industrial activity, causing the closure of industrial units. This paper analyzes the socio-spatial impacts of the closure of the activities of the Alpargatas industry in the municipality of Nova Cruz – RN. To develop the research, a qualitative approach was adopted, proceeding with the bibliographic review on the proposed theme, documentary research and empirical research, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a businessman, a worker and a municipal manager. The results showed that with the end of the tax incentives, its activities were terminated in Nova Cruz, corroborating the process of deindustrialization that generated structural unemployment, reduction in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), income and consequently crisis in trade with the drop in sales.

Keywords: Nova Cruz. Espadrilles. Deindustrialization.

¹ Master's student in Geography and Research in Geography (PPGE)
Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte
E-mail: isadoraduarte.prof@gmail.com
LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/7713165812522648>

INTRODUCTION

The process of productive restructuring of industrial activity that began in the second half of the twentieth century, characteristic of a new phase of the world economic system, legitimizes and favors the reordering of the productive process in Brazil, producing socio-spatial changes and, in particular, in the Northeast region, where the spatial object of this research was selected, namely: the municipality of Nova Cruz in the state of Rio Grande do Norte. This new phase of the world economic system is associated with a new model of accumulation: flexible accumulation, characterized by greater liberalization of the economy, by connecting places and calling them to contribute to the reproduction of capital.

In the territory, hegemonic agents use it for the interests of capital and companies. In agreement with Santos (2001), the territory is the object of the action of numerous companies, in which each one uses the territory considering its own objectives. For this use, to a large extent, the imperative is validated by the logic of capital, which, seeking new places, has contributed to the spatial emptying left by deindustrialization.

Deindustrialization is a process that consists of the closure of local industrial units, with a reduction in production and the number of industrial jobs (SAMPAIO, 2017). Currently, this phenomenon is observed, for example, in municipalities in Rio Grande do Norte.

According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the population of the city of Nova Cruz reached 34,269 people in the 2022 Census, which represents a drop of -3.44% compared to the 2010 Census, with a reduction of 1,221 inhabitants. Of this total population, the female population is composed of 17,558 people and the male population is composed of 16,711 people. One of the motivations for the reduction of the population of Novacruz is the search for job opportunities in cities that have a greater offer than the city of origin, such as the capital and metropolitan region. For Ojima (2023), the deconcentration of the population is a movement that occurred throughout the country, especially the capitals, in which the population of smaller cities seeks places with less cost-benefit and settles in cities around the capital.

The main activities in this space are agriculture, industry, services and public administration, configuring itself as a Local Center, according to the regions of influence of the cities (REGIC, 2018). The secondary sector of the city of Nova Cruz is mainly concentrated in the segments of food, clothing, civil construction, printing, lumber and handicrafts (COUTINHO, 2010).

The Alpargatas industry was installed in Rio Grande do Norte in the 1970s, in the cities of Natal, Santo Antônio, São Paulo do Potengi and Nova Cruz, integrated into the national/global market of footwear production. Since 2008, Alpargatas has closed units in the state, showing signs of exhaustion of production. In the city of Nova Cruz, this industry was installed in 1992 and ended its activities in 2017, a fact that contributed to the emptying of the consumer goods industry in Rio Grande do Norte.

Considering this, the general objective of the research is to analyze the socio-spatial impacts in Nova Cruz - RN of the closure of the activities of the Alpargatas industry. The specific objectives are: to understand the factors of attraction and repulsion of Nova Cruz for the installation of the Alpargatas industry; and, to identify the socio-spatial impacts in this city of the closure of Alpargatas' activities. To achieve these objectives, bibliographic, documentary, secondary source research and semi-structured interviews were carried out. Thus, the sample and references of the case study were defined.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the globalized world, with advances in technology, science and information, the territory gains new forms and new characteristics, contributing to a new way of reading it. Thus, the territory becomes even more important because of the potential to offer companies greater or lesser productivity (SANTOS, 1999). The use of territory is deeply linked to the advantages offered to large corporations to contribute to the reproduction and accumulation of their capital, being an important concept for work, since it is fundamental for the perception of the functioning of the globalized world.

With the informational technological development, the world experienced a period of intense technological innovations, which brought profound changes to the territory. In view of these innovations, we are faced with the technical-scientific-informational environment, which Santos (2006) states that in this period, technical objects tend to be simultaneously technical and informational, since they already emerge as information due to the extreme intentionality of their production and location. Thus, the territory undergoes the process of technification, scientification and informalization, for the author, with these processes the spaces mainly serve the interests of the hegemonic actors of the economy, culture and politics and are inserted in a global context.

In capitalism, the State and multinational companies are the actors that have the greatest power of action (SANTOS, 2006), that is, they use their strength to make

corporate use of the territory, according to KAHIL (2010, p. 478), it is the "hegemonic way of sharing space in contemporary capitalism". Although the hegemony of the State and the multinationals are not the only forces, they are the ones that "have the power to determine the tendency of all other forms of development of the process of material production of life in the current phase of capitalism" KAHIL (2010, p. 478).

The use of the territory is intensified with the introduction of engineering systems, which aim at the technification of the territories, as well as the dynamics between economy and society: population mobility, distribution of agriculture, industry and services, which configure the functions of a new geographical space (SANTOS AND SILVEIRA, 2011). Geographic space is defined by Santos (2006, p. 39) as "an inseparable, solidary and also contradictory set of systems of objects and systems of actions, not considered in isolation, but as the single framework in which history takes place".

The territory is used by everyone, such as people, companies and institutions. For Gottmann (2012), territory is historically used as a resource and shelter. In Santos' (2006) conception, territory is seen as a resource for hegemonic actors, in which it is a guarantee of their particular interests, such as greater production and an infrenent search for ever greater profits. According to the author, for hegemonized actors, the territory is used as a shelter, in which they seek to adapt to the geographical environment, as well as to recreate strategies that ensure their survival in the places.

The use of the territory happens from the expansions of sciences and techniques, in which they determine it as a new geographical environment (SANTOS AND SILVEIRA, 2011). It is from the additions of sciences and techniques that the territory becomes progressively equipped to meet the interests of hegemonic actors, in which they see the territory only as a resource in the search for surplus value. Thus, we can understand the territory used as the banal space, which for Santos (2006, p. 191), is the "space of all people, all companies and all institutions, capable of being described as a system of objects animated by a system of actions".

In this context, the event is responsible for transforming the system of actions and objects, attributing new meanings to them, being the vector of possibilities and a vehicle for facts to occur (SANTOS, 2006). They can be global or local, in such a way that a local event can have global repercussions, especially from the globalization process, where there is a greater connection of places. Thus, the global event of the productive

restructuring directly influenced the arrival of Alpargatas in the city of Nova Cruz, inserting it in the global production of footwear.

The city of Nova Cruz is part of the global production of footwear and the use of its territory is closely linked to the accumulation of capital by the major hegemonic actors. In Silveira's (2011) conception, the territory used is where factors of different orders collaborate to generate situations, in addition, the supremacy will always be of those who have the technique and the highest performance. In this sense, the territory always needs to meet the demands of companies, on the contrary, new places are sought. In this period of globalization, according to Santos and Silveira (2011), territories are increasingly being valued and devalued at a reckless speed.

With the process of restructuring the economy, marked by rapid changes in the economy, politics, labor relations, as well as advances in science and technology, "every point of the modernized territory is called upon to offer specific skills for production. It is a new territorial division, based on the occupation of areas hitherto peripheral and the remodeling of regions already occupied" Santos and Silveira (2011, p. 105). Nova Cruz "is called" to contribute to the production of Alpargatas footwear according to a local logic. However, the withdrawal of this production from the city contributes to the process of deindustrialization.

The first concept of deindustrialization that gains emphasis in the academic environment is by the researchers Rowthorn and Ramaswamy (1997), for them, deindustrialization refers to the secular decline in the share of industrial employment in the total employment of a country or region. More recently, Tregenna (2009), defines deindustrialization as a process of decline sustained both by the participation of industry in total employment and by the participation of industry in GDP. Oreiro and Feijó (2010) point out that an economy does not deindustrialize when industrial production is stagnant or falling, but when the industrial sector loses relevance in the generation of jobs and/or added value in the economy.

Deindustrialization progresses differently in developed and underdeveloped countries. In developed countries, deindustrialization is seen as positive or normal, due to the maturity of industrialization and urbanization, thus, the service sector had intense growth and now has higher rates in the share of GDP, however, industry continues to grow, with high investments, productivity and international competitiveness (CANO, 2014). In the underdeveloped countries, the same author called it early or negative, despite its growth,

the industrial sector suffered from a decrease in participation in world production, a drop in productivity, loss of external and internal competitiveness, etc.

The process of deindustrialization in Brazil occurs early or harmful, since it is an underdeveloped country. According to Cano (2012), 5 main factors are causing this process in Brazil:

1. The prevailing exchange rate policy, implemented from the Real Plan, "the excessively valued exchange rate fulfills, to this day, the role of price anchor, in which it receives the due "logistical" support from the practice of absurdly high real interest rates and the fiscal anchor." Cano (2012, p. 834);
2. Unregulated opening of the Brazilian economy, since 1989, in the Sarney government, and expanded in 1990, in the Collor government. The trade opening, together with the appreciated exchange rate, reduced the protection of national industries in the face of competition from international industries;
3. High interest rates in the country;
4. Direct investments from other countries;
5. Since 2007, the Brazilian economy has been experiencing a slowdown.

All the factors cited by Cano (2012) reflect negatively on the "growth rate, investment, production and manufacturing exports in the country, especially in a context of intensified global competition" Sampaio (2017. p. 387). The presence of new competitors in the world market, such as Asian countries, has caused challenges for the Brazilian industry in the face of high competition, especially from more modern and high-tech sectors. According to Belluzzo's (2005) assertion, the practice of not integrating high technologies in industry means deindustrialization and contributes to the expansion of technical progress.

In addition to the reduction in GDP and unemployment, Singer (1999) considers deindustrialization to be the cause of which de-salaried and informalization are intensified. In addition to these impacts, Sampaio (2017) reiterates that deindustrialization in developing countries has meant greater dependence and external vulnerability and that policies that aim to reduce regional inequalities, such as the National Regional Development Policy (PNDR), which face problems such as socio-spatial segregation, unemployment, income reduction and technical regression.

METHODOLOGY

The research was configured as a case study, as it is "an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined" (YIN, 2001, p. 32). According to Gil (2008, p. 57), the case study is "characterized by the deep and exhaustive study of one or a few objects, in order to allow their broad and detailed knowledge".

The bibliographic review was developed based on "the available record, resulting from previous research, in printed documents, such as books, articles, theses, etc." (SEVERINO, 2013, p. 106), in addition to websites, magazines and dissertations, about the guiding concepts of the research. Documentary research was also carried out in newspapers, with attention to the institutions of Rio Grande do Norte, seeking "the contents of the texts that have not yet had any analytical treatment" (SEVERINO, 2013, p. 107), to fill existing gaps.

The secondary data collection was carried out in electronic databases of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE/SIDRA, IBGE/Cidades), the Ministry of Labor (CAGED, RAIS) and on the Alpargatas website, with the purpose of characterizing the object of study and understanding the numerical indicators resulting from the process of emptying the industry.

The empirical research was divided into two stages: the first, with interviews from December 3 to 16, 2021, with a worker, entrepreneur and manager of the industrial branch in question; and the second, on January 15, 2022, for the *on-site* visit, with the scope of photographing the urban space of Nova Cruz and the space where the Alpargatas establishment was located. The interview aimed to collect information about the socioeconomic impacts in Nova Cruz with the closure of the activities of the Alpargatas footwear industry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Faced with the process of closing Alpargatas' industrial activities in Nova Cruz, the city went through the process of deindustrialization, and its departure not only from Nova Cruz, but from Rio Grande do Norte, is linked to the interests of hegemonic companies. Deindustrialization can be understood, as already noted, as the reduction of industrial work and the reduction of industry in the GDP (TREGENNA, 2009).

The relocation process can cause social and economic impacts for the city. Sinder (1999) highlights that it is possible to succeed in the de-salaried and informalization, that is, from the structural unemployment left with the departure from industry, workers can face a reality without wages or perform informal jobs without employment ties, consequently, there will be a reduction in income, lower purchasing power, among others.

That said, the impacts on the city, caused by the departure of Alpargatas, are analyzed, based on the results obtained with the interviews. Thus, they were questioned: "Unemployment is one of the greatest social wounds of the modern world, but it affects more than just the loss of the worker's income. In your opinion, what were the other impacts caused by the closure of Alpargatas' activity in the municipality of Nova Cruz?" The Worker (2021) pointed out that "[...] the city stops collecting, for sure, [...] and I see more the issue of unemployment. I myself still don't have a formal job. I work as a barber." The Entrepreneur and the Manager added:

[...] many people had to leave the city of Nova Cruz to work in other companies because they could not live without any income, they left here in Nova Cruz to look for jobs and commerce to this day is suffering from the farewell of Alpargatas [...] (ENTREPRENEUR, 2021).

In addition to unemployment, we have a supermarket that is a strong chain in Rio Grande do Norte, which is experiencing difficulties in our city, we can attribute the lack of these purchases, the lack of this acquisition of employees who represent families [...] this also affects those who sold the bottle, mineral water, bread and so on it affects [...] (GESTOR, 2021).

Analyzing the information obtained, it is understood that the main impacts mentioned above by the interviewees was the reduction in the income of workers, which affects purchasing power, which can lead to limited access to certain goods or services. In this sense, from the dismissals, workers will consume only basic materials for survival. The reduction in the circulation of money in the municipality affects, in addition to workers, commerce, which suffers from the low amount of sales, as stated by the Entrepreneur and the Manager (2021).

Another effect highlighted by Trabalhador (2021) was the collection that the municipality no longer receives with the departure of Alpargatas. This factor can be observed when compared to the share of the gross value added at current prices of the industry in the gross value added at current prices total (%) in the GDP of the municipality. In 2016, the industry's share in the GDP was 13.47%. In 2017, it was reduced to 5.03%, according to the database of the IBGE Automatic Recovery System (SIDRA) (IBGE, 2021).

Informalization was also one of the consequences, confirming the thesis of Sinder (1999). In this case, the worker himself is the example used by him, where, five years after his dismissal, he performed informal work to survive. However, informalization has some losses for the future, such as difficulties for retirement, since there is no contribution to social security, as well as losses, such as the absence of sick pay, vacations, among other benefits.

Finally, it can be seen that unemployment in the city is one of the reasons for the occurrence of migrations. The lack of formal employment repulses people to places with better living and working conditions. In this sense, the Entrepreneur (2021) states that, "[...] many people had to leave the city of Nova Cruz to work in other companies, because they could not live without any income." The migrations of Nova Cruzenses occur mainly to capitals, especially São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in the Southeast region, where there are cities that are configured as large urban centers, with a variety of jobs.

In the continuation of the interview, the interviewees were asked about the impacts on the tertiary sector: "In general, small cities depend on the tertiary sector, which aggregates the activities of commerce, services and, consequently, the local workforce. With the closure of industrial activity, was there pressure on this sector? How was the reaction?" The answers obtained from the interviewees were as follows:

It was very difficult for people in commerce, because it generated an income of almost 1 million, and this money was distributed here in our city. When this income left, it was missed by everyone, both by the employee who worked and by us merchants [...]. At the beginning of the month, we sold more, and when it closed, sales dropped and, consequently, I stopped buying some goods, since I wasn't selling. Then it generates a wave of consequences (ENTREPRENEUR, 2021).

Certainly, it caused a certain indignation, because they wanted to count on this investment in the municipality. This money would be spent in our municipality. This money was going to be generated within commerce [...]. Larger or smaller companies are also interconnected, one thing with the other. And money, when it circulates, everyone wins (GESTOR, 2021).

It was not very good, what happens, in all we had an average of 500 people working, that is, everyone there who received more than salary, others received salaries, so it is a very big impact for the city because it is money that no longer circulates within the municipality, that is, there were 500 families employed and all 500 left. [...] a snack bar near Alparagatas closed, the boys who sold snacks also felt the impact (TRABALHADOR, 2021).

In view of the statements, it is observed that the activity of the third sector that stood out more among the interviewees was trade, because with the drop in consumption, there is a direct impact on this segment. The Manager (2021) reported that "[...] the larger and

smaller companies are interconnected and the money, when it circulates, everyone wins", that is, the larger companies build a connection with the smaller ones and, to a large extent, when a company like Alpargatas withdraws from Nova Cruz, the smaller companies feel the impact on their monthly revenue.

However, the impacts are not only noticed in local commerce; region and the state feel the effects. In this sense, as the worker (2021) states: "[...] I stopped buying some goods, since I wasn't selling. So it generates a wave of consequences." In this way, we are having a globalization process where spaces are increasingly connected and, as Giddens (1991) asserts, local events influence distant spaces.

O Trabalhador (2021) highlights the impact on the commercial establishments surrounding Alpargatas. When the company was in operation, it caused an intense flow of people in the changes of schedules, since Alpargatas worked in shifts: 1st shift from 5:30 am to 2 pm; 2nd shift from 2 pm to 10:45 pm and 3rd shift from 10:4 pm to 5 am. Thus, at breakfast and dinner times and during times of transition, employees gathered at nearby cafeterias to eat.

With the departure of Alpargatas, these establishments were strongly affected due to the drastic decrease in customers. In addition, Nova Cruz has a tradition of selling snacks by people on bicycles, where they pass on the streets, workplaces and, as stated by Trabalhador (2021), they were also affected.

Finally, the interviewees were asked about the work situation in Nova Cruz: "The effects of this change fall on the real income mass of the population, since it is the basis of household consumption. What is, effectively, the situation of work in Nova Cruz, given the little dynamism of industrial activity?" Faced with the problem, the interviewees answered as follows:

Unfortunately, our city of Nova Cruz, today, is going through a very difficult situation in terms of jobs, as there are few companies that add some employees [...]. Today, we also see Nova Cruz, a city that is growing. Other companies are coming to the city of Nova Cruz, for example, Americanas, Pague Menos and other pharmacies (EMPRESÁRIO, 2021).

Unfortunately, Nova Cruz today is a city that lives without any production, because the city hall does not produce anything, the state does not produce anything. Who produces are the companies, the industries and the agricultural sector. So, Nova Cruz, today, does not produce anything. There was a year of drought, as we know, and the incentive was little from the public sector [...]. So, the exit of the factory only brought harm to our municipality (GESTOR, 2021).

The work situation now makes it very difficult, because the city's entrepreneurs are few. Those who do, already have their employees and don't want to put anyone

else. Those who became unemployed cannot work, because there is no vacancy. The company that occupies the space that used to belong to Alpargatas, on average, employs 34 people, that is, 34 families live supported by the space that previously supported 500 families [...]. Today, we have a large company installed in the city, such as Americanas, but it will never employ 540 people, that is, they will employ 2 assemblers, 2 receptionists, 2 salespeople, 4-6 people. The others cannot. It is a gigantic economic impact for the city (TRABALHADOR, 2021).

According to the considerations, similarities are perceived in the answers of the three interviewees, stating that the city of Nova Cruz is going through a difficult time in relation to work. Alpargatas was the industrial enterprise that added the most job positions in the city, and so far there has been no insertion of another company to integrate the workers who became unemployed after his departure. As stated by Trabalhador (2021), "[...] Those who became unemployed cannot work because there are no vacancies". This situation demonstrates the little industrial dynamism of the city, where, according to the CAGED survey, in 2019, it was home to only one industry in the footwear sector and three in the textile industry of clothing and fabric artifacts, which employs a much smaller number of employees than Alpargatas, according to Trabalhador (2021), on average 34 employees.

The Manager (2021) mentions that Nova Cruz remains "without any production, because the city hall produces nothing, the state produces nothing". In view of this statement, it is understood that the primary and secondary sectors have a smaller influence on the economy of Nova Cruz. At the foundation of the city, the agricultural sector, historically, presented itself as the basis of the economy. However, it declined with the outbreak of commerce and services offered in the city, and is currently impacted by the drought, affecting production and work. In addition, the city does not have a significant industrial production of a company the size of Alpargatas.

However, Nova Cruz, in recent years, has been the stage for the installation of companies such as Lojas Americanas and the pharmacy chain Pague Menos. The establishment of these enterprises becomes an expectation for the opening of new companies and a future of opportunities for all New Cruzians, who do not have the possibility of continuing in their place due to lack of jobs. In addition, the development of the work will influence the indicators of the municipality such as *per capita income*, level of education, since more people sought to qualify to occupy the jobs, reduction of the level of poverty, in order to increase the HDI of the municipality.

CONCLUSION

The footwear industrial reorganization is the result of the advent of the productive restructuring that occurred in the 1970s, with the intensification of competition on a global scale, especially from Asian products and the economic opening. Thus, the need was felt to relocate to places where industrial activity did not have so much economic representativeness, as well as a consolidated base in the municipality of a footwear union, which favored the accumulation of capital and reduction in production costs.

The Brazilian Alpargatas footwear industry was installed in the Northeast region through national policies, such as SUDENE, for technification and modernization of territories, as well as tax exemption and incentive programs offered by governments. From the spatialization of industrial activity, Nova Cruz was inserted in the world production of footwear, acting as a sewing center for the production of sporting goods, especially the Rainha and Topper brands, modifying the territorial division of labor and organizational of the municipality to meet the interests of hegemonic actors.

In view of the results obtained, it was observed that the installation of Alpargatas in Nova Cruz is linked to the supply of cheap labor, a privileged location, close to cities with industry of the same conglomerate, which facilitated the flow of products and reduced transportation expenses. In addition, the importance of the state for maintaining the operation of the industry through tax incentives, such as the exemption from municipal ICMS and donation of land for the installation of the enterprise, was verified. The presence of Alpargatas in the city caused, to a large extent, a substantial increase in industrial work, consequently there was an increase in income, reduction of poverty and of the IHD of the municipality.

However, with the economic crisis, starting in 2014, later intensified with corruption scandals due to the action of Lava Jato, Alpargatas broke the production of footwear in Nova Cruz. In addition, with the end of government incentives, they withdrew from the territory of Nova Cruz and their activities were relocated to cities in the state of Paraíba. His departure caused significant social and economic implications in the municipality, such as the reduction of industry in the GDP, impacts on the amount of sales in commerce, structural unemployment, migration of workers from the footwear industry to the Southeast region, which offer a variety of jobs and closure of establishments.

In this sense, it is understood that the use of the territory of Nova Cruz by the Alpargatas industry is strictly associated with the expanded accumulation of its capital,

seeing the territory only as a resource in the search for surplus value. Thus, when they find places with greater profitability, they begin the process of productive relocation, contributing to the industrial emptying of the site. Thus, it is understood that the city of Nova Cruz went through the process of deindustrialization, with the closure of the activities of the largest industry ever installed in the city, whose participation was important in the GDP and in the offer of jobs, and its departure from the municipality caused socioeconomic impacts for the municipality, people, commerce, services, among others.

Finally, this work is the beginning of a path to be followed academically, opening possibilities for a broader discussion about the use of the territory by Alpargatas in Nova Cruz, as well as in the cities of the state of Rio Grande do Norte in which it worked.

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