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***Ahmedabad, India: labour and the city, a continuous interdependence***

By taking as example the trajectory of an industrial city – Ahmedabad – and of its army of industrial and casual workers, my paper seeks to illustrate how the spatial and social development of the city is intimately connected with the changing conditions of its labour market over time. Within the span of a century, Ahmedabad experienced an extraordinary industrial development, labour conflicts and the rise of trade unions, then a slow and steady contraction that led to a collapse of its major sector – textile – in the 1980s/1990s. Within this picture, categories such as casual and formal, free and unfree labour, assume a greater significance if seen as part of a whole process that transformed the urban environment in the direction of a further marginalisation of its most vulnerable population.

Over the span of a century, the trajectories of migrant labourers coming to Ahmedabad showed that the entrance in the urban labour market meant by no means a path from casual to formal labour and from insecurity to security, but often forced individuals into forms of dependency – from contractors, from slumlords – that stuck them at the margins of the urban space and society. Although in its phase of expansion the textile industrial sector absorbed a great portion of the city's labour force, most migrant labourers remained employed in the informal economy for the whole life. The collapse of the textile sector exacerbated this situation, as masses of former industrial workers had to seek different sources of income as street vendors, home-based laborers or small entrepreneurs, with always great reductions both in income and social security. By looking at the interactions between labour and spatial development this paper encloses issues pertaining unfree and casual labour into the broader spectrum of informality within the city, as for increasingly large portions of society urban life is identified with a sense of helplessness and subjection.