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CUP reference: ILW1900028

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INTERNATIONAL LABOR AND WORKING-CLASS HISTORY

Volume and Issue Number: 0 and 0

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1

2 Historical cultures under conditions of 3 deindustrialization working group report

4

5 *George Steve Jaramillo*

6

7 *Melinda Harlov-Csortan*

8

9 *Stefan Moitra*

10 *Roberta Garruccio*

11 Q1

12 Q2

13 Crumbling smokestacks, shuttered furnaces, and abandoned quarries are all
14 striking representations of deindustrialization. These and other images con-
15 struct a discourse whose ideological undertones, far from confining them to
16 the realm of symbolic nostalgia, have profound effects on contemporary socie-
17 ties. In 2015, within the European Labor History Network (ELHN), a working
18 group on historical cultures of labor under conditions of deindustrialization
19 (working group) began to critically study and reflect on this nascent theme.¹
20 It grew from a small group of researchers to a network of academics across
21 Europe and beyond. Though the study of deindustrialization is not new, contem-
22 porary work offers insights into the continuing struggle over the meaning of clas-
23 sical industrial work and its loss, revealing unresolved social, cultural, and
24 political tensions.² Yet, existing representations of deindustrialization have
25 been criticized as “smokestack nostalgia.”³ In order to chart how we understand
26 contemporary industrial decay in our political, cultural, and economic climate,
27 the working group explores representations and more-than representations of
28 loss and regeneration in deindustrialized regions, primarily in Europe but
widening to include a growing global network.

29 This network leads to numerous processes of exploring these aspects in a
30 variety of ways. Furthermore, the annual meetings and upcoming publications
31 emphasize the global relevance of our proposed perspectives by involving
32 pan-European and non-European research projects. As such, in this “note
33 from the field,” we share our ongoing research findings from our annual meet-
34 ings and symposia since 2015, working toward notions of post-industrialization
35 focusing on three emerging themes: human interactions, landscape reinterpreta-
36 tions, and the politics of methods.⁴ This is concluded with a view toward the
37 future of our working group.

38

39 *Human interactions*

40 Our first point is the human interactions that occur through deindustrialization.
41 Our discussions dealt with the social aspects of these processes, namely the con-
42 tinuing struggle over the meaning of industrial work and its loss, and the

46 unresolved tensions between the top-down and bottom-up initiatives. It includes
47 understanding the “wounds of class,” which the de-industrial situation entails, or
48 the changes to “natural” environments and the resulting entanglements.⁵ Our
49 research explores these topics in a representational and more-than representational
50 manner that open up discourses between these historic representations
51 and contemporary landscapes, providing insights into processes of re-thinking
52 the industrial past.⁶

53 For example, by emphasizing or transforming the industrial aspect of the
54 landscape as in Katowice, Upper Silesia, the townspeople come to terms with
55 its socialist past, though attempting to reinvent its post-industrial future.⁷
56 Similarly, the contemporary utilization of these places points to numerous
57 new research questions, where the tendencies toward environmental issues
58 neglects serious social questions. The evaluation of the industrial past can
59 cause tensions between those that lived it and those that are currently remem-
60 bering, as is the case in Sardinia where the establishment of the Sulcis-
61 Inglesiante Geopark has placed at odds the contemporary environmental and
62 touristic needs with the memories of its mining residents.⁸ Furthermore,
63 diverse cultural aspects can also be analyzed, such as the leisure activities at
64 the time of industrial activities (brass bands in Great Britain), its cultural trans-
65 formation to diverse museums (in the Ruhr region) or special recreational
66 zones, or through their memorization via art (in Scotland). All these aspects
67 point to the fact that these areas are more than just human landscapes, not
68 just because neither the human representatives nor their social unit has been
69 disappeared but also because “their legacy” is mobilized in diverse ways.

71 *Landscape and territorial interpretations*

72 The second point is the concept of landscape and territory itself, moving beyond
73 traditional ideas and toward a relational understanding.⁹ This includes the
74 more-than-representational concepts disseminated through various narrative
75 forms that show how memory, identity, and particularly industrial cultures are
76 perceived and practiced. Themes from musical explorations of labor organiza-
77 tions, such as aural labored landscapes to the rethinking of gendered landscapes,
78 opened up new discourse in the way that deindustrialization is performed and
79 understood.¹⁰

80 This new discourse challenges the result of human and natural interaction
81 in which numerous heritage terms, such as historic urban landscape or cultural
82 landscape, are discussed by UNESCO. It also points to not just the social crea-
83 tion of the given landscape but the contemporary utilization of it. Such a terri-
84 tory can be seen as the relationship between nature and culture, not just people
85 and ideologies transforming the utilization of a given territory. Such research
86 can be investigated by diverse sources through tangible (artistic and monumen-
87 tal) or intangible (through traditions and interviews) ways. Similarly, at different
88 ages and socio-political circumstances, different aspects of this interconnected-
89 ness are emphasized and or evaluated as valuable to preserve. Accordingly,

sites can also be seen as different aspects of the evaluation process, which is why other transformation processes, such as gendered, audiovisualized, and heritagized aspects of the given territories, have been discussed as processes during the annual conferences.

The notion of territory also involves the question of ownership that has led to numerous possible research initiatives regarding actors. On the one hand, a general notion of heritagization on local, regional, national, European, and global (UNESCO) levels can be identified but many times it does not involve the notion of bottom-up initiatives or the sustainability of the given project. Diverse actors have to cooperate not just hierarchically but also professionally as, for instance, many times the former industrial territories are either polluted, so environmental specialists are needed for the utilization projects, or have dubious ownership status, for which legal representatives are necessary. These aspects would allude to the fact that the local/national specificities would prevent the option of a comparative or global research initiative, though numerous presentations of the former conferences would deny this assumption. Ownership varies if the given example is spread through a wide scope of territory or focused on a well-defined factory location; similarly different questions can be raised if the case study is located within an urban environment or at its periphery. These questions and aspects can yet lead to new comparative possibilities that are more related to the character of the given territory than its geo-physical location.

Politics of methods

Our final point looks at the politics of methods used in the research of deindustrializing communities or institutions that nurture, propagate, and manage these representations. Law claims that the methods used to gather narratives, data, and other forms of research are integral to the “making” of research.¹¹ This creates a particular “attunement” to methods that put to practice the theoretical talk of method assemblage, helping to concentrate on the landscape. The researched historical cultures can also point to diverse theories like Nora’s concept of lieux de mémoire, as well as to research methodologies, such as oral history or the analysis of visual representation.¹² One common denominator is the social and cultural handling of the process of deindustrialization and its aftermath from the viewpoint of interviewees and their communities. What becomes apparent in the comparative perspective is the range of discursive framing—from the traumatic memories of the British miners’ strike to the relatively pacified conflict strategies reflected in memories from the West-German coalfields.¹³ In many cases, the collective memory of industry is split between feelings of pride and belonging, on the one hand, and injury that needs to be redressed, on the other. This is particularly apparent for contexts in which industries have literally left behind a toxic legacy with regard to health and the environment, as in the industrial harbour of Venice, Porto Marghera.¹⁴ In many cases, interviewees, actors, and communities strive to be recognized and

legitimately inscribe themselves into the grand narratives from which they are often excluded. Practitioners of oral history, therefore, themselves become actors in the discursive conflicts of historical representation, be it in the museum, in archival research, local history workshops, or in the context of national heritage debates.¹⁵

Next steps

The study of deindustrialization offers insights into the continuing struggle over the meaning of industrial work and its loss, revealing unresolved social, economic, and political tensions. Overall, we reflected on the status of our growing program of events and the significance of our work within the labor history and broadening scope of our group. There are numerous new aspects to investigate in the future, especially in moving beyond the de-industrial and toward the post-industrial. In particular, the working group chose the theme of Industrial Heritage Activism: Memory Politics in Public Labour History to showcase at the third biennial EHLN conference in Amsterdam in 2019. At this time, participants will explore the critical turn in industrial heritage studies looking at relations, actions, and ideologies influencing how industrial heritage has been preserved. This is done by identifying movements, groups, and individuals that are instrumental to the construction, preservation, and reinterpretation of the materialities of the industrial heritage in its variety of forms (e.g., factories, landscapes of extraction, and infrastructures). Furthermore, new comparative research projects broaden the scope of collaborative partnership, including the urban landscapes of Duisburg, Germany; Sesto San Giovanni, Italy; and Newcastle, Australia, and the project titled “Sociocultural Change, Memory, Heritage and Identities in the context of Industrial Decline” that involves South American and Spanish researchers (introduced in Gijon, Spain, in November 2018). These international collaborations not only strengthen the existing research within Europe but also broaden our impact beyond European borders, opening up new discourse.

Furthermore, we are developing the more-than-representational themes by collecting selected papers into an edited volume for publication by 2020. Taking into account the developing work explored within this paper, the edited monograph explores emerging moments and nodes, where a landscape comes into being of multiple actors and as a more-than representational approach, which opens up broader perspectives on practices of rhetorical exploitation, discursive representations, and performative approaches of dealing with the industrial past, loss, and regeneration. Therefore, this provides insights into processes of re-assessing/re-imagining the industrial past, which is essentially future-related and is the accompanied processes of historical knowledge production and meaning making. The future of deindustrialization will continue to impact not only European concerns but global issues as well. Our ongoing network will generate useful entry points investigating new perspectives, making critical insights among the diverse critical

representations of deindustrialization in different media and contents, and moving these debates into the future.

NOTES

1. Wicke, Christian, and Erik Eklund, "Historical Cultures of Labour Under Conditions of Deindustrialization," *History Workshop Journal* 82 (2016): 293–98.
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15. Garcia-Ovies, Alicia, "La Memoria Asturiana, Grabada Para La Historia," *El Comercio* (2014). <https://www.elcomercio.es/culturas/201407/08/memoria-asturiana-grabada-para-20140708005257-v.html>.