

European Labour History Network Conference

University of Uppsala, 11-13 June 2024

WG "Memory and Deindustrialization" & WG "Workers, Labour and Labour History in
Modern Central-East Europe"

Conveners:

Melinda Harlov-Csortán (Apor Vilmos Catholic College, Vác), Stefan Moitra
(Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum), Tibor Valuch (Eszterházy Károly Catholic
University, Eger), Christian Wicke (Utrecht University)

Tuesday 11 June 2024, 16.00 - 17.30, Room H 317

Group Meeting **WG Memory and Deindustrialization**

Ethnic Identities and Industrial Memory

Wednesday, 12 June, 14.00 - 15.30, Room SAL 32.6

Panel 1

Chair: Stefan Moitra (Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum)

Organizing Team: **Welcome and conceptual introduction**

Ondřej Klípa (Charles University, Prague)

The defeat of memory. Anger and politics in a Polish lignite-fired power plant.

Martin Baumert (Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum)

„I'm a miner, who's more?“ Lignite Mining and Identity in East Germany

Thursday, 13 June, 11.00 - 12.30, Room SAL 48.2

Panel 2

Chair: Tibor Valuch (Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, Eger)

Jenny Hagemann (Serbski institut Chóšebuz/Sorbian Institute Cottbus)

Inherited landscape? Negotiating ethnicity and belonging within the heritagisation of the post-mining landscape in Lusatia.

Tereza Juhászová (Charles University, Prague)

Deindustrialization in a linguistically mixed periphery of Czechoslovakia during the second half of the 20th century

Janine Schemmer (University of Klagenfurt/Celovec)

Ethnic coding of industrial heritage. Exploring interrelated dynamics of shipyard work, its musealisation, and (industrial memory) politics

Thursday, 13 June, 14.00 - 15.30, Room SAL 48.2

Panel 3

Chair: Martin Baumert (Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum)

Irene Díaz Martínez (University of Oviedo)

Asturias and the Basque Country. The Omission of Industrial Memory in the Construction of their National Identities

Lachlan MacKinnon (University of Cape Breton)

“Don’t Forget Where You’re From:” Ethnic Identity and Industrial Memory in Whitney Pier, Nova Scotia

Group Discussion

Abstracts:

Ondřej Klípa

The defeat of memory. Anger and politics in a Polish lignite-fired power plant.

My paper deals with lignite-fired power production in the borderland triangle of Poland - (East) Germany - Czechia with a special focus on a power plant in Polish Turów. It juxtaposes the international entanglements of the three countries in the communist period regarding the brown coal power stations with the nowadays nationalist rhetoric related to this industrial sector, especially coming from the current Polish government. Based on both archival and oral historical research, the paper shows how the Turów plant's workers were integrated into the xenophobic and anti-EU rhetoric of the Law and Justice government and how it differs from other instances of workers' political radicalization in East Central Europe during the transition period. Finally, it deals with the strategies the workers approach their own memory of the past international cooperation, i.e., how they try to make it compatible with the current nationalist (and very often anti-German) hysteria. The main argument is that the Polish government abused the workers' (both of the plant and the attached coal mine) frustration from their loss of respect and social recognition and artificially escalated their fear of the future. By using an "external enemy", the government can steer workers' (and Polish society in general) attention away from domestic political problems. As a result, the workers struggle to accommodate the historical evidence as well as their own memory of the rich trans-border contacts and cooperation in the past with the current xenophobic atmosphere.

Ondřej Klípa is Assistant Professor in the Department of Russian and East European Studies at Charles University, Prague. He is the author of *Majstr a Małgorzata: Polky v továrnách ČSSR* (Master and Malgorzata: Polish Women in the Factories of Communist Czechoslovakia) (Charles University Press, 2021). Klípa's research focuses on state socialism, nationalism, migration, and ethnic minorities.

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Martin Baumert

„I'm a miner, who's more?“ Lignite Mining and Identity in East Germany

Mining is (almost) always linked to issues of ethnic, gender and class identities. Resource extraction is embedded in contexts of social, ecological, cultural and, due to labour migration, ethnic conflicts. This is especially true in case of the territories of the GDR. This small state was the world's largest producer of lignite, but also extracted raw materials such as copper, potash and hard coal. The image of the miner had a particularly prominent position in socialist society: Miners enjoyed high prestige and were economically privileged. Miners' Day was a fixed date in the mining districts with a fair-like character. Accordingly, the miners' milieu was also considered particularly loyal to the state. During the "Peaceful Revolution" of 1989 a majority of mine workers appeared to be siding with the state powers rather than with the opposition and subsequently became part of the "losers of history". In the post-GDR transitional stage of society, the mining sector was also one of the losers. Employment number in lignite mining declined from 138,831 in 1989 to 11,241 in 1999 (8 %). While a bracket of older, experienced miners was able to retain their positions, younger men and women workers were particularly affected by the job cuts.

If we look at the East German lignite fields today, however, we can observe contradictory developments: On the one hand, the regions identify themselves with the lignite industry and its value chain more than ever (completely ignoring the consequences of climate change); on the other hand, mining traditions and the associated cultural practices have largely disappeared. Given the omnipresence of industrial traces in the landscape – from curated and re-used mining sites to industrial wastelands – and in comparison with similar mining regions both in the East and the West, the absence of a heritagization of the mining past in the Eastern lignite regions is striking. This paper will focus on two comparative case studies, the Lusatian mining area – the settlement area of the Sorbs, a national minority heavily affected by lignite mining – and the Borna lignite field south of Leipzig. By looking at regional migration history, current political discourse about energy transitions and regional agents of identity-construction, the paper attempts to trace the question why lignite mining in Eastern Germany has not had an identity-forming effect so far.

Martin Baumert is a research associate at Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum. His PhD theses on East German lignite mining during National Socialism appeared as *Autarkiepolitik in*

der Braunkohlenindustrie. Ein diachroner Systemvergleich anhand des Braunkohlenindustriekomplexes Böhlen-Espenhain, 1933 bis 1965 (Berlin/Boston 2022). He is now working on an environmental history of East German coal mining as well as on the legacies of Fascism in the region.

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Jenny Hagemann

Inherited Landscape? Negotiating ethnicity and belonging within the heritagisation of the post-mining landscape in Lusatia.

Since the end of lignite mining in Germany is planned for 2030 (latest: 2038), the region of Lusatia is in transition and currently searching for a new self-understanding following its industrial past as mining region. This process is accompanied by a complex conglomerate of uncertainties (Giddens 1990; Baumann 2000) – arising from consequences of the German Reunification, the transformation of the former mining community and the regionally defining working-class culture associated with it as well as a radically reshaped landscape. Historicising perspectives – such as a current World Heritage initiative – are gaining in discursive importance, leading to a new conceptualisation of the post-mining landscape mainly as a practice of past presencing itself, functioning as a coping mechanism to face new uncertainties and therefore, becoming a new action arena for the negotiation of regional identity, belonging and power structures (Jamarillo & Tomann 2021). Taking into account, that in Lusatia lignite mining took place in the settlement area of the autochthonous minority of the Sorbs/Wends, this re-thinking of the post-mining landscape offers the potential for the inclusive handling of diversity, sensitising for the strong entanglements between:

- (I) pre-industrial land uses – predominantly implemented by Sorbs/Wends –, such as vineyards, fish-ponds, agricultural architecture, but also traditions, field names and legends, which are especially entangled with Lusatia's post-mining landscape today – yet are still mostly narrated as opposites, with the “industrial heritage” of the miners at the one side and “Sorbian cultural heritage” on the other. This perception is changing recently within the UNESCO-discourse of the region;
- (II) the planning and challenges of post-mining recultivation strategies, such as reforestation, post-mining lakes and, more recently, sustainable/renewable energies. In the recultivation discourse, the post-mining landscape is often a place of technological innovation and successful recreation of the former loss. Unanswered questions on resilient water management and landslides are challenging this perception constantly;
- (III) the transition of people, socio-cultural networks, cultural practices and settlement

structures due to resettlement as well as working migration. Since in Lusatia, most of the resettled villages are characterised by Sorbian cultural practices in past and present, this aspect is highly linked to the negotiation of minority rights, the construction of ethnicity and protest movements;

(IV) and other practices of memory – especially memorial sites, place naming (e.g. street names recurring to devastated villages) and commemorative activities, which are shaping the landscape intensively.

Since the study area was the most important mining region and energy centre of the former German Democratic Republic (1949-1989), this leads also to findings on the influences of changing socio-political conditions in the GDR as the former Soviet occupation zone and the Federal Republic of Germany of today.

Before this background, I would like to discuss a minority-sensitive concept of post-mining landscapes and the collective functions of the presencing of their pasts by taking up selected examples. Following Elka Tschernokoshewa and her understanding of cultural hybridity as an “as-well-as” rather than an “either-or” of belonging (Tschernokoshewa 2011) the paper will focus on the negotiation of minorised groups within the heritagisation of these landscapes.

Jenny Hagemann is a research fellow at the Serbski institut Chóšebuz/Sorbian Institute in Cottbus. She is leading the sub-project “Sustainable implementation of Sorbian/Wendish needs and expertise in the World Heritage process” within the research association “Strategy & management development for the World Heritage initiative for the Lusatian post-mining landscape”. Her doctoral thesis “Vererbte Regionen. Aneignungen und Nutzungen von regionalem Heritage im Wendland und in der Lausitz im Vergleich” (transcript, Bielefeld, 2022) was written within the framework of the research association „CHER: Cultural Heritage as a resource? Competing constructions, strategic usages and multiple adoptions during the 21st century“ at the Leibniz University of Hanover. As a cultural anthropologist, she has published several papers on the valuation of the past within regional contexts, especially the German anti-nuclear movement as regional heritage and the negotiation of minorised groups within regional heritage discourses. Her main research interests focus on regionalisms,

minorities in regional and industrial planning, cultural heritage and collective memory, as well as popular cultures.

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Tereza Juhászová

Deindustrialization in a linguistically mixed periphery of Czechoslovakia during the second half of the 20th century

The industrialization of Eastern Slovakia was one of the significant projects undertaken by the political leadership of Czechoslovakia after 1945. While some megalomaniacal projects by later socialist planners failed, others were highly successful. Enormous industrial facilities in Eastern Slovakia provided employment for many local residents and fundamentally contributed to the modernization of the entire peripheral region of the state. This was not limited to the development of regional centers like Košice but extended to small towns situated away from major routes. This presentation focuses on the small town of Medzev in Eastern Slovakia, whose German-speaking population was known for producing blacksmithing products. The metalworking industry in the town experienced several cycles of prosperity and decline. Local industrialization in the 1960s brought significant development to the town, but from the mid-1980s, local industrial production began to decline. In connection with the decline of the local factory, which employed a significant portion of the local German-speaking population as well as newcomers from the region, the town also experienced a substantial decrease in its standard of living.

Drawing from archival documents and oral-historical interviews, this presentation scrutinizes the deindustrialization trajectory in this linguistically heterogeneous small town on the Czechoslovak periphery since the 1980s. This contribution addresses the following questions: How did the process of deindustrialization unfold in a small town in Eastern Slovakia? How did various groups of residents, differing in terms of their native language, education, and gender, cope with deindustrialization? What role did the declining metalworking industry play and continues to play in the memory of the local residents? By answering these questions, the presentation will provide a bottom-up perspective of the deindustrialization of a small town on the Central European periphery.

Tereza Juhászová is a Ph.D. Student in Contemporary History in a Joint Ph.D. Program at the Charles University (Prague) & University of Regensburg. She is also the coordinator of the Malach Center for Visual History at the Charles University. Her research focuses on marginalized communities in Czechoslovakia after 1945. Contact: tereza.juhaszova@fsv.cuni.cz

Janine Schemmer

Ethnic coding of industrial heritage. Exploring interrelated dynamics of shipyard work, its musealisation, and (industrial memory) politics

The Shipyard Museum *Museo della Cantieristica (MUCA)* in the Northern Italian city Monfalcone establishes shipbuilding as a cultural heritage of the city and its surroundings. Although labour migration has been an essential part of the development of the shipyard as well as the city since the foundation in 1908, the exhibition does not elaborate on the heterogeneity of the people and workers involved. Thus, the institution marginalises a large part of the working community. This leads to the question for whom exactly this industrial heritage is made, and which actors are involved in the process. My contribution aims to approach the constellation behind these memory practices.

The *MUCA* opened its doors in 2017 and is located in the former accommodation for the shipyard workers which used to house mostly those coming from nearby Istria (in today's Slovenia and Croatia). The current permanent exhibition focuses mainly on technical achievements, remarkable ships, professional pride, and the sectors' importance for the growth and identity of the city. However, it rarely explicates the historical complexity of labour migration and the conflict-ridden development on site. Following on from this, the museum location is particularly interesting as the building is situated directly opposite the shipyard, where shipbuilding takes place to this day.

From the beginning, the shipyard built mainly military and passenger ships. While different owners and partial nationalizations followed over the decades, the shipyard has been operated by the Italian company Fincantieri since 1984. While a crisis in the 1980s led to the closure of many shipyards all over Europe, Fincantieri succeeded in reinventing itself by specializing in the construction of cruise ships. Due to this alignment, the entire structure and

organisation of shipyard work underwent a change, and with it the composition of the workers, who are in large numbers subcontractors hailing from both European and non-European countries. Today, migrants from over 80 different countries constitute about 20 percent of a total population of around 30.000 inhabitants. The most numerous group originates from Bangladesh, followed by Romania, Ex-Yugoslavia and Northern Africa. Such development also led to a renegotiation of the identity of the city alongside that of shipyard work.

As this development is faded out in the exhibition, it creates demarcations due to a one-sided account as well as mere fragments of the local labour history. Besides, the social consequences of the structural change of the industry are an issue local politics have discovered for its purposes. The right-wing populist party Lega, governing since November 2016, instrumentalises ethnic minorities working and living in the city for its political goals, and stigmatises them by considering them as a source of trouble as well as a threat to local order. The party's campaigning against ethnic groups contests the belonging of migrants to a local context and their professional positioning in the shipyard, while reinforcing urban polarization. In the talk, I would like to explore the musealisation process of shipbuilding and relate it to working-class memory, current labour market policies and populist identity politics.

Janine Schemmer is a cultural anthropologist and senior scientist at Institut für Kulturanalyse, Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt. She is the author of *Hafenarbeit erzählen. Erfahrungs- und Handlungsräume im Hamburger Hafen seit 1950* (München/Hamburg 2018). She has published widely on spaces of work, particularly shipyards, on memory and heritage of antifascist resistance and on the methodology of oral history.

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Irene Díaz Martínez

Asturias and the Basque Country. The Omission of Industrial Memory in the Construction of their National Identities

Asturias and the Basque Country, both located in the north of Spain, were, together with Catalonia, the focal points of the Spanish industrialization process, rooted in coal and steel. While the Basque Country faced the productive transformation process with relative success,

and in fact, is among the most prosperous and richest areas of Spain, Asturias is still trying to adapt to the post-industrial reality after the closure of the mines and the lack of success of the economic reactivation measures promoted since the nineties. These are not the only differences in regions that shared a prosperous industrial past. The strength of the almost hegemonical Basque political nationalism contrasts with the Asturian political frame, where nationalism has not managed to consolidate itself even as a minority political option. The same can be said of the language, if in the Basque Country, the vernacular is a co-official language alongside Spanish, in Asturias, the Asturian, which was the language of a large part of the working class, has not yet obtained the same legal status. Differences are even deeper if we take into account the traumatic past that the Basque Country continues to deal with as a result of terrorism.

What both share, for reasons that will be addressed in this text and which are largely related to what has been expressed above (different attitudes towards nationalism, different post-industrial trajectories, the burden of terrorism...) is a common blurring or erasure of the industrial past and especially of the workers' memory in the representation of national identities. While there's a growing interest in promoting the tangible industrial heritage for tourism (given the economic returns), there is notably less effort to enhance the value of the working-class culture associated with industrialism. A good reflection of this can be easily found in many of the industrial museums both in Asturias and the Basque Country that lack their own working-class identities and struggles, in which I understand is a policy driven "from above" that deliberately excludes the working class as a historical subject, blurring their industrial past and excluding it from their own national identities.

Irene Díaz Martínez is a Margarita Salas Researcher, Instituto de Historia Social Valentín de Foronda. Universidad del País Vasco / Universidad de Oviedo. A historian of Spanish labour history, she has also been an archivist and oral historian of the Asturian coal fields. She has researched and published on the labour activism during the Franco dictatorship as well as on the impact of deindustrialisation in Northern Spain. Her latest book is *Desindustrialización: Memoria, Patrimonio y Representaciones*, (Asturias, Trea, 2022), co-edited with Ruben Vega.

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Lachlan MacKinnon

Don't Forget Where You're From:" Ethnic Identity and Industrial Memory in Whitney Pier, Nova Scotia.

In October 2015, nearly 14 years after the final closure of the integrated steel works in Sydney, Nova Scotia, former steelworker and artist Keith Baldwin finished a large black and orange mural on the side of the Discount Dollar Store in the adjacent working-class neighborhood of Whitney Pier. The mural depicts a silhouette of the former plant, and the bottom-most section is adorned with the large words "Don't Forget Where You're From." Just around the corner from the mural, towards nearby Galicia Street and St. Mary's Polish Catholic Church, are the small, detached homes where hundreds of Polish and Ukrainian immigrant families made their lives from the early 20th century when they arrived in the city seeking employment at the mill.

Drawing upon immigrant letters and steel mill records, this presentation examines the material basis for Polish and eastern European immigration to the area, the resulting cultural and ethnic consciousness that intersected with industrial and occupational experiences, and the results of deindustrialization in the aftermath of the mill's closure in 2000. These threads are drawn together to reflect the lasting identity formations and collective experiences that the Polish community in the city experienced during the 20th century – including the establishment of the St. Mary's Polish Church and nearby Polish Hall as central community and cultural institutions. The continued vibrancy of these institutions and their intersections with the industrial memory of the deindustrialized landscape reveal aspects of what Sherry Lee Linkon describes as deindustrialization's cultural "half-life."

Lachlan MacKinnon is the Canada Research Chair in Post-Industrial Communities at Cape Breton University. His recent book *Closing Sysco: Industrial Decline in Atlantic Canada's Steel City* uses oral history to explore the intersections of political economy, bodily health, and environmental changes wrought by deindustrialization. MacKinnon's research relates to the history of capitalism and deindustrialization, with special focus on environment and ecology, labour and occupational health, oral history, and state policy.

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