

Call for Papers
Ethnic Identities and Industrial Memory
Workshop, Vác, Hungary
29-30 August 2023

The industrial past has been a source of national pride and local nostalgia. Since the emergence of industrial archaeology after the Second World War, spatial and social entities subject to industrial boom and decline have enjoyed very different kinds of historical representations as often informed by ideological motifs. Since constructions of industrial heritage and memory have been strongly connected to identity politics, including nationalism, the industrial past will also remain a contested domain in our uncertain future.

In the current political climate, a historical link is often drawn between the emergence of the populist right, post-fascism and xenophobia and the long-term consequences of deindustrialisation, that is, the disappearance of worlds of labour that have been constitutive to the cultural identity of millions in industrial regions around the world. As social inequality has been growing and traditional working-class organisations have lost on appeal, populism might be a new kind of “socialism of fools”, to borrow the contested expression of observers discussing antisemitism during the second industrial revolution of the late 19th century. Especially since Donald Trump’s promise to re-industrialise the Rust Belt to make his nation “great again”, historians, sociologists and political scientists have applied various angles to understanding the problematic relations between the (mis)management of economic change and the radicalisation of the electorate. This includes the “shock therapy” of post-communist transformation in East- and Central Europe (Ther 2019), the precarisation of work both in the East and the West as well as the longing for an “imaginary Fordism”, when national economies did not seem dominated by global markets, old gender roles favoured a male breadwinner, and it was possible for working-class people to be part of consumer society (Steinmetz 1994). Nationalist forms of nostalgia celebrating economic achievements and social security of the cold war era can now be mobilised to promise the return to a flourishing homeland that perhaps never existed.

Building on such interpretations, this workshop shall bring together scholars from across Europe to take a closer look into historical representations of ethnic and national identities under conditions of deindustrialisation from a comparative perspective.

The workshop will focus on the following leading questions:

- 1) How did long-term attitudes towards “race” and xenophobia play out in the process of deindustrialisation and its aftermath? If industrial societies have often been spaces of inward migration, they seem to have differed in their capacity to overcome ethnic divisions. In which ways has deindustrialisation aggravated such divisions or did the transformation process also contain possibilities to overcome older racialized identity patterns?
- 2) How has industrial memory/heritage been constitutive to or excluded from representations of national identities? Are there regional variations between (imagined) communities within nations when it comes to industrial memory politics, which might be at odds with broader national identity constructions?

- 3) How have ethnic minorities been (mis)represented in dominant historical cultures of labour under conditions of deindustrialisation? What are the blind spots in post-industrial memory practices and how can we open these up? Has working-class memory sufficiently accounted for the diversity of the work forces that have made post-war economic miracles possible?
- 4) How have minority ethnic groups coped with processes of deindustrialisation, also in terms of their own agency in collective memory, public history, and cultural heritage of the industrial age? How can we account for antagonistic industrial memories, when groups are excluded from or are competing over their place in history?

We hope to discuss these questions in a wide comparative perspective including conceptual approaches and empirical case studies from Europe, both in the former Communist societies and “the West”.

The workshop will take place at Apor Vilmos Catholic College, Vác, Hungary near Budapest. It is organised in collaboration with the working groups “Memory and Deindustrialisation” and “Central-East Europe” of the European Labour History Network. Main organisers: Melinda Harlov-Csortán (Apor Vilmos Catholic College, Vác); Stefan Moitra (Deutsches Bergbau-Museum, Bochum), Tibor Valuch (Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, Eger) and Christian Wicke (Utrecht University).

Basic accommodation (between 28 to 31 August) and some catering will be provided by the organisers, while transportation costs will have to be covered by the speakers themselves. Please email a summary of maximum 500 words as well as a short biographical note to memorydeindustrialization2023@gmail.com before 1 May, 2023. Accepted participants will be required to provide an extended draft of their presentation in advance of the workshop.