



Museum of Work, Norrköping. Photo: Peter Holgersson

WORKLAB GENERAL CONFERENCE

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Theme: Future Workers' Museums – Creativity In Times Of Crisis?

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WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 11

Keynote

Listening for moments of shared authority in archived interviews with Finnish migrant-workers

Malin Thor Tureby

Professor in History

Malmö University, Sweden

At the end of the twentieth century, Michael Frisch coined the term shared authority. Frisch focused primarily on the shared authority during the interview and constructing the interview narrative when he wrote about how oral history can be practiced and used. Frisch underlined the importance of protecting and preserving the interviewee's authority to interpret as well as describe the past. He argued that the working class, migrants, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized groups are often limited in the extent to which they are allowed to interpret the past or their experience, while researchers or people in other different positions of power are allowed to comment on or interpret the meaning of their experience. With the archived collection Migration Finland-Sweden as an example, this talk, will delve into the possibilities to hear or practice shared authority when collecting and working with (archived) oral history interviews and interview narratives in the future.

Session 1 10.35 - 12.05

Work In Progress: A co-creative approach to exhibit redesign

Tara Bursey

Executive Director

Workers Arts & Heritage Centre, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Experiences and understandings of labour and work are always shifting. How might an labour museum reflect the changing conditions in where and how we work, and lived experiences of work and labour today? How can cultural spaces practice process over permanence, positioning themselves as works in progress?

This paper outlines Work In Progress, the first of a multi-stage re-design of the "permanent" exhibits of the Workers Arts & Heritage Centre (WAHC), a labour history museum and multidisciplinary art centre that shares the history and culture of working people in Hamilton, a post-industrial city in Ontario, Canada. WAHC's mandate is to preserve and protect the culture of diverse workers, including both waged and unwaged work, and underrepresented ways of working, from care work and emotional labour to migrant work, sex work, and Indigenous conceptions of work such as land stewardship and water protection.

In 2019, the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre's exhibition committee, which included Board members, external advisors, and the former ED, began work brainstorming an approach to overhauling WAHC's permanent exhibits. These exhibits, scattered throughout small galleries on the first floor of our historic building, were over 10 years old and no longer compliant with accessibility standards. Furthermore, the exhibits represented the heyday of the Canadian unions until the mid-20th century, did not reflect contemporary issues and realities for working people, and represented an overwhelmingly white male industrial worker. WAHC understood the urgency to shift this narrative, and change the form and content of these exhibits to be more relevant and reflective of the population we serve.

An approach agreed upon as an experimental, participatory approach to exhibit building called *museum prototyping*. Pioneered by the Museum of Making at Derby Silk Mill in the UK, museum prototyping employs cheap-and-cheerful interactive exhibits that ask visitors for their feedback or input through hands-on, creative contributions and compelling question prompts. While a plan was drafted by WAHC staff for five interactive "prototypes" that ask people about their experiences about work, labour and social activism through collection objects and question prompts in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic and its related closures from 2020-2022 prevented the project from launching as planned. The project's launch in January of 2023 with dynamic group tours brought

many surprising findings.

Work In Progress has helped WAHC challenge the public's understanding of work and labour, while acting as a catalyst for inviting different communities back to WAHC as we move out of the isolation of the pandemic years, and has been a perfect outlet for welcoming people back to our space. This paper will outline the genesis of Work in Progress, our learnings from interactive tours to student and equity-deserving community groups, how principles of design thinking inspired the project, and how it positioned community members as active agents in the redesign of new exhibits scheduled to launch in the fall of 2025. We will also describe how the project helped us better understand the public's appetite for interactivity in museum exhibits, especially among youth and young workers.

Presenter Biography:

Tara Bursey serves as Executive Director of the Workers Arts & Heritage Centre, Canada's only labour history museum and multidisciplinary art centre. She is also an interdisciplinary artist, self publisher and arts worker. She has worked as Curatorial Assistant at the Textile Museum of Canada and Artscape Youngplace, and in a curatorial capacity for the City of Hamilton Tourism and Culture Division, Hamilton Supercrawl, Craft Ontario, the Art Gallery of Hamilton and the Wychwood Barns Community Association. Her artwork has been exhibited across Canada as well as in Copenhagen, Berlin and Eye, Suffolk, UK, and she has presented her artistic research in the areas of textiles and contemporary art at Symposia in Los Angeles CA, Sackville NB and Savannah GA, USA. Bursey has worked rigorously in the areas of programming and education, bringing arts education to first and second graders at her neighbourhood school, and curating exhibitions about zines, and professional wrestling. Recently, Bursey was appointed the 2022 Lassonde Artist-In-Residence at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, Canada.

Disrupting the Authorized Heritage Discourse: Unveiling the Under-Represented Narratives of Miners, Migrants and “Others”

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Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) has long been the cornerstone of our understanding of conservation principles applied to the materiality of heritage. The Ruhr Museum, located in the former Coal Washery of the Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site, represents industrial heritage following the principles of AHD. It holds outstanding universal value, representing the evolution of traditional heavy industries in Europe. Traditional representational methods have been criticized for selectively presenting industrial heritage narratives in the Ruhr region. They focus on aesthetics and leisure while neglecting the broader historical and social meanings, thus prioritizing certain narratives over others.

The formulated research question addresses the challenges and opportunities in reforming heritage practices to effectively and inclusively capture the diverse historical and social narratives of the Ruhr region's industrial past. This research proposes a unique approach to deindustrialization, viewing it through the lens of social theories. This perspective could prove instrumental in comprehending the role of transformations and mediations in shaping people's engagement with heritage, transcending the mere representational aspects. Thus, the research aims to explore the overlooked narratives of the key actors in the region's history, challenging the dominant discourse and enriching our understanding of the cultural heritage of the Ruhr. Delving into the affective and "more-than-representational" dimensions of the Ruhr post-industrial landscape poses a significant challenge to the traditional narrative. It offers a fresh perspective on narratives, practices, and social formations, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the region's cultural heritage.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a framework for interpreting the meaning of signs and symbols within the social and cultural context by shedding light on how working-class narratives and experiences can be interpreted over time from the perspective of ordinary people to an increasingly institutionalized practice of industrial heritage.

The permanent exhibition at the Ruhr Museum presents the region's natural and cultural history, from coal formation to the present-day Ruhr metropolis. Community efforts aim to include underprivileged perspectives in the industrial narrative and change historical culture, countering the prevalent nostalgia for the industrial past. This suggests a shift toward less-represented narratives that reconcile seemingly contradictory elements in creating post-industrial space.

The Ruhr region's industrial heritage has been a marketing tool to boost the region's economic position in a competitive economic environment. The nature and role of heritage agencies as institutions are crucial for breaking away from limited, top-down, highly managerial views of what heritage stands for. This emphasizes the need to understand how institutions function in the heritage process. Deviating from the established heritage narrative and embracing a more comprehensive method of representing the stories of miners, migrants and 'others' presents ethical implications, contributions, challenges, and opportunities closely linked to the complexities of heritage interpretation and representation. An authentic portrayal of the experiences of miners, migrants, and other underrepresented groups in heritage discourse can be achieved through participatory processes, digital storytelling, community engagement, and the inclusion of immigrant narratives in cultural heritage.

Acknowledgement:

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What is a workers' assembly hall without an assembly of workers? Capturing and communicating the (im)material heritage of the Workers' Assembly Hall in Copenhagen

Søren Bak-Jensen

Director

The Workers Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark

This presentation relays experiences from trying to preserve and raise awareness of a significant type of building in the history of the labour movement, the workers' assembly halls. On an international scale, these buildings are under significant threat from not just armed conflict and political opposition, but also from the difficulties in capturing and communicating a heritage value which cannot be reduced to either material or immaterial, but which must be understood across such a divide.

The talk revolves around the example of the Workers' Assembly Hall in Copenhagen, today the home of The Workers Museum. Opened in 1879, it is the oldest purpose-built workers' assembly hall in Europe aimed at supporting both administrative and public-facing activities of the Danish labour movement. But it is just one of thousands of halls serving similar purposes established by labour movements across the world, especially during the decades around 1900. The presentation puts forward the approach chosen to try and bring forward not just the architectural qualities of the building, but also the life and activities that gave the building its real significance: the meetings, the debates, the popular education, the concerts, and the parties. And, on a deeper level, the freedom, sense of hope, and pride experienced by the participants.

Innovative technical solutions, digitization, and recreation of past events for dissemination purposes were central components in trying to communicate the heritage value of the building to highly diverse audiences. A major restoration of main parts of the building along with an immersive layer based on sound and light were central efforts towards raising awareness of the unique heritage of the building, as an argument for future protection but also to create a stimulating and sensory framework for present-day reflection and dialogue on the future of work, welfare, and democracy.

With workers' assembly buildings and other buildings significant to labour history falling into disrepair or losing their value for communities in many countries, the presentation is intended as an invitation to discuss innovative ways in which to make the (im)material heritage of the labour movement accessible and valuable to wider audiences and thereby support the claim for preservation and protection.

Biographical notes

Dr. Søren Bak-Jensen is the director of The Workers Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark. As an active voice in the public and professional debate about the role of museums, he advocates a focus on the social and educational inequalities characterizing museum audiences and on the possible ways towards greater cultural democracy. During his 10 years heading The Workers Museum, the museum has made significant efforts towards greater inclusion of communities and in the role of educational activities. This has led to The Workers Museum being awarded the 2019 DASA Award by the European Museum Academy and the 2023 European Council Museum Prize. He

holds a Ph.D.-degree in the History of Public Health from the University of Copenhagen, and is the Vice-Chairman of the Danish Museum Association and the Chairman of WORKLAB – The International Association of Labour Museums since 2021.

Session 2 13.00 - 15.00

When the analog past is challenged by the digital present – the digital transformation of trade union magazines collection

Rasmus Ravnholdt Johnsen

Mette Kjær Ovesen

Librarians

The Workers Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark

As an institution of diverse collections, we feel the pressure of technological development. The materials we have collected, cataloged, and made available for research in physical form for more than a century are disappearing and being replaced by digitally created copies. This development has also changed the behavior and needs of our users. Researchers and students increasingly expect to access materials digitally, ideally from their own desks. As a research library, we have a long tradition of collecting trade union magazines and making them available for research. Our collection dates to 1869 and represents a treasure trove of historical sources that shed light on the history of the labor movement in Denmark. Today, these magazines are published digitally and are usually freely available on the associations' websites. However, as a research library, we still bear the responsibility of collecting and preserving these magazines, and we also aim to make the historical collection of magazines available in the same manner to meet the needs of our users. In other words, we are facing a significant transformation of our work.

This transformation presents several challenges related to collection and preservation practices, as well as economic and copyright issues. However, the digital transformation of the trade union magazine collection also opens interesting perspectives. Digitization and OCR technology significantly increase access to the material, resulting in a tremendous efficiency in its use. There is thus great potential to expand the use of the trade magazine collection and thereby enhance research into the history of the labor movement. Moreover, digitization eliminates geographic inequalities in access to the material.

The presentation will highlight some of the projects through which we are trying to address these challenges. Common to these projects is their foundation in collaboration with various external stakeholders, as we see cooperation as essential to accomplishing this task. With this presentation, we want to share our experiences from these processes and provide a preliminary evaluation of how the projects have succeeded and how they could have been approached differently.

Biographical notes

Rasmus Ravnholdt Johnsen is a librarian at the Workers' Museum in Copenhagen. He has substantial experience working with the collection, preservation, and accessibility of the history of the Danish labor movement across library, archive and museum collections as well as communicating the history of the workers movement. He holds a master's degree in history from the University of Copenhagen.

Mette Kjær Ovesen is a librarian at the Workers' Museum in Copenhagen. She holds a masters degree in Information Science and Cultural Communication and has various experiences from the library field. Mette has the main responsibility for the library's collection of fiction - 'Working-Class Literature'. Mette is working on an upcoming project on the use of literature in trade journals and its digitization.

Strategies for Digital Knowledge Transfer in the Context of the Changing Nature of Work in Technical Monuments and Museums with Demonstration Sites in Germany

Konrad Gutkowski

Research associate

LWL Industrial Museum, Dortmund, Germany

The changing nature of work poses significant challenges for cultural institutions such as technical monuments, industrial, labor, and technology museums in Germany. Demonstration sites that showcase historical crafts and industrial techniques—such as brick-making, weaving on historical looms, or casting—are highly dependent on knowledgeable individuals who can pass on these traditional skills. However, as these techniques no longer play a significant role in modern workplaces, fewer people possess the necessary expertise. The imminent loss of the last knowledge holders, many of whom work as volunteers and are nearing retirement or leaving due to age, exacerbates the challenges faced by these cultural institutions, particularly in the context of workforce shortages.

This raises the central question: How can the endangered knowledge of traditional crafts and industrial techniques be preserved and made available for future generations? The project "Digitizing Living Heritage – Preserve, Document, Share" (2024–2027), conducted by the LWL Museums of Industrial Culture and the LVR Institute of Regional Studies, aims to explore potential solutions through digital methods to document and make accessible this valuable experiential knowledge. The project will digitally capture the tacit knowledge of demonstrators and develop digital manuals. These manuals are intended to support the training of new personnel while also contributing to the long-term preservation of these techniques.

The presentation will explore and discuss three key questions:

1. How might hands-on knowledge be effectively documented and used for knowledge transfer?

The project considers how audiovisual documentation can capture the complexity of historical work techniques in selected cultural institutions. The idea is to create resources that allow museums to digitally convey these skills. Additionally, fostering networks between cultural institutions and craft chambers is proposed as a means of exchanging knowledge and refining these documentation methods.

2. What opportunities exist for smaller and volunteer-run institutions to leverage digital solutions for knowledge transfer?

One of the project's ideas is to develop a practical guide to help smaller and volunteer-run cultural institutions create their own audiovisual documentation, even with limited resources. This concept offers a cost-effective approach that could allow these institutions to preserve valuable knowledge and manage challenges related to the changing nature of work, such as workforce shortages, while ensuring the knowledge transfer continues despite the loss of experienced personnel.

3. How can the documented knowledge and techniques be made accessible in the long term?

Another potential approach is the creation of an open, freely accessible online database to store the digital manuals. This platform could provide a long-term solution for preserving and sharing intangible cultural heritage,

making the documented techniques available not only to museums but also to researchers, educators, and the general public.

The presentation explores and discusses these three key questions using the example of the project "Digitizing Living Heritage." It aims to highlight ideas for addressing the challenges posed by the changing nature of work, ensuring that the knowledge of the last knowledge holders—many of whom are volunteers and nearing retirement—can be preserved, made accessible, and transferred to future generations.

Bio:

Konrad Gutkowski studied History and German Studies at Ruhr University Bochum and the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. Since 2016, he has been a research associate at the LWL Industrial Museum. His areas of expertise include digitalization, knowledge transfer, and research projects. As a senior curator, he has worked on various projects and exhibitions such as „Sounds of Changes“, „Alles nur geklaut? Die abenteuerlichen Wege des Wissens“ (All Stolen? The Adventurous Paths of Knowledge), „Coding da Vinci“, 2FUTUR21“, Podcast „Factory Radio“ , and „Digitizing Living Heritage“.

Ellen Bömler studied Public Administration (B.A. 2013) and Marketing Management (M.A. 2018). From 2013 to the end of 2019, she worked in the LWL Cultural Department and was the project manager for FUTUR21 from 2020 to mid-2022. Since mid-2022, she has been a research associate for strategic projects and grant management at the LWL Museums of Industrial Culture.

3D digitizing of cultural heritage – what's the gain for industrial sites?

Marinette Fogde

Head of Research

Sophie Gudmann Knutsson

Curator

The Museum of Work, Norrköping, Sweden

There is a growing interest from museums, archives and in academic research to develop methods for digital preservation of cultural objects. It has become an increasingly urgent topic due to the destruction of valuable cultural heritage buildings and objects in times of war and climate changes in society. Furthermore, it offers opportunities to broaden access to culture, create new ways of experiencing and enhance innovation. The Museum of Work in Norrköping is a national museum with the aim to support local museums, called “working life museums” and industrial heritage in Sweden. To explore the possibilities of 3D technology, The Museum of Work, performed a pilot study of the 19th century mill Hävla. In the presentation, we will discuss the study in terms of technology, access, educational value and invites ideas for further research and collaboration.

THURSDAY DECEMBER 12

Session 3 09.30 - 12.00

Labour's Memory – an infrastructure for research in global trade union history

Silke Neunsinger

Research coordinator and associate professor

Swedish Labour Movement Archives and Library, Sweden

This contribution outlines the ongoing Labour Memory project, which will be completed in 2025. It highlights the project's distinctive interdisciplinary and international collaboration and its anticipated benefits for activists, scholars, archivists, and the general public.

Labour Memory makes annual reports available from trade union organisations within the LO sphere (Swedish Blue Collar Unions) from the 1880s to the present. This collection encompasses reports from local, regional (Uppland), national (Sweden), and international trade union organisations and is accessible globally.

The initiative is driven by the essential role of the labour movement in shaping Swedish democracy. Trade unions have been instrumental in establishing the welfare state and the Swedish labor market model, and their influence extends internationally. By digitising and making searchable the archives of these trade unions and the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, we can create a comprehensive and coherent documentation of Sweden's most significant civil association.

This collaborative project involves the Swedish Labor Movement Archives and Library, the Popular Movement Archives for Uppsala County, the Archiv der sozialen Demokratie in Bonn (Germany), and the International Institute of Social History (Netherlands). These archival institutions will collaborate to develop, preserve, and provide access to the database once the project is complete, ensuring ongoing sustainability and accessibility. Additionally, in partnership with the Department of Information Technology, Image Processing, the Department of Linguistics and Philology, and the Department of Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ABM), researchers will create tools for handwriting recognition, as well as methods for identifying words, phrases, and themes, while assessing archive users' needs for effective search and analysis tools.

Can museums be socially relevant without contributing to polarization?

Niklas Cserhalmi

Phd and Director

The Museum of Work, Norrköping, Sweden

In the new media landscapes, there is no way for media consumers to distinguish true from false with the senses. Source criticism and source trust will most likely be replaced by sender trust/ sender legitimacy. In that case individuals will choose a number of actors whose news they trust. Trust is thus a currency whose value will constantly increase.

In Sweden museums have the highest trust rates of all societal sectors. In the national surveys about trust rate, we have been at the top of the list in terms of public confidence for two years in a row. The police, health care and public service journalism are other actors that many people have confidence in, but museums are at the very top. ICOMs museum definition, the Swedish Museums Act and the Swedish Instrument of Government state that museums should contribute to society by, among other things, promoting the free formation of opinion and democracy.

When we are the social actor that enjoys the greatest trust, in groups that vote both to the left and to the right, we have an opportunity to work in a bridging and unifying way and thus counteract polarization. Do we also have an obligation to do so?

Can museums be community catalysts and create conversations about difficult topics that we as a society need to address without contributing to polarization? If so, how would this be done?

Notorious Name - Experiences from Risk Management at the Lenin Museum

Kalle Kallio

Director

The Finnish Labour Museum, Tampere, Finland

Lenin Museum, opened in 1946, can be described as the most hated museum in Finland. In its early years, the museum served as a symbol of Finland's new foreign policy. Museum became a diplomatic stage, projecting Lenin as a friend of Finland and a guardian of our independence.

All those years of propaganda, this Soviet showroom had its fierce opponents but after the collapse of the USSR, museum was surprisingly not closed like similar attractions in Eastern Europe. It transformed into a specialist of Soviet heritage and a camp attraction with a unique appeal. However, threadbare premises, outdated exhibition and economic challenges made transformation inevitable. In 2014, Lenin Museum was merged with The Finnish Labour Museum and completely renovated.

The new museum opened its doors in summer 2016. The focus shifted from Lenin's persona to broad exploration of Soviet history. While the museum's essence underwent profound changes, its name remained unchanged. It was a birthplace of Soviet Union where Lenin and Stalin, two famous villains, had met each other for the first time. Visitor figures were fine, customers happy and museum was economically stable.

Political risks realized in February 2022. Russian aggression towards Ukraine also affected reception of Soviet heritage. Finland re-evaluated its foreign policy, applied for NATO and closed its long eastern border. Finns wanted to boycott everything Russian and Lenin Museum seemed to be high on that list. There was a clear need to understand Russian history but at the same time, institution specialized on those themes was under pressure. On the very first day of aggression, museum started to call people to peace demonstrations. Museum was decorated with Ukrainian symbols, ticket sales included donations to Unicef, and museum proactively addressed the situation in all possible medias. Museum changed all practices that might be misunderstood.

In social media, Lenin Museum was mainly criticized by people who have never visited the place and those who had, luckily defended us. Ordinary Finns argued that the renewed Lenin Museum is not a temple of evil but worth to visit. With pre-emptive work, discussion eased and funders kept backing us.

Narrative of the museum still felt problematic. In Russia, authoritarianism, state-controlled war economy, oppression of dissidents and foolish propaganda reminded Soviet practices in many ways. Exhibition should not only focus on Soviet times to be relevant today. Title of the museum did not just resemble the content, it misled our audience.

Thus, the museum decided to rebrand itself as Nootti, The Museum of Finnish-Russian Relations. Nootti, meaning a diplomatic note, reminds Finnish audience of the Cold War era. With a new brand, museum tries to strengthen its professional identity, attract new audiences and engage with communities.

In my presentation, I will tell the story of the rebranding as it happened. I will analyse expectations of our audience, staff and owners and briefly describe the content coming Nootti Museum (open 15 February 2025). My presentation will be an interesting case study of political dangers, risk management and crises communication.

Kalle Kallio, aged 47, is one of the leading museum thinkers in Finland. He holds PhD degree in labour history and MA in education. Since 2005, he has worked as a museum director in The Finnish Labour Museum, which is a national museum of working life and social history. Kallio has been a board member of Worklab since 2008 and a long-standing chairman (2010–2021). Kallio teaches museum studies at his hometown university in Tampere.