

RADICAL MUSEUMS

2019 WORKLAB Conference

Date: Monday 11 November – Wednesday 13 November 2020

Venue: The Workers Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark

Session abstracts

Tuesday 12 November

Session 1:

Speaker: Pascal Majerus

Presentation: Building the virtual

It was once mainly in the realm of the workplace that we were confronted with sophisticated technology. That's no longer the case. We carry it around in our pocket. But how well do we understand it? Where it comes from? How it works? What we value? How it is made? Our exhibitions make use of interactive technologies, whether as tools of audience engagement or as museum objects. Can we go further in our exploration and use?

In La Fonderie, Museum of Work and Industries, the evolution of technology and the social context from which it arose, and the conflicts it engendered, are central to our story. That is why we focus on reclaiming active physical human experience to understand our history, but also to build our future. By actually creating real objects the visitor gets to understand materials, effort, the production process, to both appreciate the benefits of technology, while understanding their social reality. We believe that the virtual can be improved by a firm foundation in the real.

Labour museums touch both technologies and social change. They also provide an opportunity to actively involve audiences from different social backgrounds, ages, and life experiences. By mixing audiences, it helps to exchange knowledge and to build critical thinking on technology and its challenges. This paper will build on these questions based on experiences of working at la Fonderie. The fact that it is located in Brussels, a city polarised between a wealthy capital of Europe and a place with high youth unemployment, offers a crucible for investigating the various roles a museum can play in this context.

Speaker: Isis Luxenburger

Presentation: The Mediation of Industrial Culture. Industrial Film as Steering Instrument.

Industrial films are a valuable resource for research in the field of cultural studies as they are both mediator and part of industrial culture. Nevertheless, they also remain an interesting means of mediating culture, which can be instrumentalized by labour history museums in order to attract, entertain and thrill visitors and to provide starting points for subsequent discussions.

As a multi-layered mass medium, films can reach a broader public than e.g. print media and offers promising possibilities of usage and adaptation. Archival material can be used to create new films of different genres and the multi-layered nature of film allows for the insertion of several, different and even contrary messages touching, intriguing or even troubling the spectator, thereby creating a need of reflection and discussion - a need which labour museums can meet.

Many industrial films are endangered as their carrier materials decay in forgotten places, but these historical documents are worth being sought, saved and given a new life with the opportunity to revive history by moving images. The usage of existing and the creation of new industrial films (from archival and fresh material) can be a powerful tool of both mediation and steering. There are examples for both existing films, which can be employed in a museum context, and new films, which were created from scratch or around archival material according to the museum's intentions. These examples shall illustrate the potential of employing industrial films in labour and industrial museums as a steering instrument.

Session 2:

Speaker: Elli Leventaki

Presentation: The Industrial Museum of Syros Island, Greece

The Industrial Museum of Syros Island is located in the city of Ermoupolis, the capital of Cyclades in the Aegean Sea, Greece. It was established in 1986 but opened its doors to the public in 2000. It is housed in several industrial buildings near the current operating shipyards by the sea.

The museum aims to showcase the island's prestigious past, by presenting proofs of success, particularly in the fields of shipping and trading. It features machines, tools and documents from many industries including shipyards, boat building, textiles, printing, product packaging, town planning, loukoumi making and even the first electric car that was made in Greece in the 1970s. The narrative, however, seems to be constructed around the development of various industries by the island's wealthiest families, and almost every item is accompanied by the name of its owner or donor. It is emphatically pointed out that Syros has always been a very developed and rich island, where many ship owners resided and had their businesses. But is the island's labour history, just a history of benefactors? Who worked in these companies and operated these machines?

Museums have often been accused of glorification, subjectivity and a tendency to "bury" certain stories in order to highlight others. In this case, it is an image of previous glory and prosperity that the island wishes to remember and promote, and it does so by reproducing it nostalgically through this museum's narrative. Only

by reading between the lines can one see that there is more to the island's labour history and tradition than this outdated story.

Speaker: Sandra Schürmann

Presentation: Exhibiting colonial and global work – towards a participative approach

My presentation is going to give an insight into the developing process of exhibitions that address issues of colonial and global labour. There are two occasions that make these topics relevant for us right now: Firstly, we are planning to revise our permanent exhibition over the next years. Secondly, we are preparing a temporary exhibition on role of colonialism in Hamburg's industrial development.

The current permanent exhibition of the Museum of Work (from the mid-90s) in many ways reflects the ways how labour museums in general approached their topics at the time: While reacting to ongoing technological and social changes, it is dealing with lives of working-class people that were then ignored by established museums. This exhibition also includes a part about overseas and colonial trade that was co-curated with experts from what was then called 'third world initiatives'. The result was quite innovative at the time, but is outdated today – and we are now facing the question, how are we going to deal with the topic?

At the same time, our work on the temporary exhibition on 'colonial industrialization' raises questions that go far beyond the project itself: Initially, we thought we could just fill gaps in historical research. Meanwhile, we have come to realize that when we deal with a topic like this, we need to fundamentally reflect and rethink our own perspectives. We are thus faced with the challenge of overcoming eurocentristic biases, of offering and practicing participation of civil-society actors. Last but not least, in a time of an increasing polarization of public discourse, we are called upon as political actors.

Speaker: Jacob Westergaard

Presentation: Clever Hands – the making of a relevant exhibition

As part of its strategy, the Workers Museum in Copenhagen has an ambition to engage in various societal issues on work life, communities and democracy. One such issue is the current debate on the lack of skilled labour in the near future labour market. And closely related to this: the tendency amongst young people to choose academic educations on the cost of more practical, skill-based educations.

Therefore, the museum has embarked on a project called Clever Hands, that combines exhibition, learning activities and social events. The project set out to involve visitors in a discussion on the value of skilled labour and craftsmanship, both for the individual and society at large. The discussion centers around questions such as: What happened to the social status of being skilled? What counts as knowledge? What does it mean to be educated? Why is the brain and the hand treated as belonging to different realms?

The museum chose two main target groups for the project: a) Young people who are about to leave primary school and make an educational choice, and b) skilled workers whose work life the exhibition should represent. Neither group contains the typical museum visitor. On the contrary, they contain many non-users.

So, to attract these groups and make the exhibition relevant to them, they were included in the making of the exhibition.

The work with making an exhibition relevant is part of some larger questions that deal with how we make our museums more democratic and inclusive. This has not only to do with the topics dealt with in our exhibitions, but also the way the questions are addressed and the way we include the visitors we plan our exhibitions for. Making radical museums that are relevant for our visitors requires active engagement, openness and willingness to change course in the process. Reviewing the work with Clever Hands can highlight some of these questions.

Session 3

Speaker: Katy Ashton

Presentation: People's History Museum – the home of ideas worth fighting for – A case study

This presentation will draw upon PHM's recent, current and upcoming programme themes:

- Never Going Underground – the fight for LGBT rights – an award winning community curated programme (2017)
- Represent! Voices 100 Years On – marking 100 years since some women and all men got the right to vote (2019)
- Disrupt? Peterloo and Protest – marking the bicentenary of the Peterloo Massacre and inspiring protest today in the Protest Lab (2019)
- Migration – working with migrant and refugee communities in the aftermath of the EU referendum in the UK (2020)

I will talk about our successes and the lessons we have learnt, in response to the conference themes:

- The visitor as activist and co-creator
PHM has explored a number of different models of co-creation and co-curation over recent years and is passionate about empowering individuals and communities to help shape and deliver programmes at the museum. These programmes have been political in nature and have engaged people in reflecting on the past, to question and challenge the present, while making a real positive difference to the future.
- Starting a riot and becoming a campaigning museum
Programme themes at PHM have given scope for visitors to engage with the ideas that they believe are still worth fighting for today – to develop and create their own creative campaigns. PHM has its own manifesto which shapes its Business Plan and its objectives – and at the heart of this is an ongoing question about how far the organisation should go as a campaigning museum – examining the opportunities and the risks.
- The collections and practices of a radical museum
Crowd-sourcing content for each of PHM's programme themes has brought new and exciting material into the collection – but has also created challenge around ownership, ephemeral items and how to conserve modern day materials. Documenting the current and future campaigns for

equality and social justice is essential to PHM's role and has required re-thinking of policies and practices.

Speaker: Julie Rokkjær Birch

Presentation: Museum activism – why and how

- Museums have the superpower of public trust
- Museums are not neutral (and never have been)
- Museums can (and should) be agents of social change

The Women's Museum in Denmark is a museum of the cultural history of gender (40K visitors/year)

But it is also a social hub for gender culture and debate. The museum is a clear voice in the public media debate in Denmark, it has opinions, and the museum is aiming to be a gamechanger in society when it comes to gender, sexuality and equality.

I will give a short inspirational talk about why and how I think museums should take on the role as norm critic gamechangers and be: activists. I will argue that museums hold a responsibility to qualify the debate and that museums should start the debate as well.

POV: It's not naïve to want to change the world. It's naïve to think that we can go on in this complex world doing business as usual.

Wednesday 13 November

Session 4:

Speaker: Linda Nørgaard Andersen

Presentation: Museumsrebels: Because museums need to be disturbed

Education is more important than ever. It teaches children and young people formal skills and introduces them to the rights and duties of citizenship. It prepares them to get a job, but most importantly: to have a meaningful life. To educate and form future generations and fellow citizens is a task every community institution must take responsibility for and education is thus a key element for museums. The demand for relevant education and learning programs in museums will therefore never go away: nor the demand for them to be responsive to contemporary needs. European surveys rank young Danish students at the top when it comes to knowledge about democracy and their confidence in democratic governance. But democratic self-confidence of the same young Danes falls short of those levels. One in three young Danes feels unprepared to participate in democratic processes, and 48 per cent of senior secondary school pupils do not think that their opinions are worthy of attention. This is the paradox that since 2014 has formed the basis for educational programs at The Workers Museum in Copenhagen and created a new youth program:

MUSEUMSREBELS! A program where young people from all over Denmark is involved in developing exhibitions and events at the museum.

The presentation will give examples on how The Workers Museum has involved young people and young refugees in activities related to exhibitions and fostering a new learning culture through participation and outreach. And how educational programs can provide opportunities for the more isolated, vulnerable and marginalized member of the society to take part in activities and gain experiences, where they otherwise may not. The presentation will also reflect on how implementing learning goals, learning theory and outreach can develop new foundations for design processes for exhibitions and public programs. And what the museum staff can learn from working with rebels.

Speaker: Niklas Cserhalmi

Presentation: Museum Labs as methods and tools for empowerment

In this presentation I will talk about two recent activities produced by The Museum of Work aimed at creating laboratories for dealing with highly relevant and up to date problems; mismatch and fake news.

The Travelling Democracy Lab – tools to handle propaganda and fake news

The Museum of Work has produced a small travelling exhibition that will be shown at 30 libraries in Sweden 2018 and 2019. The exhibition gives tools to the audience to strengthen them in resisting propaganda and fake news in in the new media landscape and in the digital world. The Swedish Institute (which is a body responsible for the picture of Sweden abroad) has translated the exhibition to English and promotes it to Swedish embassies around the world. The international version of Democracy Lab was first shown at UN:s World Press Freedom Day in Ethiopia in May 2019.

The Museum of Work now applies for state funds to build a permanent Democracy Lab at the museum. In our application we strongly stress that we will be able to reach citizens via workplaces in cooperation with trade unions and employers organisations. And also via the Working Life Museums that are spread all around the country, also in places where state funded culture has hard to reach.

Job Lab – when abilities and skills, instead of class and sex, determines what we work with

The Museum of Work builds Job Lab as a permanent exhibition focusing on the unbalances in how young people make their choices in studying- and job careers. Sweden has one of the most gender biased work markets in the world. And class is in the same way an enormously important factor when it comes to career choices. For a middle-class child, it is almost impossible to imagine studying vocational educations or to work in industry. Also ethnicity affects the choices, but not as clear as class and sex.

The Museum of Work are building an exhibition where we will test young people and let them see their strong sides and their best abilities and match those with trades where those abilities will make it possible for them to make a good working- and everyday life.

Speaker: Ulla Rohunen

Presentation: Collecting and documenting global change

The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas has implemented several projects that record global phenomena in the local level. I will present some practical case studies. All these three projects relate to major ongoing global phenomena. Documenting and collecting today's activism and movements is important.

In the project "Redundant Heritage" museum recorded the experiences of people who were dismissed from their jobs and objects related to that experience. The project was implemented in 2018. Over 50 interviews and over 60 objects were collected in museum during the project. The project has also been published in an online exhibition. In the project, everyday stories also tell about global changes. Redundancies are an important part of post-industrial history.

Werstas has accumulated a collection of anti-racism since 2016 and has been actively involved in recording demonstrations. The collection also grows with the donations of individual people. Collection on anti-racism has been built and developed in collaboration with activists and researchers. Museum is collecting items that tell about anti-racist campaigns and movement.

Over the past few years, the Werstas has also documented several demonstrations against climate change. Some of them have been mass events of tens of thousands of people. The museum has been involved in recording these protests by filming, video and recording audio. Banners and other material from various demonstrations has also been collected.

Session 5:

Speaker: Paulo Fontes

Presentation: The Work and Workers Museum (MTT) in São Bernardo do Campo, Brazil: a failure dream

This presentation analyses the trajectory of a proposal to build the Work and Workers Museum (MTT) in São Bernardo, in the outskirts of São Paulo, Brazil. São Bernardo, the main hub of Brazilian automobile industry, is the birthplace of the so-called new unionism. It is exactly where former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva came to fame as a union leader who organized massive strikes that were decisive to the end of the military dictatorship in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 2011, the local city council decided to carry forward the idea of building a Museum of Work and Workers. After five years of debates, elaboration of a detailed conceptual proposal and the beginning of the construction of a specific building for the Museum, the proposal was abandoned in the midst of a strong economic crisis, accusations of corruption and political polarization that called into question even the need of a museum with this theme. The paper will present the conceptual proposal of MTT and how it was strongly articulated with recent developments in Brazilian labour history, among other disciplines. In addition to covering the various processes and forms of labour, the different arrangements of worker's public and political presence, the Museum was conceived as a space for celebration and reflection on the social experiences of workers. Therefore, strong attention was given to the working-class cultures. The presentation will also highlight the different responses to the Museum proposal. In particular the increasing hostility of politically conservative sectors will be focused. Finally, it will be analysed the reason for the proposal failure and the current perspectives for the MTT.

Speaker: Helene Aury

Presentation: From the Museum of living history to the project of a National museum of labour history

The history of the Museum of living history in Montreuil (suburb of Paris) is an example of the transition from a partisan historiographical to a scientific approach. When the communist conception of history went into crisis, the museum went into crisis too. It was necessary to imagine a new project which runs from his heritage but was connected to modern/ contemporary historiography.

The Museum was established in 1939 by an initiative of Montreuil's elected communist's representatives and of Eugen Fried, emissary of the Communist International. This decision took place in a moment where the French communist party began his entry into the society and political republican culture by connecting with the history of the French revolution. For communists, this revolution was not only seen only as a bourgeois revolution but also as a popular revolution.

After a reassessment in the eighties, our activity is now organized around labour history and we intertwine the history of work and the history of workers organizations, created by and for themselves during the 18th, 19th and 20th century. Actually we discuss to create a National museum of labour history which doesn't exist in France because this history has been eluded for political reasons. The challenge is to keep this topic relevant to people today, and we are working in this direction with our exhibition themes, conferences and educational activities.

We would like to intervene as a museum which has to deal with different challenges: to keep a modern historical and historiographical approach, to face social change locally and also in the society, to keep being innovative and creative with few resources.

Speaker: Kalle Kallio

Presentation: Old Radicals in Changing Societies

In my presentation, I will focus on history and future of labour museums. Labour heritage and labour history are ideologically loaded concepts, rooted in post-war Europe. In the beginning, labour museums widened the understanding of heritage and practically included workers in national histories, collections and exhibitions.

These institutions were making museums more accessible and generated touching nostalgia from the era of poverty. However, traditional working class communities were already permanently changed thanks to the emerging welfare state, school reforms, deindustrialization, globalization, growing consumption and mass media. Class-consciousness was replaced with individualism and labour movement degraded: trade unions are nowadays more like interest groups and socialist parties hardly move any masses.

Traditional idea of labour heritage was greatly valued by the baby boom generation. For example in the Finnish Labour Museum, many events and lectures are still crowded with these gray-haired enthusiasts. However, they won't be active museumgoers for long. This is the last generation with childhood memories of material scarcity, class conflicts and labour communities. Children of 1960s and later decades have a different perspective on history.

Labour museums have a problem. We look like old radicals in changing societies. However, labour museums are still valued institutions, which preserve an important part of human history. Moreover, inequality, insecurity and class conflict just look different in our societies – there are important stories to tell, many experiences to document. And at the same time, we have a huge variety of new themes waiting for progressive heritage institutions like labour museums.

I will give an overview of labour museums, their aims and outcomes in European museum field. Based on a new strategy for The Finnish Labour Museum, I try to outline some trends for the future of labour museums as radical institutions fighting for a better and sustainable world.