

## Industrial Nostalgia and Heritage Preservation

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**Friday's session on Industrial Nostalgia and Heritage Preservation** alerted us to the way that industrial decline has become the basis for historical interpretations. The role of professional heritage specialists was profiled as well.

Stephan Berger of Ruhr University, Bochum presented "Industrial Heritage Without Class? The Ruhr Region of Germany." He argued that a strong nostalgia for industrial history of the Ruhr was driven by social and community historians desire for preservation that began in the 1960s. Public funds have created a light and theatre show in the area (tourism is now the main economic engine of this once industrial area) that has erased histories of conflict, the role of Communist influence, and heterogenous identity in order to create a usable past that emphasizes openness to migration. Instead of encouraging debate, it have served to create a homogenous past that trivializes the nature of work and the losses that were part of the history.

Jana Golombek, who is from the Ruhr University, followed Berger's. She is investigating the role of industrial heritage in the rust belt in the US. Various memories of that industrial age are being generated. While the Heinz History Center tracks history from the top down, there are other places that amplify the dissenting voices in the area, efforts of preservationists, and the way that efforts were ongoing to track human costs of the loss of the steel industry.

Ruben Vega Garcia of University of Oviedo discussed the memory of youth of the industrial past in the Asturian coal mining region of Spain. There is a deep sense of loss and despair in the area, but the interviews he conducted show that the industrial past is factor of identity among Asturian coalfield youngsters. Young workers still attend to a heroic past, including memories of the general strike of 1934 -the largest proletarian uprising in Europe. Many of these students do not find a job for which they are trained and this makes the past more poignant part of their memories. Their sense of belonging to a mining community still resonates as they negotiate involvement in various movements. They also tend to convert the violent past into a source of pride. They find a way to convert that past into a residual feeling of belonging.

Marion Fontaine's presentation (University of Lille, but presented By Jana Golombek due to Fontaine's absence) also dealt with a mining area, this time in the de Lewarde area of France, where most of the mines have closed. The nostalgic use of these areas has been a political football. The Communist Party valorized the miners when they were seen as the base for socialist transformation. But with the decline of mining and its extinction was fodder for the manipulation of memory by the extreme right who sought to preserve and romanticize the memory of miners. The shock of pit closures gradually led to a shift toward tourism history. Whereas the miners personified the future of the working class, these working class are now seen as a dangerous.

Another conclusion of the panel was that the listing of these sites as world heritage sites was a key moment, listing process led to commercialization of memories. For example, people start to decorate their areas with miners lamps, in a process that fetishizes the struggles of workers.

This was a very long panel, and my notes don't do full justice. The fact that some people hung on for more than a ½ past its conclusion shows it was a compelling session.

## Author



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