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(Post-)Industrial Memories Oral History and Structural Change

Introduction

Stefan Moitra and Katarzyna Nogueira

You cannot turn everything into a museum, that's for sure. In the beginning we joked with bitter irony: "Well, we can create new jobs if we travel the Ruhr region as museum miners. So we'll all be a museum ourselves. And people can visit us as a vanished reality" (Interview Gottfried Clever).¹

This recent quote from an early-retired miner from Germany's former hub of coal extraction touches on a complex of important problems faced by regions undergoing the structural transformation of their industrial base. This concerns issues of memory and representation just as much as very concrete questions of re-positioning former workers and employees inside and outside the labour market. How can the gap left by a vanished industry be filled both in terms of employment and with regard to the wider meanings that industries developed in shaping local and regional societies, often over generations? How can value systems, structures, places and cultural practices that used to hold a community together be saved for the future without the economic centre that defined all these practices? And to what extent can museums – or other forms and spaces of historical representation – manage to bridge the gap between the levels of “authentic” experience and “professional” (industrial) heritage practice in order to come to terms with the transformation of industrial communities?

The study of deindustrialisation has been in the focus of scholarly interest for quite some time now and in a variety of disciplines. Most frequently the term is applied to economic change in Europe and North America since the 1970s (for overviews see: High 2013; Strangleman/Rhodes 2014). This geographic and temporal scope might well be broadened, given that developments of deindustrialisation did not just occur “after the boom” (Doering-Manteuffel/Raphael/Schlemmer 2016; Raphael 2019) following post-war reconstruction after 1945 and can even be observed in pre-modern contexts inside and outside Europe and thus rather be understood as an intrinsic part of capitalist production cycles. Thus, deindustrialisation is also always a global phenomenon, with industry and production moving between states and continents, just as the goods produced circulate (Johnson 2002; Schindler et al. 2020). Another instance of widening the perspective might be seen in research concerning the deindustrialisation processes in Central and Eastern Europe in the wake of integrating the post-

¹ Archiv im Haus der Geschichte des Ruhrgebiets (AHRG), Bochum, Sammlung Lebensgeschichtliche Interviews, LINT 81.

“Scrap-Heap Stories”: Oral Narratives of Labour and Loss in Scottish Mining and Manufacturing

Arthur McIvor

Introduction

I witnessed in his later life my father’s deterioration from proud industrial worker and stable breadwinner (he was a father to four kids) to redundancy and poorly paid, precarious, degraded work. Arthur McIvor (snr) had held a steady job almost all of his working life (for 32 years) on the assembly line in a car factory until being made redundant at age 54 as the company downsized in 1980. Thereafter his body was drained in work that was beyond his physical capacity (in a small, old-fashioned dirty steel-works). His deeply engrained work ethic, shaped by wartime service in the Royal Navy, would not countenance premature retirement. He ended up diminished and stigmatised (in his eyes at least) as a factory cleaner, sweeping floors. But at least he had a job. He found some consolation in booze; there was rarely a time when the Bell’s whisky bottle was far from his reach near his favourite armchair in these last years of his life. His degeneration was heart-breaking. My Dad died in 1992 and his life is one I’ve been struggling to make sense of ever since. He shared the fate of millions of industrial workers in the UK and elsewhere facing structural economic change as factories, mines, steel mills, ports and shipyards downsized and closed. They were thrown, as often said, on the “scrap heap”. What was the meaning of such industrial work and its subsequent loss to such men as my father? How did they make sense of all this themselves, through relating their own life stories and narrating the lived experience of this profound rupture in their lives?

This article is an attempt to understand this process through listening to the voices of workers like my father and reflecting on their ways of telling, whilst making some observations on how an oral history methodology can add to our understanding. It draws upon a rich bounty of oral history projects and collections undertaken in Scotland over recent decades, including interviews oral historian Ian MacDougall did for the Scottish Working People’s History Trust. At the Scottish Oral History Centre (SOHC) we have also been collecting and archiving oral interviews since 1995 and have a series of collections on working lives and a growing number of projects relating to deindustrialisation, including a number of outstanding student projects (Clark 2013, 2017; Ferns 2019; Stride 2017). Other sets of archived and extant interviews include excellent sources for the county of Ayrshire, including those undertaken on the Johnnie Walker

plant closure in Kilmarnock in 2011 and the University of West Scotland collection on deindustrialisation in Kilmarnock and Cumnock.¹

Scotland’s Deindustrialisation

Deindustrialisation has dominated the cultural landscape of Scotland since the 1970s and has been the focus of considerable academic study. Important work has examined the economics of industrial decline, the impact of deindustrialisation and plant closures on communities and the extraordinary lengths that Scottish workers went to protest against and resist job losses and the attack on their livelihoods (see, for example, Foster/Woolfson 1986; Phillips 2012, 2017; Perchard 2013, 2017; Clark 2013, 2017; McIvor 2017). Much of this work draws upon oral history interview methodologies with those directly affected, some very extensively. Many of us have also been influenced by path-breaking work on the social and cultural impacts of deindustrialisation in North America, including the inspirational work of Steven High and Alessandro Portelli, to whom we owe a great debt (cf. High 2003; Portelli 2011; Linkon/Russo 2003; K’Meyer/Hart 2009; Walley 2013; Strangleman/Rhodes/Linkon 2013).

Scotland was an archetypal “industrial nation” built on coal, textiles, chemicals and the heavy industries of steel, engineering and shipbuilding. At mid-twentieth century the economy was still dominated by industry and such blue-collar jobs were heavily concentrated in west-central Scotland, in the Clydeside industrial conurbation centred around the port city of Glasgow. From the 1950s the country experienced a particularly rapid and steep rate of deindustrialisation, which accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s recession under the neo-liberal onslaught of Thatcherism where so-called “lame duck” industries were left to the savage vagaries of the market. In Glasgow, industrial jobs as a share of total employment fell from 50 percent in 1951 to just 19 percent in 1991 (Phillips 2017: 316 f.). As elsewhere, deindustrialisation was an uneven and complex process – associated with full plant closures and large-scale job losses, but also persistent and progressive downsizing and company restructuring, with the concomitant rising levels of work intensification, job insecurity and worker disempowerment that went along with mass unemployment and under-employment. There was a shifting in response to market pressures towards lower cost, more flexible labour and a concerted managerial offensive – bolstered by the resurgence of neo-liberal ideologies – to increase workloads, attack trade unions and undermine the labour contract. These processes adversely affected Scottish workers’ health and well-being in complex ways, adding another dimension to a pre-existing poor health record linked to high levels of overcrowding, poverty, deprivation and poor standards of occupational health and safety (for more detail see McIvor 2017: 25 ff.; McIvor 2014). As social researchers Mackenzie and colleagues recently remarked: “Scotland [...] now has the worst mortality outcomes, and the widest health inequalities, in Western Europe” (Mackenzie et al. 2015: 4; see also Walsh/Taulbut/Hanlon 2009).

¹ I am grateful to all narrators for telling their stories and to interviewers for permission to use this material and for depositing and archiving interviews with the SOHC (see bibliography for full details).

Conditions for a Successful Farewell

Memories of Coal Mining in Ibbenbüren

Thomas Schürmann

In conversation, Ibbenbüren miners sometimes call their colliery a small Gallic village. This term refers to the relationship with RAG Aktiengesellschaft, which owns the Ibbenbüren colliery since 1999. However, the pitmen always add that the expression is not meant maliciously but entirely amicably. Unlike the fighting Gauls in the Asterix books, the citizens of Ibbenbüren do not regard themselves as the last shelter of resistance against an all-powerful opponent. The term “Gallic village” rather means that the colliery occupies a special position in the corporation where it is managed as a limited liability company, located at some distance from the Ruhr area, the largest German coal field, and far from the administrative centres of the coal industry. The Ruhr remains a frequent point of reference when it comes to the self-description of the Ibbenbüren miners. But perhaps the word also simply means that Ibbenbüren is the smallest coal mine in Germany.

The Ibbenbüren colliery was one of the last two German coal mines to cease production in December 2018. The coal district in northern Westphalia comprises the town of Ibbenbüren and five neighbouring municipalities (Fig. 1). It has a total population of about 110,000. This region is the field for a long-term documentation of mining culture in Ibbenbüren (Schürmann 2015)¹, a key feature of which will be a collection of oral history interviews undertaken with active and retired miners as well as with other people involved in the wider Ibbenbüren community. Based on these interviews, this article will have a closer look at the changing self-images of miners in Ibbenbüren, particularly in the recent context of an accelerated deindustrialisation process both in Ibbenbüren and in German coal mining at large.

1 Between June 2014 and August 2018, I conducted 100 interviews. I would like to express my thanks to the interviewees and also to the RAG Anthrazit Ibbenbüren GmbH for giving me the opportunity for the interviews. The recordings and transcriptions are kept in the archive of the Volkskundliche Kommission für Westfalen, Münster, Germany. The following text references to the interviews also contain the date of the interview and the page of the transcription. The documentation can be seen as a parallel project to the documentation “Menschen im Bergbau” set up in Bochum: <http://www.menschen-im-bergbau.de/> (21.06.2018). Thanks to Roy Kift (Essen) for making a completely new translation of this text.

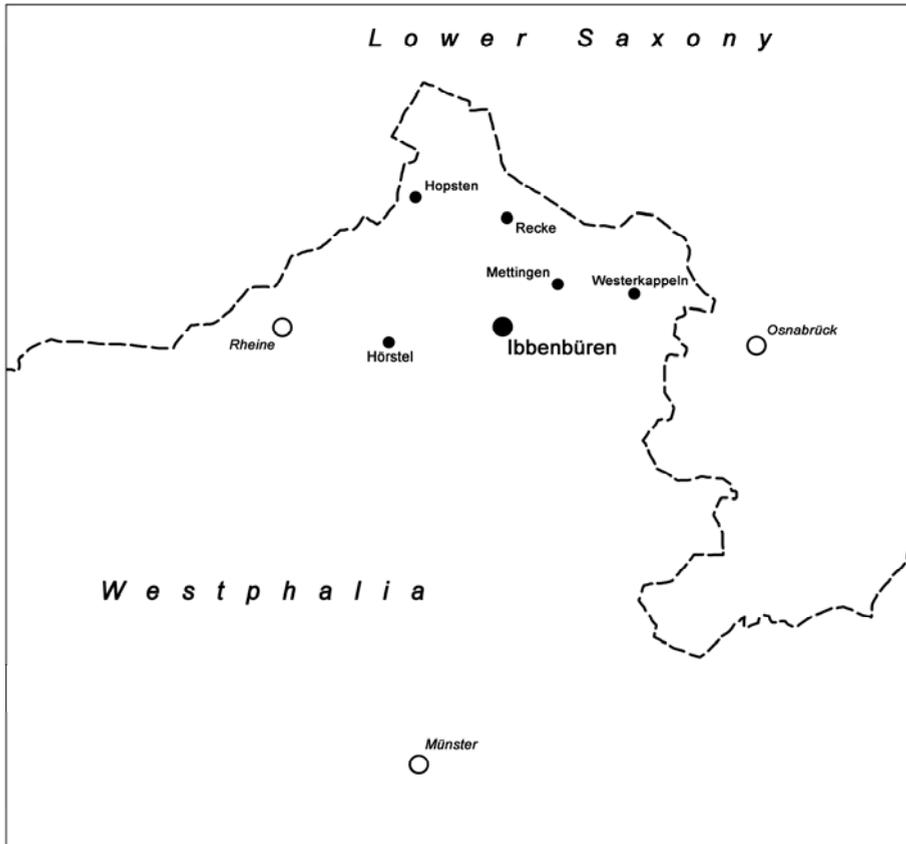


Fig. 1: The mining region of Ibbenbüren in the North of Westphalia (Source: own illustration)

Pitmen and Farmers

One of the things that characterises the self-image of the Ibbenbüren region is the fact that Ibbenbüreners assume people in the Ruhr area are unaware of its existence. And if they are, its image seems determined by agricultural stereotypes: the miners there wear wooden shoes (Interview 68 *1962), they drive to the colliery on tractors (Interview 95 *1978), and they tend to dig out sugar beets rather than coal (Knappenverein 2005: 23). An ink drawing made in 1960 in Ibbenbüren humorously illustrates how the people of Ibbenbüren imagine the way people in the Ruhr area see their district: as rural and rather backward (Fig. 2).

The people of Ibbenbüren would strongly dispute the opinion that their colliery is backward. Technically speaking, they were up to date – from today’s point of view one can say: until closing. So they proudly point out that one element of the mechanisation of coal mining, the coal planer, was developed decisively in Ibbenbüren. In addition, for many years Ibbenbüren was the deepest coal mine in the world, its shafts going deeper than 1,500 meters below the surface. Indeed, because of the immense depth and

Winning or Losing?

German Pit Closure and the Ambiguities of Memory

Stefan Moitra

Introduction

Herbert Hötzel was born in 1923 in Lower Silesia. After serving as a soldier in the Second World War and following a short term as a prisoner of war, he ended up in the Ruhr valley and, amidst the severe post-war crisis of food and energy supply, became a coal miner in the winter of 1946. “After all those injustices that have happened, now you can do something good for the people”, he remembers what he told himself back then. He started as a haulier at the Friedrich Thyssen Mine in Duisburg and later became an underground train driver. His memories of going underground for the first time are rather bleak:

You cannot actually describe it. I was always used to my freedom – and then down into the hole for the first time. And I was sent to the 9th level: it was 46 degrees hot, and as a non-miner this is damn difficult. But you have to start from somewhere, right? (Interview Hötzel).¹

Notwithstanding such difficulties, Hötzel’s narrative is by and large shaped by a sense of pride in the work and industry he had been involved in. Even his memories of literally closing his very mine in 1976, as a member of the crew in charge of dismantling the underground works, is tinged with motives of pride and nostalgia. However, as a beneficiary of the first early retirement schemes to prevent sudden mass redundancies, Hötzel interprets the end of his working career as a gift. Instead of continuing mine work at a neighbouring pit, he decided to opt for his pension and immediately went on a hiking tour to the Harz Mountains with his wife. “Those were the years I received as a gift.”

Hötzel’s testimony embraces an array of discursive points of reference. There is the image of the miners’ self-sacrifice after 1945, working under severest conditions in order to provide the basis for post-war survival and eventual reconstruction, a trope frequently employed before the backdrop of the “economic miracle”. This is closely connected with a work ethic of endurance, masculine strength and productivity. Most crucially, in narrating the end of his working career, Hötzel combines a sense of crisis awareness regarding the long-term perspective of mine closure with feelings of both sadness and relief. He quotes the social worker who advised those who took early

1 This and all following quotes translated by the author.

retirement as early as 1976: “‘It won’t get any better, it will be even worse for the mining industry.’ – As early as that!” Yet, the possibility to get out of the mine is felt as a liberation.

In this long-term experience, spanning the war and post-war period to the early 21st century, Hötzel’s adult memories are certainly exceptional. However, with regard to his view on deindustrialisation, pit closure and early retirement, he articulates an ambiguity that somehow represents two sides of the same coin, yet is often painted over by an overriding master narrative of successful welfare-state crisis management. The Ruhr region in particular, along with a number of smaller West German coalfields, has been facing a prolonged process of industrial demise that has eventually taken six decades, from the first signs of crisis in 1958 to the closure of the last remaining coal mines in 2018 – the Prosper-Haniel colliery in Bottrop (Böse/Farrenkopf/Weindl 2018) and the Anthrazit Ibbenbüren colliery near Osnabrück (Gawehn 2018; Schürmann 2020). From the late 1950s, when the Ruhr industry alone employed well over half a million miners, both underground and aboveground, this number has shrunk to 3,400 in 2018; between 1970 and 2000, employment was reduced by roughly 50,000 per decade.²

There are two grand narratives connected to this process. Firstly, the Ruhr towns, as well as their counterparts in the Saar region and other coalfields, struggle with the consequences of industrial decline as a long-term structural transformation, forcing the old mass industries of coal and steel to be replaced by more modern patterns of production and work (Goch 2019). With hubs in higher education, research and new industries, parts of the Ruhr seem to be fairly successful in making this shift from the heavy industries of the past to the “knowledge society” of the future. Unemployment figures, however, still rank amongst the highest in Germany (Hüther/Südekum/Voigtländer 2019: 99, 124 ff.). In contrast to this image of mass unemployment as a consequence of deindustrialisation, the second grand narrative is closely tied to the “socially responsible”, “socially compliant” way of handling the downsizing of the mining industry. Social responsibility – *Sozialverträglichkeit* – has been a central element to discursively frame the targets and viability of keeping up as many coal mines as possible while at the same time constantly shrinking the industry but avoiding uncontrolled redundancy. This was mainly set into practice in a system of direct and indirect state subsidies and in a scheme of early retirement that allowed underground workers who had mostly started their professional lives at the age of 14 to 16 to retire once they had reached 49 or 50. In their efforts to find consensual crisis solutions, *Sozialverträglichkeit* became a key semantic denominator for trade unionists, shop stewards, company executives as well as politicians to address an apparently obvious common goal. This was epitomised by a phrase attributed to Adolf Schmidt, the head of the Industrial Union of Mine and Energy Workers (IGBE) from 1969 to 1985, declaring the goal of social responsibility had to be “Niemand fällt ins Bergfreie!” – “Nobody falls into the void!”, i.e. nobody will fall into unemployment.³ Thus, in hindsight, the history of the German coal mining industry in the second half

2 For data see Huske (2006) and <https://www.rag.de/unternehmen/mitarbeiter-und-fuehrung/zentrale-personalsteuerung/> (24.03.2019).

3 The term “bergfrei” initially refers to land that could potentially be mined but was as yet without concession to do so. In contrast to that, the phrase uses the term in the sense of an underground crevice which a miner might fall into.

The Trauma of a Non-Traumatic Decline

Narratives of Deindustrialisation in Asturian Mining: The HUNOSA Case

Irene Díaz Martínez

Introduction – Asturias as a Deindustrialised Region

Taking the case of the Hulleras del Norte Sociedad Anónima (HUNOSA), which comprised the state-owned mining industry in the Spanish region of Asturias, this article addresses the memory of deindustrialisation in Asturias in the last three decades. In doing so, I will use oral narratives compiled in three connected projects dedicated to industrial decline in Asturias (conducted 1994–1996), narratives of youth living conditions in the Asturian Coal Basins (2004–2006), and of work cultures, memory, and identity in the context of deindustrialisation (from 2013).¹

To some extent, Asturias seems to be an exception from the stereotype of a deindustrialising region as mainly described in the English-language literature about the subject. Comparatively good living conditions, low crime rates, good educational levels, including a high ratio of university degrees, plus high, though questionable, investment into local and regional infrastructures seem to make Asturias stand out. Foreign – or even Spanish – visitors of Asturian towns and villages, especially in places where industry weighed heavily in the past, are often surprised by the tranquility and leisurely atmosphere – Asturias has a high proportion of “chigres” (local taverns) – and by the exuberant nature. “Natural Paradise” has been a motto for decades to promote tourism in the region. Even when focusing on the Coal Basins more particularly (“Les Cuenques” in the Asturian language), this overall impression does not differ too much.² New residential blocks, boulevards, refurbishments, and/or the gentrification of historical city centres seem to chime with the steady restoration of industrial spaces now out of use.

In contrast to the tranquil surface, however, if anything has taken root in the collective imagery of the Asturian people, it is the deep crisis the whole region is suffering from. Facing high unemployment rates, lack of expectations for the youth, and

1 Oral testimonies are deposited in the Archivo de Fuentes Orales para la Historia Social de Asturias (AFOHSA), <https://www.unioviado.es/AFOHSA/> (22.07.2020).

2 Coal pits in Asturias concentrate around two river basins: in the inner western, the anthracite mining industry surrounds the Narcea River, and, in the centre of the region, the Central Coal Basin joins the rivers Nalón and Caudal as well as the cities of Langreo and Mieres. These towns, much more directly tied to both the mining and steel industries, were the places where the Asturian industrial take-off first took place and exerted a strong social, political, and economic influence up to the very end of the 20th century. The very notion of the Mining Basins (Les Cuenques) often centres on the Nalón and Caudal Valleys with Langreo and Mieres, but we should consider that there are around 20 mining towns in Asturias altogether.

demographic change, this is as much a material crisis as it is one of values. The post-industrial condition is entangled with issues of identity as well as with the corruption and the exploitation of public funds which both leading political parties as well as the trade unions are embroiled in. Furthermore, there is an environmental aspect to the crisis as the long-term consequences of industrial activity are mirrored in high pollution ratios which affect soil, water, and atmosphere and increase the spread of several pollutant-related types of cancer.

These symptoms define the Asturias of the last few decades. The impact of the crisis and the decline of all industrial sectors that used to shape the Asturian economy, its identity, and its politics are undeniable, both on a statistical level and in regard to public perception, whether they are articulated by voices from below or from political authorities and social agents. The Coal Basin seems ridden by a “permanent crisis” (Lillo 1978) ravishing the region and by a sheer lack of hope for the future.

Measures to balance the social consequences of dismantling the coal industry, such as early retirement schemes and the promotion of investment into alternative industries, sought to minimise the social and economic impact of pit closures and tried to offer prospects for the future. In choosing the lesser evil in the face of an apparently inevitable process of deindustrialisation, political leaders as well as trade unionists frequently claim such instruments as signs for a successful policy of avoiding a more traumatic mode of change. Yet, this markedly contrasts with the more ambiguous memories of decline. Reactions vary from apathy to vindication of the past (and present) and materialise in cultural creations that address the loss of collective identities tied to work in the coalfields, even implying a fragile resignification of a regional identity as mining communities without miners.

Decline as Cultural Trauma

As a key to approach the impact of industrial decline in Asturias, the concept of cultural trauma provides a good framework of understanding. Following Ring et al., cultural trauma can be understood as a discursive response to a break in the social network that happens when profound changes shake the foundations of collective identity. The discourse that results from this process could be analysed as a struggle for meaning in which individual and collective actors try to define and make sense of a situation. A central aspect of cultural trauma is the collective attempt to identify the causes of suffering, of those responsible (and to blame them), and search for possible solutions. It also implies the constant working on discursive practices of memory and collective identity in a struggle to determine what is considered traumatic (Ring/Eyerman/Madigan 2017: 13 f.). From a slightly different angle, Jeffrey Alexander understands cultural trauma as a collective loss of identity. The traumatic experience threatens the community’s sense of orientation and challenges the individuals’ sense of who they are, where they come from and where they want to go. The deterioration of identity goes hand in hand with trauma (Alexander 2003: 85).

Along with the notion of cultural trauma, E.P. Thompson’s concept of moral economy provides a further instrument to comprehend the memory narratives analysed in the following more fully. Conceived here as a mechanism to balance the functioning of the community and confront grievance or external pressure, the concept of moral economy is useful to explain the reactions of mining communities – in

A Post-Carbon Future?

Narratives of Change and Identity in the Latrobe Valley, Australia

Antoinette Holm and Erik Eklund

The Latrobe Valley Region – an Introduction

The Latrobe Valley contains substantial brown coal reserves, which have been developed in earnest from the early 1920s (Barton/Gloe/Holdgate 1993). A state-owned mining and electricity generation industry, administered by the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SECV) supplied the state's power needs and shaped the region's economic and urban development (Langmore 2013). The power stations Yallourn A (opened in 1924) and Yallourn B (1932) were constructed adjacent to the open-cut mine at Yallourn. There was further expansion in the post-1945 period when new open-cut mines and power stations were constructed east of Yallourn. The first major project of the post-1945 era was the Morwell open-pit mine (1955), and the adjacent Morwell Power Station and Briquette Factory (1959). Hazelwood Power Station, also fuelled by the Morwell mine (now often referred to as the Hazelwood mine), was opened in 1965, and reached full capacity in 1971. The final element of the Latrobe Valley power hub was the Loy Yang open-pit mine with the Loy Yang A and Loy Yang B power stations operating from 1989 and 1992, respectively. Meanwhile, expansion had continued at Yallourn, adding the power stations C, D, and E between 1954 and 1961. Between 1977 and 1980, gas-fired peaking stations were completed at Jeeralang. The Yallourn W station was completed in 1969. From 1993 to 1996, the three large brown coal mines and power stations – Yallourn, Hazelwood, and Loy Yang – were privatised (Loy Yang A and B sold separately); until recently, they supplied 85% of the state's power needs (Fletcher 2002). Between 1989 and 1990, the SECV employed 8,481 workers, but through privatisation and asset sales, the workforce had declined to less than half that number by 1994/1995 (Cameron/Gibson 2005: 274).

Hazelwood Power Station, an eight-turbine brown coal generator, was the centre of an ambitious programme of state-sponsored economic and community development from the late 1950s (Peake 2013; Eklund 2017). At its inception, it represented a world-class, innovative, and ambitious approach to power generation. Through decades of paternalist management and welfarist approaches to workers and communities, the identity of the station was firmly fixed in the public mind. The power station continues to be referred to as "Hazelwood" after its privatisation, and now, during decommissioning, its continuity is emphasised in the popular discourse, rather than the rupture of a serial resale of the station. Prior to decommissioning, Hazelwood's reputation had moved from being beloved (underpinning the local community's stability) to a more widespread demonisation. From 2004, it was widely known as Australia's "dirtiest"

power station, producing approximately 3% of the nation's total greenhouse emissions. This was the result of a very effective campaign led by WWF, and other environmental groups, which targeted Hazelwood.¹ Photographs of it were used to illustrate a broad range of media stories about climate change and carbon dioxide production.²

In the 1990s an abrupt and comprehensive programme privatised SECV assets including, the three brown coal mines along with the power stations, dramatically changing the social and economic landscape of the Latrobe Valley. These changes were accompanied by major local government amalgamations. The region now faces the further challenge of an economic transition for decommissioned coal-fired power generation in the context of climate change and climate change politics. Complex national and international debates have very little to do with regional experience. The region is variously portrayed as a hapless victim, totally dependent on employment from electricity generation, or emotionally and financially wedded to “dirty” power production. The impact of these debates is to effectively decentre the “blame” for climate change onto a place of production, and obscure city-based electricity demand. We are not the first locally resident scholars to observe (and live through) rapid change in the Latrobe Valley. Since the early 1990s, what Somerville and Tomaney call “the material and discursive production” of the Latrobe Valley has been observed and critiqued by scholars; firstly, in the immediate aftermath of the SEC's privatisation, and secondly, in the midst of the climate change talks in Rio and Copenhagen in 2008 and 2010. A common theme across these observations, and in ours offered below, is that the Latrobe Valley functions as a symbol with considerable rhetorical power that is harnessed by varying sides of the political debate (Cameron/Gibson 2005; Tomaney/Somerville 2010).

Dealing with Closure – Representations

On Thursday the 3rd of November 2016, Engie, the French company and majority shareholder of the Hazelwood power station and its adjacent mine, announced that the plant and mine would shut by the 31st of March 2017 (Engie Press Release 2016). There had been weeks of speculation about the closure, the Australian press featuring stories that ranged from a definite programme for closure to its opposite. The Federal and State Governments' publicly stated positions were firstly, that the decision rested with the company, and secondly, that coal-fired power stations remain a vital part of the Australian-wide energy infrastructure. The company's position was that the workers would be the first to know, and that no decision had been made yet. This remained Engie's public position until the 3rd of November, when workers were called to a 10 a.m. meeting; moments after the meeting finished, the public announcement was made. In fact, the French press had been reporting both that the plant would close and that the company had reached this decision the week before the meeting with the Australian workforce (Feitz 2016).

1 See, for example, <http://www.replacehazelwood.org.au/> (11.10.2016).

2 See, for example, “Australia's Climate Change Authority says scientific predictions have led it to revise up the recommended carbon emissions reduction target”, ABC News, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-27/smoke-rises-from-hazelwood-power-station-in-la-trobe-valley2c/5288960?nw=0> (14.10.2016), which features a photo of Hazelwood. The Australian Financial Review's story (“Climate Change Authority backs emissions trading scheme”) has a photo of Low Yang B, though it is not identified. See <http://www.afr.com/business/energy/climate-change-authority-backs-emissions-trading-scheme-20160831-gr5hsu> (12.10.2016).

Visualising Deindustrial Ruins in an Oral History Project: Sesto San Giovanni (Milan)

Roberta Garruccio

Introduction

In a special issue devoted to post-industrial oral history narratives, my contribution will focus on a photo gallery. Therefore, first of all, I have to explain why I am addressing the topic from this particular perspective. At the centre of interest is Sesto San Giovanni, a medium-sized city north of Milan that became the fifth largest industrial district in Italy after WWII, long recognised as “the factory city” or “the Italian Stalingrad”. The photographs under consideration concentrate on the ruins of its big industries, built around the beginning of the 20th century and dismantled before that century drew to its close. The “part-time artist” Umberto Gillio,¹ who took the photos, is an amateur photographer who has devoted his time and skills to collaborate in an oral history project carried out between 2013 and 2015, a project in which I acted as a principal investigator together with two independent scholars, Sara Roncaglia and Sara Zanisi. It was born from the idea to enhance the cultural memory of industry in Sesto, and intended the photo reportage to act as an important visual segment of the entire research. Umberto Gillio’s shots were meant to directly connect the photographic representation of former industrial spaces in Sesto the way they are preserved today with the oral testimonies collected in a campaign of interviews.

Our research has been funded by the Lombardy region², and one of the main requirements of the call for proposals we applied to was the ability to reach out to a wider audience rather than to a strictly academic one, and to ensure the dissemination of results in order to solicit the interest of the general public outside the university setting. That is why our investigation was intended as a public history endeavor, covering three main research products: an oral history archive – we collected almost 50 in-depth interviews about the aftermath of the industrial shutdown in Sesto³; a documentary based

1 <http://www.umbertogillio.com/> (Accessed 16.04.2020).

2 We have worked in partnership with a local foundation, Fondazione ISEC - Istituto per la storia dell’età contemporanea (<https://www.fondazioneisec.it/>), which also preserves the large archives of the local industrial concerns, the independent association AVoce. Etnografia e storia del lavoro, dell’impresa e del territorio (<http://www.avoce.eu/avoce/en/1229-2/>), and my department at the University of Milan, the Department of Language Mediation and Intercultural Communication (<http://eng.mediazione.unimi.it/ecm/home>).

3 The interviews with former workers, union delegates, and managers from Falck Steelworks were realised using the life course model, and were audio and video recorded. The collection is now kept at the ISEC Foundation in Sesto.

on our interviews⁴; and the photo coverage of the structural change in Sesto, entrusted to Umberto Gillio. In this article, I will try to unearth the cultural meanings and hints implied in these images.

1. Where: Sesto San Giovanni

From the perspective of post-industrial narratives, Sesto San Giovanni is a peculiarly intriguing space for a number of reasons. Undoubtedly, this has to do with the significance of its manufacturing past: for almost the whole 20th century, Sesto has been the location of several big firms with their factories and mills in the steel and heavy industries. To appreciate the magnitude of what has occurred in Sesto in the last decades of the century, we need to keep in mind some crucial events in its history, which can merely be sketched here.



Figure 1: Falck Concordia plant viewed from Viale Italia, Falck area's main longitudinal axis, in Sesto San Giovanni (Photo: U. Gillio 2015)

Industrialisation in Sesto starts in the early 20th century with the arrival of the major businesses of that time. Proximity to Milan, abundant water supply, good railway connections to Central Europe, and cheap property explain why several industrial concerns moved to Sesto in the wave of the Second Industrial Revolution: Breda in 1903 for railway engine manufacturing; Campari in 1904 for industrial beverages; Ercole Marelli in 1905 for power generating engines; Falck in 1906 for steelmaking; and Magneti Marelli in 1919 for magnetos and equipment for the automotive industry (Varini 2006; Tedeschi/Trezzi 2007).

4 The documentary, realised with the help of a professional filmmaker, Riccardo Apuzzo, is titled "Il polline e la ruggine" (Pollen and Rust), and is accessible on the ISEC Foundation YouTube channel, in Italian with English subtitles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcF1GY0DBIY&vl=en> (Accessed 16.04.2020).

Thus, Sesto San Giovanni developed into a genuine industrial hub rather than into a mere company town that caters for a single industry. During the economic boom after WWII, it became the fifth biggest industrial centre in Italy, while Falck grew to be the major private steel company in the country and the major employer in Sesto. In the 1960s, out of 35,000 people who had a job in the city's heavy industries 9,000 worked in the four big Falck plants that shone with particularly evocative names: Vittoria (Victory – for cold rolled steel processing), Vulcano (Volcano – for cast iron processing), Unione (Union, also called T3 – for steel and hot bar rolling), and Concordia (Concord, also called T5 – for plates, welded pipes, and bolts) (James 2006; Trezzi 2007).⁵

As important as it is, the history of Sesto's big factories barely covers a century. The succession of factory closures was swift: only a 10-year gap separates the bankruptcy of Ercole Marelli in 1984 from the closure of the last Falck steelmaking mill.⁶ The demographic shifts in the city reflect this parabolic development: the population numbered less than 7,000 in 1901 and peaked at almost 100,000 at the end of the 1970s; today, the number has shrunk to 80,000 inhabitants. Having gone through what is undeniably a process of deindustrialisation, but one that has not developed into a full post-industrial transformation, Sesto is a far cry from the cool and well-manicured places which western urban marketing has often popularised. Sesto's deindustrialising process is rather an instance of those "uncertain transitions" which ethnography and other social sciences have increasingly put under scrutiny (Burawoy/Verdery 1999).

Even though at the beginning of the research, our interest was generically directed towards the shutting down of the mills and factories in the city of Sesto San Giovanni during the 1980s and 1990s, our focus progressively narrowed to a single case as the project developed: the Falck steelmaking company. Along with Breda, Falck was the biggest industrial firm in Sesto until the 1980s and the one which usually provides the lion's share of images in the representations of the city due to its sheer size and the visible traces it has left in the urban landscape. The area formerly occupied by the Falck steel mills, which covers 1,450 square metres, represents 20% of the town's territory and is at the heart of the largest real estate urban redevelopment project in Italy, which is one of the largest in Europe (Moro 2016).

5 During the post-war economic growth, the Unione plant became the biggest privately owned steel mill in Italy; its claw-shaped roof, rebuilt in the 1950s, is a landmark in Sesto. Today, the only accessible site is Concordia, visible from the east side of Viale Italia, the main street cutting through the Falck area, together with the Magazzini Generali (MA.GE), the warehouse where the bolt section was located.

6 The Falck group changed its core business towards renewable energies after that (https://www.falckrenewables.eu/?sc_lang=en) (Accessed: 16.04.2020).

“Guest Workers” in Mining

Historicising the Industrial Past in the Ruhr region from the Bottom Up?

Katarzyna Nogueira

Introduction

For more than 150 years, the Ruhr valley has been shaped significantly by immigration. Since the mid-19th century, millions of young job-seeking men were drawn to the increasingly industrialising region. During the first wave, they came from the neighbouring and rural areas nearby, later from further afield, both from inside and outside the wider German territories. People from the eastern provinces of the German Empire, from East and West Prussia as well as the provinces of Posen and Silesia soon became the biggest group of “foreign” workers in the Ruhr region (Peter-Schildgen 2007; Schade/Osses 2007). More than 60 percent of these so-called “Ruhrpolen” (Ruhr Poles) worked in the local mining industry before the beginning of the First World War (Oltmer 2013: 27). After the re-emergence of the Polish state in 1918, about two-thirds of the “Ruhrpolen” either returned or moved on to the coalfields of France and Belgium. The second migration wave into the Ruhr region started after the end of the Second World War.¹ More than 13 million refugees and expellees left the former eastern territories of Germany, many of whom ended up in the Ruhr region, usually after first settling in rural areas in Bavaria and northern (West) Germany (Kift 2011; Seidel 2019). By 1960, more than one-third of all expellees lived in North Rhine-Westphalia, with the mining and steel industries as typical fields of employment. At this point, the refugees constituted a crucial “part of the solution to the state’s labour market problem”² in the immediate post-war era (Kift 2011: 137). The third and latest wave of labour migration into the Ruhr mining industry, which will be the focus here, started in the 1950s. In the booming post-war economy, the West German government negotiated several recruitment agreements with countries in southern and south-eastern Europe as well as with two North African countries to fill the demand for cheap labour. The first agreement was signed between Germany and Italy in 1955, followed by others with Spain, Turkey, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia, and Yugoslavia. The recruited labourers were called “Gastarbeiter” (guest workers). Additional and special agreements also led to the (temporary) immigration of a smaller number of workers from South Korea (Pölking 2014) and Japan (Kataoka et al. 2012). This third immigration wave came at a time when the decline of the mining industry was about to start, caused by cheaper

1 A different kind of labour migration regards the forced labour of prisoners of war and, especially, of civilian workers from all over German-occupied Europe during the war. By 1944, more than 40 percent of the Ruhr mining workforce, around 163,000 people, were forced labourers (Seidel 2010).

2 All citations were translated by the author.

sources of energy and strong competition from overseas. Nevertheless, this development led to a new and temporary demand for workers in general and mine workers in particular. About fourteen million people came to the Federal Republic as so-called “guest workers”. What was planned to be a form of temporary labour migration became a permanent relocation for about three million “guest workers” and their families (Seidel 2014: 39). After foreign recruitment officially ceased in 1973, caused by the worldwide economic regression, Turkish “guest workers” became the largest group of migrants in the Ruhr area, most of whom worked in the hard coal industry. Today, there are more than 2.8 million people of Turkish descent living in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt 2015: 128 ff.), still representing one of the largest groups of people with a migration background in the country.

Without immigration, neither the Ruhr region nor its heavy industry would have existed the way both are known to us today. The importance of migration for the mining industry seems beyond question; yet, it might be asked what place the history and experiences of migration occupy in the self-image of the Ruhr today. After the decline of mining and steel, industrial heritage has become essential for the new narration of the region (Berger/Golombek/Wicke 2018: 74). During the 1970s, initiatives “from below” started to advocate both the preservation of the tangible industrial heritage and a stronger appreciation of the lifeworlds, experiences and memory of the region’s working-class communities and their culture. This process led, for instance, to the very first classification of an industrial building as a historical monument, the machine hall of the Zollern Colliery in Dortmund (Parent 2013). Cultural institutions, museums, and even trade unions and companies became key players for the memorialisation of the industrial past and the representation of regional identity. Industrial heritage was and still is a success story (Berger/Golombek/Wicke 2018). However, “an almost ghostly unanimity” characterises the stories that are told in the context of industrial heritage (Berger 2019: 512 f.). This homogenisation of narratives leads to the celebration of certain memories while others remain blind spots. Narrating labour migration as a success story, for instance, tends to neglect its more problematic aspects. One example of this standardisation of narratives can be seen in the accentuation of an all-encompassing camaraderie underground. According to this narrative, everybody was the same underground, notwithstanding where someone came from; miners needed to be able to rely on each other as every mistake, no matter how small, potentially entailed deadly consequences for all. While this narrative underscores the integrative power of the underground workplace, it nonetheless seems to contrast markedly with a public – and historical – discourse that emphasises the alleged difficulties and shortcomings of migration and “integration” in the Ruhr area (Berger 2019: 514).

Oral History, or rather: various forms of using oral testimonies and memory narrations, have been an integral part of recovering and representing the Ruhr’s industrial history. As both historical movement and method, oral history initially emerged as a tool of counterhistory, a politicised form of historiography from the bottom up. In the Ruhr region as elsewhere, the “history from below” movement sought to reset the focus on new historical subjects (e.g. women, workers, and migrants) and perspectives (e.g. everyday life). After the decline of the mining industry, local history workshops, academic historians, filmmakers, and museum practitioners began to construe miners and mining communities as historical subjects. Accordingly, personal narrations played an increasingly important role, not only as a source of research but also as an instrument

“We Are in the Museum Now”

Narrating and Representing Dock Work

Janine Schemmer

Dock work underwent a major shift since the implementation of the container and its consequences like automation and logistics. Since the 1960s, global developments have had a major impact on work structures and organisational patterns of workers and employees. This development engendered generational conflicts through structural transformations, job losses and hierarchical labour disputes. Furthermore, the changing character of dock work altered ideas and concepts of masculinity connected to the profession, challenging a traditional sense of male workers' pride and evoking existential issues.

Although transformations in ports follow global logics and are subject to similar processes, the history of each workplace and its actors is always linked to a local context. While, in some former port cities, dock work merely plays a marginal role today, others have been able to maintain their status as an important reloading point. Hamburg is particularly suited to an analysis of this technical transformation as the port still plays a major role in the city's economy and public image (cf. Rodenstein 2008). Moreover, inhabitants and dock workers alike identify with the place up to the present day.

As complex spaces of work and cultural encounters, ports are natural candidates not only for an analysis of spatial transformations, of changes in employment patterns and work cultures. Since the disappearance of former working practices and the historicising of port areas took place as a simultaneous process (cf. Berking/Schwenk 2011), harbours and docks are good examples regarding the challenges of historic representations and the museumification of labour. After losing its status as a freeport zone in 2003, various enterprises, such as advertising agencies, entertainment industries and the wider creative sector, began to settle in and around the *Speicherstadt*, the central part of the former port area. This district today is re-enacted as a cultural event space. Right next to it the so-called *HafenCity* is emerging, a huge restructuring project. Characteristic features of the old port and its related patterns of work maintain their presence in the form of warehouses and historical cranes and function as the backdrop for this development. Andreas Reckwitz describes this process as “self-culturalisation” (Reckwitz 2009: 2) and explains the transformation of Western urbanity since the 1970s with the creation of culture-orientated creative cities. He points out that this phenomenon is not only a discursive one, but also influences and changes social practices and the materiality of the architecture of a city, of residential or entertainment areas or business districts. The *HafenCity* is only one expression of this transformed materiality. Besides, various former docks have been filled up in order to store containers there, and container terminals and new working areas have been located outside the centre in the

western and southern part of the city. Besides an increasing event culture, Reckwitz also observes a trend of museumification, a development that occurred in Hamburg as a parallel process to the rising mechanisation of labour. Since the 1980s, various old ships have been converted to museums and are now part of the maritime heritage ensemble and the city’s public image. One institution that documents and represents this transformation process as well as the historic occupational traditions is the *Hafenmuseum* (Harbour Museum). As last witnesses of the old port and as protagonists and active part of the transformation, a group of unionised men raised the idea of a museum in the mid-1980s. It eventually opened its doors in 2005 as a branch of the *Museum der Arbeit* (Museum of Work).

While the global success story of the container and the revolutionary changes it brought about in the logistics sector are well known and researched (e.g. Levinson 2006), my research focuses on the perceptions of those who observed and experienced these transformations and on the socio-cultural and spatial implications the changes entailed (Schemmer 2018).¹ In this article, I will report some of my central findings. When working in the Harbour Museum as a student, I established first contacts with some future interview partners, while I got to know the others in different contexts. Overall, I collected 25 interviews with former Hamburg dock workers, with the term referring to protagonists occupied in the wide range of cargo handling. As narratives always represent a retrospective view on an experience and “stories are told from their end” (Lehmann 2007: 284), the narratives I gathered, along with some interviewees’ present engagement in the museum and other heritage sites, predominantly reflect their current views on the harbour complex and its changes.² Considering a narrative a cultural practice means to look closely at the processuality that constitutes meaning in retrospect, and to identify the different functions of retrospective narratives (cf. Bendix 1996: 170). My interest lies in the perceptions and self-positioning of former dockers, discursive patterns of their narrations, and the meaning they attribute to their former workplace in relation to present developments. In the following, I will outline central topics brought up by the interviewees regarding the transformation of the port, in particular with respect to the mechanisation of dock work and the social and spatial changes this process triggered. As the place where these memories are located and publicly negotiated today is the Harbour Museum, I will first turn to this institution.

Moving Display Cases – Negotiating Dock Work

The Harbour Museum is situated in *Schuppen 50*, one of the last historic, heritage-protected quay sheds built between 1908 and 1912. Notwithstanding its historic setting, the shed is located within the contemporary working port, close to the container terminals. This proximity makes the museum an interesting place for research as it marks an intersection between work related memories of the former dockers and the transformations the port has visibly undergone over the last decades. Although the municipality

1 It must be noted that most protagonists in my study have internalised the port’s history and firmly identify with it until today. As my analysis focuses specifically on cargo handling, where women were not employed, I rarely interviewed female protagonists. In addition, the voices of those who are not part of this narrative community for various reasons, such as the countless workers who lost their jobs or just worked in the port briefly, must be left out.

2 All cited quotes are translated from German into English by the author.

Old Tales and New Stories

Working with Oral History at LWL-Industrial Museum
Henrichshütte Hattingen

Olaf Schmidt-Rutsch

In 1989, only two years after blowing out the blast furnaces, Henrichshütte Ironworks was incorporated into the LWL-Industrial Museum, Westphalian State Museum of Industrial Heritage. Since that time, oral history has been formative in developing the site into a museum of life and work in the shadows of the blast furnaces. Interviews did not only have an important impact on the permanent exhibition from the beginning, they also offered a wide range of perspectives for future research. Apart from covering the stories of work, they also addressed the individual and collective ways of coming to terms with the story of industrial decline and structural change, from the point in time when the loss of work was a fresh experience to a more distanced, post-industrial narrative. From this perspective, the oral history material related to the Henrichshütte – and the general interview archive of all sites at the decentralised LWL-Industrial Museum – might offer a wide field of further future interdisciplinary and transnational research.

The LWL-Industrial Museum

The deep structural transformation in Western European heavy industries after 1945 gave rise to a new idea of industrial heritage. Exploring the remains of the industrial age, with its forgotten mills, closed mines and cold ironworks, was no longer restricted to a classic history of technology as a narrative of engineers, innovation and company history. Rather, the story of the common worker and daily work and life did not only come into researchers' focus, but established a new kind of museums, which paid attention to the objects of the industrial era. The history of the LWL-Industriemuseum, Westphalian State Museum of Industrial Heritage, reflects this development and exemplifies the importance of oral history for the museum's approach to social history.

In the Ruhr area, the increasingly severe coal crisis of the 1960s resulted in a deep regional change. The widespread demolition of mines in the industrial heartland of Western Germany became a major economic issue and social challenge. Vanishing pitheads left open spaces not only in the urban landscape. It became rather obvious that these mere technical constructions had an enormous significance as social reference points for the people, their work, biography and identity. The same effect could be recognised in the whole state of North Rhine-Westphalia. The Westphalia-Lippe regional authority (Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe/LWL) responded to this

The Importance of Oral History in (Industrial) Heritagisation

Melinda Harlov-Csortán

Introduction

Oral history includes both the subjective interpretation of the past (Gyáni 2000: 131) and the methodology that records, documents, and analyses that interpretation. The former, a personal understanding, experience, and/or memory of a past event, enriches the “official narrative”, the historical aspect, and provides the investigation with an individual, interpersonal, and human-focused aspect (Thompson 1978: 6). Among others, its two major advantages are the participatory and plurality aspects of the narrative creation. However, especially due to their co-creation feature, oral history projects, like other types of research, can be influenced by the researcher’s personality and opinion, and the general ideology of the time when the research is conducted (High 2014). Oral history should never be taken as an objective account as it evidently offers a personal interpretation which might throw light upon multiple layers and understandings of the same event. A typical period to showcase the implications of oral history is the Cold War era, when due to top-down oppressive political systems in Central and Eastern Europe it was impossible to criticise the working conditions of the industrial labour. After the political change in Hungary, for instance, the interpretation almost reversed the former viewpoint when the whole period was described as completely negative and harmful (Alabán 2017). Such mainstream interpretations can affect the personal perspectives as well.

Despite its potentially biased and subjective narration, this methodology is especially of value when the research period needs to be investigated as the authenticity or trustworthiness of the available written or material traces might be questionable. This is usually the case with research projects that focus on periods that have been re-evaluated over time. The establishment of the Oral History Archive within the Hungarian 1956 Institute in the 1980s is a case in point. At the time of its foundation, written material about the revolution of 1956 was not yet available, so the only form of sources available for researchers were oral history testimonies (Kozák 1995). Hanák and Kövér both emphasise the “still” and “already” aspects of oral history examples which show that the interviewees’ memory is still vivid and they are already capable to talk about the given past (Hanák/Kövé 1995: 94).

Oral history was the type of research through which underrepresented social communities and their interpretations and memories were able to enter the academic debate. For instance, the female narratives of the industrial culture could be researched and discussed with the help of oral history (such as biographical interviews) throughout different continents. Not only new perspectives could be analysed, but also a research focus formed around how contemporary ideology – such as Catholi-

cism (Arango 1993) or Socialism (Schüle 2001) – defined the possible choices and roles female members of this social unit could fulfil.

Interestingly, many scholars point to the challenges the new technical possibilities (like audio-video recording, online access to interviews conducted by others) put on oral history as a methodology. These challenges include both theoretical questions – even before the introduction of the new European data protection regulations – and actual realisation threats. Oral historians, especially those dealing with traumatic experiences, unquestionably play a significant role in forming narratives of a given recent event (Sommer/Quinlan 2002). In such cases that are swayed by emotions, the adaptation of new technologies which can document numerous aspects instantly as well as provide multiple methods for modification retrospectively can threaten the ultimate requirement of objectivity (Sloan/Cave 2014). Similarly, while new technologies make oral history research projects more accessible to a wider audience, they also complicate the process of protecting (anonymising) the sources (Larson/Boys 2014) or analysing the represented narrations. The same media can either strive for objectivity or allude to subjectivity (for instance, by using sarcasm or overemphasised emotions) of the narration, the distinction of which cannot be decided without background information of the given case. This was the case in numerous Hungarian movies such as *Falfűrók* (1985) about the political change criticising Socialism by sarcastically depicting industrial workers' everyday life. Those movies were directed in a documentary-like style with non-professional actors and seemingly strong sociological messages. Accordingly, this kind of movies could be interpreted in opposing ways. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of an oral history project, it is important to incorporate other sources with which the researched question is compared and contrasted. Oral history alone cannot provide suitable and professional data (Szabolcs 2001: 46).

One of the most common cultural practices of remembering the past is to heritagise it. The terms “heritage” or “patrimony” have incorporated diverse meanings, forms, and effects in different countries and areas of life over the last five decades (Larsen/Logan 2018). A very complex and often overlapping typology of heritage forms has been established during this period, yet without having been commonly adapted internationally (Fejérdy 2011). Such variety shows the richness of this process, but also challenges its adaptability. For instance, we differentiate “heritage industry” and “industrial heritage”. The former refers to the process and apparatus through which (industrial) heritage can be commodified and instrumentalised in order to become an “opportunity space” (Günay 2014: 98) in the post-industrial area. Looking at heritage as a source of economic benefit, besides its identity-forming role, is important not only to protect the heritage that has been revitalised (as this process might lead to Disneyfication, gentrification, and other forms of transforming the authentic values and past), but also to investigate the social practices that capture history at different levels (Walsh 1992). Among others, two outstanding UNESCO World Heritage Council representatives, Ron van Oers and Francesco Bandarin, called for a stronger connection between socio-economic development and conservation strategies in order to sustain what they define as the Historic Urban Landscape (Bandarin/van Oers 2012).

At the same time, industrial heritage is defined by The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH) in its *Nizhny Tagil Charter*