

## **ICOTHEC, TICCIH & Worklab joint Conference in Tampere, Finland 2010 – a critical review**

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Under the general topic “Reusing the Industrial Past” a first joint conference of the *International Committee for the History of Technology* (ICOTHEC), *TICCIH* and *Worklab* was held from 10<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2010. More than 350 participants from all over the world joined this very well organized meeting which took place in the University of Tampere and in the Finlayson Area, a former textile factory in the city centre, now successfully reused for different purposes. The scientific program of the conference was accompanied by three excursions (Modern Technology, Industrial Heritage, Tour for museum professionals), one-day pre- and post-conference tours (National Automobile and Road Museum *Mobililia* in Kangasala, UNESCO World Heritage Site Verla Mill), and by a wonderful social program.

Tampere, founded in 1779 and today Finland’s third biggest city with around 210 thousand inhabitants, is situated at both sides of the Tammerkoski rapids between the lake of Näsijärvi and the 18 meters deeper situated lake of Pyhäjärvi. These rapids formed the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century the energy basis for the development of a flowering textile, metal, shoe, leather and rubber, wood and paper industry, which led to the name of the city as the “Nordic Manchester”. Since the 1970s most of these industries had been closed down and their factories converted into business, housing or leisure sites. Today the service sector is the most important economic sector of Tampere but the city is still a place of metal, electrical and paper industry as well as of several high-tech companies, and with its three universities and numerous schools an important place for higher education in Finland.

All this made Tampere to a good place for a meeting of experts in the field of the history of technology (ICOTHEC), the conservation of industrial heritage (TICCIH) and labour museums (WORKLAB). More than 200 papers in more than 40 different sessions and workshops in up to 11 parallel sessions devoted to a broad variety of topics were presented. All these can be consulted on the program at <http://www.tampere.fi/industrialpast2010/>, and the conference page on Facebook has images and videos of the working and social events. During the congress ICOTHEC and WORKLAB held their general assembly meetings and TICCIH organized a “Workshop on Conservation Issues” as well as meetings of the Sections for Hydropower and Electrochemical and for Textiles.

Binding all this together was the aim of a plenary session with keynote lectures at the first day of the congress. ICOTHEC’s traditional ‘Kranzberg Lecture’ was given by Håkon Anderson from Norway about “Reusing the Industrial Past – The Challenges of Interpretations”, followed by TICCIH-President Patrick Martin with a lecture about “Industrial Archaeology and Reuse of the Industrial Past”. Anna Storm from Sweden spoke about “Towards a Competence of Change: Industrial Heritage in the Company Towns Avesta and Malmberget” and the historian and Vice-Rector of the University of Tampere Pertti Haapala closed this session with a

lecture about “Tampere in Global History”.

Out of doubt the Tampere conference was a successful meeting in demonstrating and discussing the historical and material dimensions of the congress’ main topic “Reusing the Industrial Past”. The broad variety of sessions and papers offered a view into the intellectual and practical standard of today’s research about the age of industry and the efforts to “reuse” its history and material evidences. The conference also showed the multi-dimensional aspects of this topic and of the different research approaches to it. Papers were given not only by historians, industrial archaeologists or museum experts but also by architects, urban planners or sociologists. As a “joint conference” it was the declared goal of the Tampere meeting to bring together researchers and experts of at least three different scientific communities – the historians of technology, the industrial heritage experts and the museum community. Moreover, one basic idea of the conference was also to mix them and to give them the opportunity to discuss the same topics from different points of view. Especially in this last aspect one would have to ask if Tampere was a success or not? To sum it up: From the authors’ point of view it was not a success, but at best a first step into the right direction.

Despite the excursions, the coffee breaks and the social events it is the author’s impression that three different conferences took place at the same time. Sessions orientated on history of technology were held and visited mainly by ICOTHEC members and the same happened with the industrial heritage and the museum sessions. A little non-representative survey of the author among ICOTHEC and TICCIH members under the participants showed that a large number of them had no idea of the organization or the goals of their counterpart. Some participants had not even recognized that this was a joint conference of both organizations. Not to speak about WORKLAB which was nearly completely unknown by all respondents. Therefore most of the sessions attended by the author were held and visited only or even mainly by members of one of the three communities. Only one session of the conference under the title “Round table discussion: History of Technology versus History of Science: Possibilities and Challenges of the Interaction” was devoted to an interdisciplinary discussion. Nothing about the interaction of history of technology with industrial heritage or industrial museums! The organizers answered the authors question about this problem during the roundtable discussion only evasively. No one had the idea that this may be of interest at a “joint” conference of ICOTHEC, TICCIH and WORKLAB.

This is astonishing because three years ago at the ICOTHEC conference in Copenhagen/Denmark the author and two other speakers were invited to give keynote lectures about industrial heritage efforts in their countries with a special focus on the interrelation to history of technology. Although this plenary session in 2007 was not very well attended by the ICOTHEC members its discussion opened up a rich field of common research interests and questions for both, historians of technology as well as for industrial archaeologists and industrial heritage experts. One outcome of the discussion had been the idea of a joint conference of ICOTHEC and TICCIH which could be realized now in Tampere. Concerning the broad variety of topics presented and discussed in the papers and sessions at

Tampere this first attempt to bring together the different communities of ICOTHEC and TICCIH the conference had been a step into the right direction. Concerning the interaction between both communities much work is still to be done. Maybe the most important finding of the Tampere joint conference is that we are on our way but that the goal is still in a far distance.