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Labour Heritage: Marginal and Mainstream

Labour museums were born after the Second World War. Workers were considered as an important audience already in the late nineteenth century but their own history and labour heritage have been taken seriously only since 1960s. The historical development of labour museums is closely tied with wider understanding of heritage and development of museum access.

Before the French revolution, workers didn't virtually have any possibilities to visit existing museum collections. Early nineteenth century museums were already open for public but they were still far from welcoming. World exhibitions changed the attitudes and workers finally became one of the museums' target groups at the end of nineteenth century. However, this was not enough; traditional museums did not present the heritage of workers, they were not run by the workers, they shunned labour movement and were not so much visited by workers either. These were all important reasons why labour museums were born as institutions.

History of labour museums can be described as a development from marginal to mainstream. For instance in Finland, legacy of the civil war overshadowed the labour heritage for decades. The Finnish Labour Museum is a national museum of social history and history of working life. Even if labour heritage has become more or less mainstream, the museum keeps searching marginal and difficult themes. For instance, collecting heritage of sexual and gender minorities and exhibiting history of disabled people are important parts of the museum's strategy.

CV

Kalle Kallio has been the director of the Finnish Labour Museum since 2005. Before this post he worked at the Finnish Museums Association and at the National Board of Antiquities. In 2010, he was elected as a chairman

of WORKLAB – International Association of Labour Museums. He has written several essays on labour heritage, museum learning and social mission of museums. Currently he is on a research leave and teaches museum studies at the University of Tampere.

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