

# Conference Report

Centre for Tourism and Cultural Change



**Steel Cities: Tradition, Transition, and Transformation, Sheffield, United Kingdom, 29 June—2 July 2006**



Steel Museum, Kelham Island, Sheffield

## Feedback

*"Last summer, a group of 50 or so scholars, policymakers and citizens involved in studying and working in steel cities across the globe met in Sheffield, England, ... to ponder the themes of "tradition, transition and transformation," and my participation was propelled by my interest in learning how other places had addressed the human costs of de-industrialization and how we might re-envision the future for the people of Pittsburgh. Sheffield and its universities were fitting hosts. Like Pittsburgh, Sheffield, the home of the British steel industry, fell on hard times in the 1980s when its steel industry ceased being a source of mass employment.*

*Pittsburgh and southwestern Pennsylvania were strongly represented - it may be hard to imagine, but sometimes our contingent had to apologize for talking so much about our hometown. Of course, there were people from many other places, too - Youngstown, Ohio; Gary, Ind.; and Chicago in the United States as well as Australia, Turkey, Sweden, Germany, France, Spain and various places in the UK.*

*In spirit with being international, the conference was also interdisciplinary. People from diverse backgrounds discussed topics such as the preservation of industrial heritage, the development of tourism, urban geography and health and social policy. Besides meeting, we were able to see a few sites, such as the ruins of ancient steel mills and the Kelham Island Industrial Museum - as well as the local pubs."*

Dr. Kenneth S. Thompson, University of Pittsburgh, USA  
(Extract from *Private Sector: Bonded by steel. Conference highlights shared histories, challenges and opportunities for steel cities*)

For nearly two centuries steel has been the fundamental building block of modernity, revolutionising the lives of millions. From its use in building and construction, in weapons production, to its role in the home kitchen, the transformative power of steel is undeniable. At all stages of its life-cycle, steel impacts upon communities, regions and nations. As China and India race to modernise their economies with imported steel, many cities across Europe and North America are still struggling to cope with the transition from productive to consumptive economies.

The focus of this conference was on the ways in which economies and societies, lives, landscapes and relationships have been, and continue to be, transformed by steel. It brought together academics and professionals from a wide range of disciplines to explore the ways by which steel has impacted upon people, places and pasts and how it continues to shape lives and relationships in the context of local and global change. The conference had a clearly multi-disciplinary aim drawing from architecture, history, sociology, anthropology, ethnology, cultural studies, geography, tourism studies, museum studies, archaeology, ethnology, linguistics, economics etc.

Keynote speakers included : The Right Honourable David Blunkett M.P., Wolfgang Christ (Bauhaus-Universität Weimar/Germany), Barbara Johnstone (Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh/USA) and Scott Kiesling (University of Pittsburgh/USA).

As a major theme of this conference, academics from different disciplines reflected upon the particular function, form and emblematic nature of steel within tourism and travel in past, present and future contexts. Indicative themes of interest include:

- Material diasporas: trade, tourism and the diffusion of material culture
- Tourism and imaginaries of steel making: Between nostalgia and fantasy
- Technological innovation in the structures and mobilities of international tourism and hospitality
- Steel 'works' - tourism and the problems and possibilities of urban regeneration
- Alchemists, Blacksmiths and Magicians: Travel and the diffusion of knowledge
- Excalibur or the metaphorical journey from stone to iron: Travel, popular culture and pragmatic narratives of iron and steel

The proceedings of the conference (CD ROM) are available for purchase (£19.50 including postage and packing). Please go to our website ([www.tourism-culture.com](http://www.tourism-culture.com)) to download an order form or contact us at [ctcc@leedsmet.ac.uk](mailto:ctcc@leedsmet.ac.uk).

## A successful collaboration between the CTCC and the University of Sheffield

This conference was jointly organised by the CTCC and the National Centre for English Cultural Tradition (NATCECT) at Sheffield University. NATCECT is the only university-based unit in England devoted to the study of all aspects of folklore and cultural tradition. It is directed by Professor Joan Beal. For further information, go to <http://www.shef.ac.uk/natcect>.

## Keynote Speaker: David Blunkett

The Right Honourable David Blunkett born in Sheffield has represented an area of Sheffield significantly shaped by the steel industry. Being a British Labour Party politician he worked at the Sheffield City Council from 1979-1988 and became a member of the British parliament in 1987. Past the 1997 general election he was appointed the first blind cabinet minister as a Secretary of State for Education and Employment. In addition, he held



Maurice Roche in conversation with David Blunkett

the position of the Home Secretary (2001-2004) and the Secretary of the State for work and pension (2005). He resigned from the cabinet in November 2005.

## CTCC

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