TANGIBLE - INTANGIBLE HERITAGE(S): AN INTERPLAY OF DESIGN, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CRITIQUES OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

• Paper / Proposal Title:
When the past becomes the future: Danish ethnic heritage as a tool of survival in American towns

• Format(s):
person presentation

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• University or Company Affiliation:
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• Abstract (300 words):
How does the ethnic heritage of a town survive when the ethnic population has abandoned it? Which actors are involved in such processes of continuity and revitalization? And through which tangible and intangible expressions is the ethnic heritage redefined?

Across America towns as Danevang, TX, Askov, MN, and Elk Horn, IA, emerged as Danish enclaves around the turn of the 20th century. Common to these towns is that they were founded on a single cultural ideology; they were towns planned by Danes for Danes. As in local communities in Denmark, a cooperative spirit was a defensive strategy and a driving force in these towns, and they soon became considered cooperative commonwealths and modern utopias among outsiders. Now, more than 100 years later, these towns have transformed: they are mainly populated by non-Danes, and the
cooperatives have shut down. Nonetheless, due to socio-economic changes the ethnic characteristics are still very present, as these towns now seek to operationalize their lost ethnic heritage as a tool of survival. In order to avoid extinction—the fate of numerous similar towns all over America—these towns actively engage with their heritage as ethnic, Danish communities to attract local, regional, and transnational attention as cultural centers. Through an examination of former and present city branding, this paper investigates how the cultural and ideological heritage is revitalized in an attempt to establish a thriving leisure economy in these Danish-American historical sites. Selected characteristics of the Danish heritage are now promoted through art, architecture, and events by non-Danes hoping to make the towns ethnic as well as financial centers once again. This revitalization relies heavily on volunteers and closely knitted community bonds, just as the former cooperative commonwealths did. Thereby, the past becomes the future of these towns in both tangible and intangible ways.

**Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Tina Langholm Larsen is a PhD Fellow in the Department of the Study of Religion with a specialization in Danish-American cultural history at Aarhus University, Denmark. Her research interests lie in the area of cultural transmission and transplantation, ranging from Danish immigration to the U.S. in the 19th and 20th century to human geography and mobilities research to contemporary ethnic heritage preservation. As a Fulbright Scholar, she has conducted field work in U.S. States as Minnesota, Iowa, and Texas during the fall 2017. In October, she presented a paper at the 40th Anniversary Conference of the Danish American Heritage Society in Chicago, and she is currently a visiting researcher at Hunter College/The Graduate Center, City University of New York.