

RETHINKING 20c NORDIC HERITAGE

Framework for Future Practice



SUSAN MACDONALD

Susan Macdonald is Head, Buildings and Sites, at the Getty Conservation Institute overseeing over 25 projects that aim to advance conservation practice internationally, including the Conserving Modern Architecture Initiative. Susan has a BSc (Architecture) and a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Sydney, and a Masters in Conservation Studies (University of York/ ICCROM) and is a certified practicing planner. She worked in private practice and in the government sector in Australia and in London before joining the GCI in 2008. Her work has ranged from site projects to strategic and policy projects, involving urban planning, development, economics, policy, technical matters and world heritage issues.

Susan has been engaged in conserving 20th century heritage for many years, is a member of the DOCOMOMO ISC Technology, APTi's Modern Committee and a Co-President of ICOMOS's 20th Century Committee. She has edited and authored numerous work on conserving modern heritage and concrete conservation.

ADVANCING THE UNDERSTANDING, IDENTIFICATION AND PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION OF TWENTIETH CENTURY HERITAGE TO SECURE AND SUSTAIN ITS FUTURE

In response to increasing threats to modern heritage sites and the absence of comprehensive inventories to support their protection, the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI), in collaboration with the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ISC20C), developed the Twentieth Century Historic Thematic Framework (20C HTF). The aim of this document is to provide a structured methodology and a tool for understanding, identifying, and assessing the rich, diverse, and complex heritage of the twentieth century.

The framework seeks to move beyond traditional evaluation approaches based primarily on stylistic or typological approaches, by situating the built environment within the broader social, political, environmental, and technological transformations that shaped the period globally. By organizing surveys of twentieth-century places around historical themes—rather than chronology, building type or architectural styles alone—it enables a deeper understanding of context and supports the identification of a more diverse, inclusive, and historically representative range of heritage places.

Structured around ten key themes—including mechanized and industrialized agriculture, rapid urbanization, transportation systems and mass communication, mechanized and conserving the Natural Environment, Buildings, and Landscapes—the framework allows practitioners to interpret heritage as part of interconnected historical processes relevant to the local context. This approach is particularly relevant in Nordic contexts, where twentieth-century architecture and planning reflect distinct trajectories such as the development of the welfare state, public housing innovation, regional identity, and strong relationships to landscape and climate. Complementing established values-based approaches to heritage assessment, the framework promotes a more inclusive understanding of significance by highlighting underrepresented building types, and places valued by local communities that have often been overlooked. In doing so, it supports more equitable, informed, and representative conservation practices.



JENS TOFTGAARD

Chairman of The Danish Council for Build Heritage 2019-23. History major with a Ph.D. in Urban History from University of Southern Denmark and the Urban History Centre at the University of Leicester. 20 years of experience in the cultural heritage sector and museums. Since 2023 director of the Danish Railway Museum.

A THEMATIC STRATEGY FOR LISTING BUILDINGS IN DENMARK 2023

A thematic approach is shaping a new agenda for listed buildings in Denmark, expanding heritage assessment beyond iconic structures to include broader historical, social, and regional representation. Inspired by The Twentieth-Century Historic Thematic Framework, a national strategy links 20th-century social and cultural history with the protection of specific buildings. Nine subthemes highlight key aspects of postwar Danish society, including e.g. civic organizations and social housing, the transition from oil to renewable energy, and the welfare state's childcare and social institutions. Implementing the strategy will involve thematic surveys to map relevant buildings and sites nationwide, creating a basis for selecting representative heritage for future protection.

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JUHANA LAHTI

Juhana Lahti, PhD, works as a senior researcher at the Finnish Heritage. His research and publications focus on the history of modern architecture and planning, particularly in the post-Second World War era. He is also interested in questions related to sustainable development and built heritage, as well as the digital paradigm shift in culture. Lahti has previously worked in various roles at the Museum of Finnish Architecture, the University of Helsinki, and the Finnish Foundation for the Visual Arts in New York City. From 2022 to 2025, he was the chair of the Finnish Art History Society. He is also a member of the 20th Century Built Heritage Working Group of the Baltic Region Heritage Committee and has held the title of Docent at the University of Helsinki since 2016.

THE FINNISH EXPERIENCES WITH THE 20TH CENTURY HISTORIC THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

Since 2023, we have used the HTF in the Cultural Environment Services of the Finnish Heritage Agency as part of our work with built environments from the latter half of the 20th century. We have tested it for interpreting urban environments in Helsinki and it was used in preparing the Aalto Works nomination for the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. We have also proposed it as a possible tool for the forthcoming update of the nationally significant built cultural environments listing. During the summer of 2026, the ICOMOS Finland working group plans to continue testing the HTF in more suburban and semi-rural areas in smaller towns and villages around the country.

In my presentation, I will provide further details on the aforementioned processes and share our key findings and insights from applying the methodology in the Finnish context.



FREDERIK ARQALUK ROSING

Frederik is a practicing architect, graduated from Aarhus School of Architecture in 2022, with a close personal and professional connection to Greenland.

Over several years, Frederik has worked with built heritage and architectural conservation, with a particular focus on Greenlandic building traditions and their relationship to nomadic cultures, colonial history, and political and cultural self-determination. This includes a special engagement with the 20th century built environment — the housing blocks, infrastructure, and planned settlements that shaped modern Greenland under Danish colonial administration, and which now present urgent questions about preservation, adaptation, and identity.

Prior to establishing his independent practice, Frederik worked at the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces with listed building conservation across Denmark, and as a research assistant at Aarhus School of Architecture, where his work centred on the historical and future use of natural materials in architecture.

BUILDING GREENLAND

When Greenland formally shed its colonial status in 1953, the practices of Danish rule only intensified, now carried forward with the full institutional and financial force of the expanding welfare state. One of the primary goals of the Danish state was to provide good-quality, long-lasting buildings that could house the entirety of the Greenlandic population, concentrated in a small number of major towns. For the entire second half of the century, this project was administered by a single body: Grønlands Tekniske Organisation, GTO. Though it operated for only four decades (1950–1987), its imprint on the built environment of modern Greenland is difficult to overstate.

GTO was, in effect, a centrally administered instrument of nation building. A laboratory in which architecture and engineering served as the primary tools for forging a modern society, defined first by the ideals of the Scandinavian welfare state. Unlike many nations, Greenland has no large-scale monuments or grand public squares, and only a handful of significant public buildings to represent and anchor a national identity. And yet the building typologies, materiality, and architectural language imposed by Danish architects and planners in the twentieth century continue to exert an overwhelming influence on how the nation understands itself. This legacy was never chosen, but as the push for greater self-rule grows it must nonetheless be inhabited and reckoned with, alongside the largely discontinued building habits of the indigenous nomadic cultures.

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BIRGITTE SAUGE

Birgitte Sauge is senior curator in Team Architecture at the National Museum, Oslo, Norway. She holds a dr.art. in art history from the University of Bergen (2004). Sauge has a long and varied professional career in issues concerning documentation and dissemination of architecture. Sauge's research is focused on Norwegian architectural history from the 20th century, architectural competitions, documentation and archives, also born digital works. 2015-19 she held a research position in the interdisciplinary project «Architecture Museums and Digital Design Media», part of the larger project «Mediascapes – Cultural Heritage Mediascape», organized by the Department of Education, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Oslo and financed by the Research Council of Norway.

Presently Sauge curated the exhibition “Stamina. Kari Nissen Brodtkorb and four predecessors” in 2025. She has ongoing research on architect Maja Melandsø and her work in Kristiansund after the second WW.

Sauge was a member of ICOMOS ISC20C Norway and ICOMOS Norway board 2013-2018.

WHERE ARE THE WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE IN NORWAY?

Why don't women architects have a clearer place in the public archives and museum collections? Why are they not included in the narratives about the history of architecture? Based on a handful Norwegian cases from the last 100 years, senior curator ph.d. Birgitte Sauge will present some of the causes to the lack of visibility and what is being done by the National museum to raise the profile of the women architects.



MARGRETHA NÓNKLETT

Margretha Nónklett is Head of the Department of Ethnology at the Faroe Islands National Museum. Her work focuses on modern cultural heritage, with particular interests in women's history, social movements, and social transformation in local communities. Her areas of interest include the social and cultural impact of industrialisation, including how the establishment of sites such as the whaling station reshaped everyday life, labour, and social relations. She is responsible for the historical and ethnological interpretation and scholarly content of the whaling station and is involved in the ongoing formal preservation process.

FROM INDUSTRY TO HERITAGE: ÁIR WHALING STATION

Established in 1905, Áir Whaling Station is the only surviving Norwegian-built whaling station in the Northern Hemisphere. Whaling activity declined during the 1960s, and limited operations continued until the early 1980s, after which the site was abandoned and gradually fell into severe disrepair.

Since 2010, the National Museum of the Faroe Islands has carried out conservation work at the site. Several buildings have been partially restored, and a range of preservation measures have been implemented. Today, the station functions as an open-air museum. Throughout this process, awareness of the site's cultural and historical significance has grown both locally and nationally, and a formal preservation process for the station and its surrounding landscape is currently underway.

This presentation examines the preservation process at Áir Whaling Station and the development of the site as an accessible open-air museum.

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JONAS KARLSSON & DANIEL ANDERSSON

Jonas Karlsson is a curator of built heritage at Ålands Museum. He works with the management and care of historic buildings owned by the Åland regional government, as well as providing heritage conservation advisory services and engaging in public outreach related to building conservation, maintenance and cultural landscapes. Jonas holds a Master's degree in Cultural Heritage Conservation (Kulturvård) from the University of Gothenburg.

Daniel Andersson is an architect at the Property Board of Åland, responsible for a broad portfolio ranging from heritage sites and historical ruins to renovations and new developments. He is a practicing architect with formal education in architecture, engineering, and carpentry. His work combines technical expertise and a deep respect for cultural heritage and the built environment.



HEALTHCARE, ARCHITECTURE, AND CHANGE: ÅLAND CENTRAL HOSPITAL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

During the 1940s and 1950s, healthcare on Åland underwent fundamental change. In 1953, Åland Central Hospital opened in Mariehamn, becoming Finland's first central hospital. From the outset, it functioned as a multifunctional facility, providing inpatient and outpatient care, surgery, maternity services, and a sanatorium. Designed with modern construction techniques and a specialised architectural layout, the hospital represented a completely new scale in the Åland context. With approximately 70 employees, it immediately became the largest workplace on Åland. Situated in a forested area north of the town centre, the hospital formed a self-contained campus, including staff and physicians' housing, laundry and bakery facilities, as well as gardens and greenhouses. Long hospital stays were common, particularly for sanatorium patients. Development accelerated rapidly during the 1960s and 1970s. Following the introduction of modern ferry traffic to Mariehamn in 1959, tourism increased significantly and urbanisation intensified. The town expanded towards the hospital area while demand rose for outpatient care, emergency services, geriatrics, and elder care, alongside a gradual decline in sanatorium treatment. These changes prompted extensive rebuilding and expansion, adding successive "annual rings" to the hospital complex. In 1970, new facilities for emergency care, outpatient services, radiology, and administration were inaugurated, connected by a single-storey structure linking previously separate buildings. Gullåsen, a specialised long-term care and nursing facility, opened in 1979, followed by major expansions in 1987 and 1992, including a new outpatient clinic and ambulance entrance. In the early 2000s, mental healthcare was centralised in a new psychiatric building complex.

Today, Åland Central Hospital—now Åland Health and Medical Services (ÅHS)—is a large and centrally located healthcare complex within the growing town of Mariehamn. Its layered building history reflects both societal change and the rapid evolution of healthcare throughout the twentieth century. The site contains significant cultural-, building-, and architectural-historical values. As healthcare needs continue to grow and become increasingly specialised, ongoing planning must address how the existing building stock can be adapted while identifying, managing, and preserving these values.

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JENNIE SJÖHOLM

Jennie Sjöholm is Senior Lecturer in Conservation with specialisation in Built Environments at University of Gothenburg. She has a Master of Science in Conservation, a degree in Architectural Conservation from the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm, and a PhD in Architecture from Luleå University of Technology. With over ten years' experience in the public sector prior to returning to academia, she has engaged with various scales within the built environment, from individual buildings to urban and landscape dimensions. Her research centres around cultural heritage, urban design, and town planning. Currently, Sjöholm serves as an associate editor of the Nordic Journal of Settlement History and Built Heritage. She is a board member of the Swedish Association for Building Preservation, contributing to the editorial board of their journal, Built Heritage. She also holds a board position with TICCII Sweden.

VALUING KIRUNA: THE RESHAPING OF A 20TH CENTURY MINING TOWN

Although small in scale compared to global cities, in the Nordic context the mining town of Kiruna, established at the turn of the 20th century, was instrumental in the development of modern settlements in the inland region of northernmost Sweden. Renowned planners and architects were engaged in the urban design and construction of both housing and more prominent buildings, introducing new planning ideals to Sweden. During the 1950s and 1960s, a renewal of the town centre enabled the creation of architectural set pieces, further emphasising Kiruna's architectural qualities.

In the 21st century, Kiruna has become known for its extensive urban transformation – variously described as 'moving a town', or 'urban demolition' – undertaken to allow continued mining. From a conservation perspective, it is notable that the entire town is designated a heritage site of national interest, and that the local council has protected a large number of historic buildings and environments.

This presentation problematises the HTF theme "Rapid urbanization and the growth of large cities" and discuss how it supports the identification, assessment, and management of urban heritage in the context of Kiruna. Although Kiruna is in some respects exceptional, both in terms of its planning history and its ongoing urban transformation, it is also representative of Swedish towns in its 20th century development and in its contemporary challenges, including demographic change, its location in a sparsely populated region, and the local council's difficulty in meeting necessary demands. Key questions include: How are processes of change, inherent in the built environments, valued in the management of urban heritage? And how are conflicts over land use and reindustrialisation balanced with place identity, the urban landscape, and traces of the past?



ANNA MARÍA BOGADÓTTIR

Anna María Bogadóttir is an architect, author, and the founder and owner of Úrbanistan. She engages with the cultural and social aspects of the built environment, with her work finding cross-disciplinary purchases across architecture, literature, and visual art. Her auto-fictive debut, *Jarðsetning* (en. *Interment*), published in collaboration with Angústúra in 2022, made her mark on the literary scene with a Nordic Council Literary Prize nomination. The book takes readers on a journey offering insights into how our surroundings shape us as humans while reflecting on a necessary systemic change that can end the disposable building culture's destructive nature. Anna has edited and published books on architecture and urbanism, some under the banner of ÚRBANISTAN.

Anna is a professor in architecture at the Iceland University of the Arts.

SWIMMING POOL HERITAGE

In the early 20th century, swimming became a core cultural and physical activity in Iceland. Around the country, communities built their own outdoor pools and established swimming schools. This laid the foundation for a national swimming culture, formalized in 1925 when Iceland became one of the first countries to legislate swimming as an obligatory part of its elementary school curriculum. Today, going to the pool is an everyday activity for many Icelanders, and almost every village has a heated swimming pool. In 2025, swimming pool culture was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This inscription recognizes the cultural tradition that, together with the public pools, forms part of a 20th-century heritage, a welfare-state pillar whose categories span recreation, education, and public health to cultural institutions and tourism.

This event is organized by ICOMOS Denmark, ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage (ISC20C), and our valued partners. *Partners:* ICOMOS Finland, ICOMOS Sweden, ICOMOS Norway, Faroe Islands National Museum and Aalands Fastighetsverket.

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VAIDAS PETRULIS

Vaidas Petrulis is an architectural historian and Head of the Architecture and Urbanism Research Center at the Institute of Architecture and Construction, Kaunas University of Technology (KTU), Lithuania. Author and co-author of numerous books and scholarly articles on 20th-century architectural heritage, including the monographs *Heritage as a Conflict* (published in Lithuanian, 2019) and *Architect Jonas Mulokas (1907–1983): Searching for an Identity in a Global World* (published in Lithuanian, 2025).

REWRITING THE PAST: HERITAGE IN THE AGE OF PLANETARY CRISIS AND GLOBAL NARRATIVES

„Entire new worlds can exist in our minds, and storytelling is what connects us to one another. Every story travels, from those narrating it to those who receive it and alter pass it on in their own way. Stories cross boundaries and the lives of many, changing how we see ourselves, others, and what surrounds us, as long as they can always be rewritten, re-appropriated, and re-narrated. Otherwise, they lose their magic, and they are dead“.

Negotiations on significance are deeply interconnected with understanding of heritage as a cultural phenomenon. Why we choose to take care of some particular pieces of the past? Why we do that? Each generation have it's own answer. For John Ruskin, past is something in front of which we have to stay modest. Jorge Otero-Pailos, though, it is something we can experiment with. The range of answers as infinite, as infinite the list of authors and thinkers. This is how idea of heritage survived more than a century.

Indeed, the definition of heritage is an ever-changing process. From early enclave-type “old towns” in Tony Garnier’s vision of a new urban future, through the Venice Charter’s reference to “more modest works of the past,” to increasing attention to immaterial dimensions of significance, including the “intangible” and reflections of the “spirit of place.” The twentieth-century architectural legacy, with its enormous volume of construction, broadens the debate on heritage across a previously unknown spectrum of typologies, materials, and technologies.

Recent societal attention to different aspects of the planetary crisis sets an ethical standard for the heritage field, which can no longer stay away from politics and economics. The discipline increasingly experiences pressure to contribute to a more sustainable and equitable planet. This shift in paradigm influences debates on the understanding of the significance of built heritage. The Twentieth-Century Historic Thematic Framework (HTF) suggests a new matrix to rethink, reinterpret, and revalue the twentieth-century built legacy from multiple perspectives: not only as a collection of achievements, but also as a collection of processes, impacts, societal transformations, and interconnections between architecture and political, cultural, and economic agendas. This shifts the debate beyond the necessary imperatives of artistic, engineering, or social exceptionalism and invites a discussion of significance from a narrative perspective. Heritage has always been a narrative. The HTHF finally acknowledges this and invites the opening of a global polylogue on the lessons of the twentieth century.

However, global perspectives always have their own limitations and challenges alongside their potential. How can we connect the global with the regional and the local? How can we relate universal experiences to local realities? Can we understand and preserve the “gene” of Nordic modernism? How do these questions address the new challenges posed by global climate change? How might the themes of the HTF influence the process of inventorying? These questions remain open for ongoing debate, in which the HTF suggests a methodology that opens possibilities for merging global trends with local everyday practices.



GRETHE PONTOPPIDAN

Grethe Pontoppidan is a Danish architect and heritage advisor with a Nordic Master in Architectural Heritage. She leads arkitekturet aps, focusing on strategy and value assessment for modern built heritage. Internationally active, she is Co-President of ICOMOS ISC20C, contributing to global heritage frameworks. Grethe has worked across the Nordic region and beyond, lecturing, publishing, and advising on key preservation projects and World Heritage nominations. She chairs a Danish NGO advisory board on post-war built heritage and is behind several leading national listing proposals. Her work bridges practice, policy, and advocacy, promoting the recognition and safeguarding of 20th-century cultural heritage in Denmark and worldwide.