Indigenous material – challenges and possibilities

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Sámi arkiiva - The Sámi Archives and National Archives Norway
What is the talk about

▶ The Sámi people and Archives
▶ Sámi arkiiva (The Sámi Archives Norway)
▶ The cross-border project Digital Access to Sámi Heritage Archives
▶ Some methodological challenges
The Sámi people and archives

- ... live over several nation states
- ... have not been an actor in traditional western recordkeeping and archives
- ... others have archived and collected material on them... – colonial perspective
- A negative situation with archives spread in many countries, uncoordinated and with little indigenous control
- The latest attempt to partly solve this problem:
  - A common Interreg project between Sweden, Norway and Finland
«Quod non est in actis, non est in mundo»
(If you’re not in the archives, you don’t exist)

› Archives are unique

› The archive is a selective memory

› Automatic preservation of all public archives (by law)

› Private archives are rather randomly preserved

› Other forms of archiving not recognized
  › Sámi society's heritage has been based on oral and practical transfer of knowledge

› Result:

› indigenous people don’t / seldom have a voice of their own in archives

› A distorted societal memory
Sámi arkìiva Norway (1995-) - part of the National Archives Norway

▷ Based in Guovdageaidnu, with a national Sámi scope
▷ Founded based on the needs of researchers (Nordic Sámi Institute) and civil society
▷ Cross-border activities upcoming – the Sámi area in Norway, Finland and Sweden
• The project seeks to:
  • Improve the accessibility of the Sámi cultural heritage
  • Develop a user-friendly gateway into cultural heritage information and digitized material from different European archives
  • Focus on Sámi youth becoming interested and proud of their heritage. In Sámi language.
• Creating common ethical instructions for the usage of Sámi cultural heritage
Digital Access to Sámi Heritage Archives

➤ Access – who tells the story?

➤ Sámis loosing control?
  ➤ Immaterial rights –
    ➤ duodji (arts and crafts exploited for commercial purposes)
    ➤ joik (the film Frozen – deal with Disney)
  ➤ Material may be perceived as offensive (photos from race biologists, expeditions)

➤ Special access regulations – individuals or indigenous groups (access control)
Digital Access to Sámi Heritage Archives

When archives, museums aso prepare selected material for a wide and/or Sámi audience:

A central task is the continuous source-critical evaluation
  - that must be done on the basis of authenticity and context.
  - may also include interpretation of the material and sometimes direct dissemination of the results that the interpretation process will give.

These functions require a solid professional foundation with the responsible staff
  - ”(from St. 22 (1999-2000) called the ABM report)/White paper to Parliament on archives, libraries and museums

+ Cultural understanding
Ethical digital dissemination/publication – how?

- Privacy rules and rights regulations should be as for the majority
- Methodological challenges
  - Seen as «the other»
    - Nameless – ex. Photo (“Lap people on stairs” = The municipality in Útsjok(?), Veli Pekka-Lehtola)
  - Is it enough to inform about context and add right context information?
    - given purpose – who has assessed, decided, photographed and appraised?
    - lacking own perspective and information on who is represented = a stereotype group
  - Is it possible to use the material positively by turning the perspective and tell the other story?
Ethical digital dissemination/publication – how?

▶ Decolonization of metadata!
    ▶ Recognition and identity
    ▶ Indigenous ownership of cultural expression, traditional knowledge and intellectual property
    ▶ Adding of new metadata

▶ Participation
    ▶ Names of people and places
    ▶ Respect for traditions, culture and belief systems
    ▶ Traditional «archiving» - storytelling, knowledge passed on through practice, joik

▶ Institutions need to develop ethical guidelines on publishing and metadata concerning material on indigenous peoples

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