

Abstracts for SIG/HFIS Panel Session:
"Documentation and Communication in Aboriginal/Indigenous Communities"

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"Sámi Culture and Language Centers: Documentation of a Threatened Heritage"

Abstract

The Sámis are the indigenous population of Northern Scandinavia. In Norway there are 30-50,000 Sámis, 10-12,000 of whom use Sámi as their first language. When the oppressive policy against the Sámi population was improved during the 1960s, some Sámi communities established language- and cultural centres for documentation and development of their language and cultural heritage. Documentation was seen as a method to keep alive and renew the traditional bonds between territory and identity. Indigenous people sought to document their knowledge in other mediums than the oral story. As the Sámis achieved access to higher education, the cultural centres became staffed with Sámi professionals. Today these institutions play an important role in providing documents as evidence in trials over land and water rights. This paper discusses how the Sámi language- and cultural centres can be seen as paradigmatic documentary institutions. It also emphasizes the importance of document theory as a theoretical tool for a better understanding of the status of documents in the ongoing trials over land and water rights.

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"To Put the Talk Upon Paper: Literacy, Libraries, and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada"

Abstract

In the late nineteenth century, missionaries and government administrators in Canada began introducing book literacy (reading and writing the printed word) into Aboriginal cultures where orality and other forms of literacy already existed and

had served Native communities well for many generations. This paper will discuss some of the motivations of Newcomer populations in Canada in employing print literacy and libraries among Aboriginal communities. This paper will also address the effects of introducing book literacy, and the ways in which Aboriginal communities embraced and articulated books and libraries as means of constructing and controlling their own identities and histories. Central to this discussion will be the idea that Aboriginal communities employed their own kinds of literacy before (and after) European arrival in North America – hieroglyphic and syllabic writing forms, in addition to birch bark biting, wampum, wintercounts, and the art of oral storytelling. These methods of communication served to record history and perpetuate knowledge amongst the People, in much the same way that alphabetic literacy served these same purposes for European cultures.

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”Diverse Knowledges and Contact Zones within the Digital Museum”

Abstract

As museums begin to revisit their definition of 'expert' in light of theories about the local and indigenous character of knowledge, questions emerge about how museums can reconsider its documentation of knowledge about objects. How can a museum present different and possibly conflicting traditions and perspectives in such a way that the tension between the perspectives is preserved? This paper expands upon a collaborative research project between the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology at Cambridge University and the A:shiwi A:wam Museum and Heritage Center of Zuni, NM to compare descriptions of museum objects by multiple expert communities, particularly focusing on Zuni ways of seeing objects that have been otherwise characterized around scientific, static forms of categorization. Based on our findings, narratives and of objects in use have emerged as key omissions in traditional museum documentation relative to the ways in which these objects are seen by the Zuni. This has uncovered several possibilities to expand on our concept of indigenous knowledge systems, particularly with relation to digital objects, allowing some new perspectives to be proposed around enabling indigenous communities to contribute descriptive information about objects both to support local cultural revitalization efforts.