

Title:

Narratives upon narratives: Curating the history of anthropology

Author:

Ageliki Lefkadiou, The Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology

Abstract:

This paper focuses on the exhibition “FOLK: From racial types to DNA sequences” at The Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology to explore how narratives connected to materiality bring together distinct ways of knowing and invite us to rethink what counts as expert knowledge. This exhibition explores research on human biological diversity by juxtaposing scientific practices of interwar racial science with contemporary human genetics. Its emphasis is on practices of measuring, visualizing, classifying, mapping, standardizing and (e)valuating human variation and their multiple entanglements with society, culture, politics, technology and economy.

The paper understands physical anthropological research as an exemplary narrative science and will focus on in one case study from the exhibition; early twentieth century research on Sami people in Norway. It will examine how we can understand exhibition work—including but not limited to research, co-production, design and communication—as a narrative practice. How do we exhibit narrative science? And what happens to these narratives upon narratives? How do museum curators interfere in these narratives, cut them up, and arrange them in new ways, for them to be continually re-shaped through interactions with our visitors?

The paper will analyze the museum as a site of conjectures that questions binary oppositions between science and humanities, past and present, expert and non-expert knowledge. Thus, it will conclude by considering the strengths, challenges and limitations of narrative knowing in museums and the possibilities of narrative in providing new insights into how we know.

Keywords:

Narrative science, physical anthropology, museums, Sami, history of science

Contact details:

ageliki.lefkadiou@tekniskmuseum.no

mob: +4748633441