

Abstract Eva Silvén, 31 October 2017

Representing the Sami in museum exhibitions and collections

In my work with diversity issues, as a curator and researcher, I have focused on how minorities and indigenous groups have been represented in museums. Like for many other ethnologists and cultural historians, the question of the Other's language has not been among my main topics. But when I think of my work, I find that it has been continuously present. In exhibitions you must determine what language/s to use for texts and labels. When collecting artefacts you have to assign them specific item names. When utilizing historical sources for writing, you have to decide what terms and concepts to use for peoples and places – the historical or the contemporary ones – which is particularly sensitive in a post-colonial situation.

In my presentation I will start with how Sami cultural heritage has been represented in museums, particularly the Nordic Museum in Stockholm. I will then reflect upon the issues above, with examples from my own experience but also in a time perspective: how the museums' preferential right of interpretation today is challenged by a new attention to indigenous knowledge and indigenous views. What can the problems be and what are the possibilities?