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CONFERENCES

Cultural Knowledge in a Changing World – Research, Teaching and Cultural Encounters

Helena Laukkoski

The XI Ethnology Days and VIII Finnish Conference on Cultural Policy Research were held in Jyväskylä on 17–18.3.2022. The theme of the conference was cultural knowledge in a changing world – in teaching, research and cultural encounters. During the two conference days, we heard three inspiring keynotes and were able to participate in several different workshops, where we heard about ongoing research in the fields of ethnology and cultural policy.

After two years of Covid pandemic lockdowns, the conference was held in person. This meant that we were able to meet and greet our colleagues and enjoy conversations over coffee and during lunchbreaks throughout the conference. This networking aspect was important for me especially since I began work as a doctoral researcher during the pandemic, and we have had only a few opportunities to meet our colleagues in person and discuss our research. I believe we can all agree on the fact that meeting online on Zoom or in Teams is not the same as meeting in person.

The year 2022 was a year of celebration for many supporting organisations at the conference. Ethnos ry turned fifty, the Society for Cultural Policy Research turned ten and the Centre for Cultural Policy Research Cupore turned twenty. This reminds us about the importance of research in these fields and serves to emphasise the significance of ongoing and future research and education, a point also noted in the conference programme since one of the workshops was a panel discussion on Cupore and the role of research in decision making.

Building Societal interaction in practice

The first keynote speaker was university teacher, Kaisu Kumpulainen, from the University of Jyväskylä. The title of the keynote was ‘Building societal interaction in cultural research and education’¹. Kumpulainen began by reminding listeners that in addition to education and research, societal interaction is one of the three responsibilities of universities in Finland. The keynote focused on how the Kumu degree programme promotes societal interaction. Kumu – Cultures, Communities and Change – is a relatively new and multidisciplinary de-

1 Original title in Finnish was ‘Yhteiskunnallisen vuorovaikutuksen rakentaminen kulttuurien tutkimuksessa ja koulutuksessa’.



Photo 1: The conference was held in Jyväskylä, on the Seminaarinmäki campus (Helena Laukkoski 2022).

gree programme that combines ethnology, anthropology and cultural policy. On a pedagogical level, Kumu focuses on a connective pedagogy that combines theory and practice in education. Kumu students are invited to participate in research projects and different networks during

their studies. This allows the students to strengthen their professional identity and offers them practical tools for their future working life.

In the keynote, Kumpulainen introduced several research projects involving Kumu students. One of them was a participative cultural planning project (OSKU) in the municipality of Sumiainen and Palokka suburb, where the residents had expressed concerns about the negative effects of municipal mergers. The concerns included, for example, the loss of local identity and services and

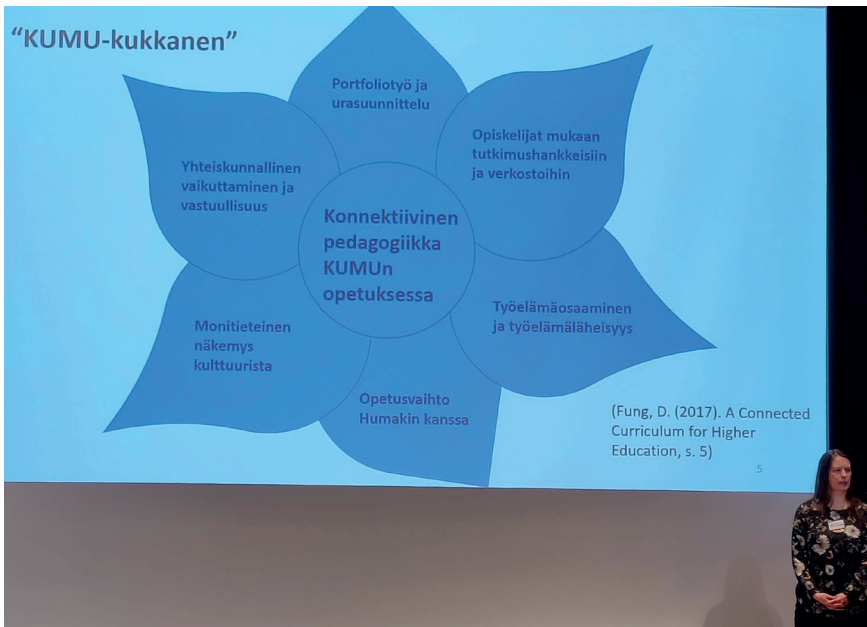


Photo 2: Keynote Kaisu Kumpulainen presenting the 'Kumu flower', which demonstrates the role of connective pedagogy in Kumu teaching (Helena Laukkoski 2022).

the deterioration of vitality in the area. The goal of the research project was to discover how the sense of locality and spirit of the village community have been built and maintained over time. The aim was also to serve the local communities by offering them ways to develop the local areas and increase vitality in the area. Visualisations documented the results of the research project and were distributed to the residents and local associations. Also, a public event was arranged for members of the local communities so they could hear the results of the project. Kumu students worked as research assistants in Sumiainen and held participative workshops for the residents. This offered the students the possibility to work in the field and learn in practice.

Learning in practice increases students' work life skills, giving them the opportunity to experience working as part of a research project. Students in the field of culture have expressed concerns about moving into working life after completing their studies because career paths in the cultural field are not straightforward. As a young doctoral researcher, I recognise and share this concern. Based on Kumpulainen's keynote, it seems the concern has been heard by the University of Jyväskylä and the Kumu degree programme has responded to it. The keynote demonstrated how societal interaction in the fields of cultural research and education can be increased in a way that serves the students, university and society.

Digital cultural policy

The second keynote, 'Exploring platforms: Moving from policy to practice in the age of tech giants', was given by Bjarki Valtýsson, an associate professor at the University of Copenhagen. The keynote focused on digital cultural policy, which is important since we spend increasing amounts of our time in different digital environments. It is important to know what the roles of digital platforms are in producing cultural heritage and how these digital platforms are regulated.

The research example that he chose to use reflected the complexity of digital cultural policy. Valtýsson presented a project in which researchers analysed Google's privacy policy and terms of service since implementation of the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The analysis focused on different versions of the same policy documents. Since 1999, Google has adopted 35 different versions of its privacy policy and 19 versions of its terms of service. We heard that the analysis of these documents has not always been easy or pleasant. The goal of the GDPR was to give us a better understanding of what companies do with our data. Valtýsson noted that the research project found GDPR had increased the complexity of data management rather than reducing it. In fact, Google's post-GDPR documents are even less transparent than before. While they do safeguard the rights of citizens, it is now harder for indi-

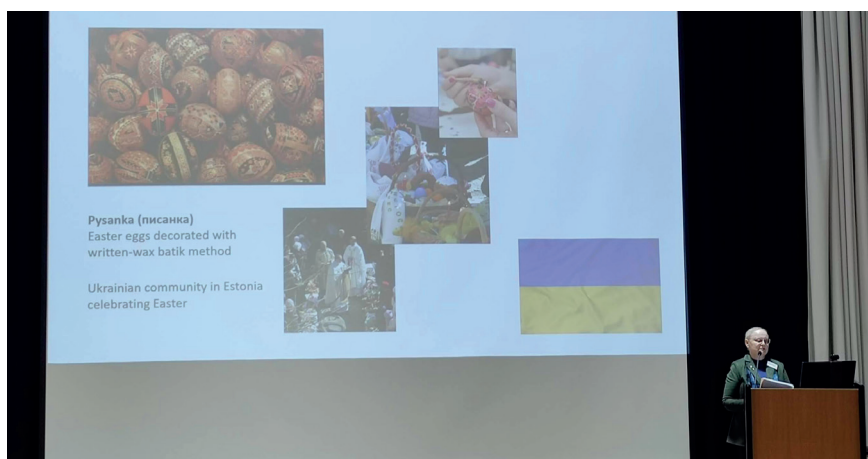


Photo 3: Keynote Kerstin Kuutma began her presentation by showing examples of Ukrainian cultural heritage (Helena Laukkoski 2022).

viduals to understand the policies. This is because the GDPR itself is complex, and this complexity is most evident in the regulatory framework related to it.

The keynote inspired discussions on different topics, such as algorithms and their role in the digital environment. The power of the tech giants was also discussed and demonstrated by the fact that even though people acknowledge the issues related to Facebook they do not leave the platform. The role of social media and digital environments has also increased in the academic community. You can use Facebook or Twitter to seek peer support or discuss your research. As mentioned earlier, it is also one of the reasons why we need to research digital cultural policy and how these digital services are regulated.

From cultural heritage policies to cultural heritage politics

The third keynote was by Kerstin Kuutma, a professor from the University of Tartu and UNESCO Chair on Applied Studies of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The topic of her keynote address was 'Cultural knowledge and heritage politics in a changing world'. Originally, the title focused on heritage policies rather than politics, but she shifted the emphasis due to the current world situation and war in Ukraine. In my opinion, this is an example of how the academic community can respond to and reflect ongoing changes in the political world.

Kuutma began the keynote by introducing Pysanka eggs, which are traditional Ukrainian Easter eggs decorated using a written-wax batik method. We also saw some pictures of the Ukrainian community in Estonia celebrating Easter, reflective of the fact that a practice considered an example of major heritage in one country can constitute a minor heritage in another. We were

also reminded of the fact that cultural heritage is not a given, but a social construct, and the ways in which people conceive of cultural heritage is related to cultural politics. In addition, we heard a brief history of the identification, mapping and institutionalisation of intangible cultural heritage in Estonia.

The misuse of cultural heritage was also brought up in the keynote discussion. The nationalist Ekre Party in Estonia has defined heritage as one of its core values. Likewise, we have seen the rise of nationalist parties in Finland and elsewhere in Europe. These parties often claim that they are protecting local cultural heritage. The parties also claim they are protecting the nation from hostile parties. These examples led to much discussion and to the general question of who has the right to use cultural heritage and for what purposes. Concern was also raised about the destruction of cultural heritage in Ukraine due to the Russian invasion.

Multidisciplinary workshops

During the conference, we had the opportunity to participate in a variety of multidisciplinary workshops. I had difficulty in choosing which ones to attend. The workshop presentations were mainly given by researchers in ethnology and cultural policy, but museum professionals and historians also presented their ongoing research in these fields. This highlights the multidisciplinary approach of the conference.

Two different workshops gave participants the chance to hear about ongoing research related to the museum and heritage field: 'Heritage, knowledge and research' and 'Museums and research collaboration'. We heard inspiring presentations about different research partners, such as museums, archives and artists. In addition, we heard about the ethics of decolonising the collections of the Finnish National Museum and about research on how artists have included particular environments, such as swamps, in their art or performances.

Maria Vanha-Similä spoke about collaboration on one such research project. A research project entitled 'Minun maaseutuni' (My countryside) is a collaboration between the University of Jyväskylä and Sarka – the Finnish Museum of Agriculture. In the presentation, Vanha-Similä highlighted the mutual benefits of such research collaboration. The researchers were able to make use of the museum's networks in their fieldwork, and the museum obtained new material for its collections and exhibitions. Another interesting example from the museum field was Jenni Suomela's presentation about using the Finnish National Museum's textile collections in her doctoral thesis. Suomela's research has focused on fabrics and the different fibres used in them. In her thesis, Suomela developed methods for recognising the fibre materials used in

the fabrics. These examples of collaboration highlight the variety of research being done in the fields of ethnology and cultural policy.

To conclude, the conference offered a variety of perspectives on current ethnology and cultural policy research. It emphasised the importance of multidisciplinary and the ways in which these two different fields of research can benefit and learn from each other. To gain cultural knowledge about the changing world, we need to be aware of the opportunities offered by multidisciplinary approaches. In my opinion, the best way to take advantage of these opportunities is to hear about ongoing research, and what would be a better place than this type of conference.

AUTHOR

Helena Laukkoski, MA, is a PhD student in cultural policy at the University of Jyväskylä. She is currently studying the role of for-profit museums in the Finnish museum field.