

New Voices in the Archives: Memes, Youth and Memory Institutions

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Citizens' societal participation *in* and *via* museums and archives

“This role involves both expanding participation *in* museums and facilitating societal participation *via* the museum: (. . .) the ways in which museums and archives can provide knowledge and experiences that enhance publics' capacity to participate in civil society *beyond* the institution.” (p. 118).

Dahlgren and Hermes, P. (2015). The Democratic Horizons of the Museum: Citizenship and Culture. In *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies* (eds S. Macdonald and H. Rees Leahy).

Heritage-conservation movements in Norway and Sweden

Participation through crowdsourcing

Citizens were openly invited to contribute original specimens and material objects to the earliest collections, organized by museums and scholarly societies.

Participation through associations

Open memberships; fee memberships; general assemblies; local, regional and nationally centralized.

Pierroux, P., Bäckström, M., Brenna, B., Gowlland, G., & Ween, G.B. (2020). Museums as Sites of Participatory Democracy and Design. In *A History of Participation in Museums and Archives. Traversing Citizen Science and Citizen Humanities*. Routledge. p. 27–45.

Community Engagement

Left: Courtesy Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2024/06/20/walker-art-center-invites-visitors-to-reimagine-its-galleries>

Right: Climate Playground model adapted by museums in New York City and Philadelphia (Photo credit Lauren Allen).



Night at the museum: the Walker Art Center's recent installation of *The New Eagle Creek Saloon* by Sadie Barnette featured a functioning bar and a reading room focused on LGBTQ+ history, where the museum held regular evening "happy hours" during the show's run
Courtesy Walker Art Center, Minneapolis



Steiner, M.A., Lyon, M., Crowley, K. (2020) Museums that connect science and communities (pp. 211-234). In *A History of Participation in Museums and Archives*. Routledge, London.

Co-curating and Caring

Left: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xME2pD-KcTA>

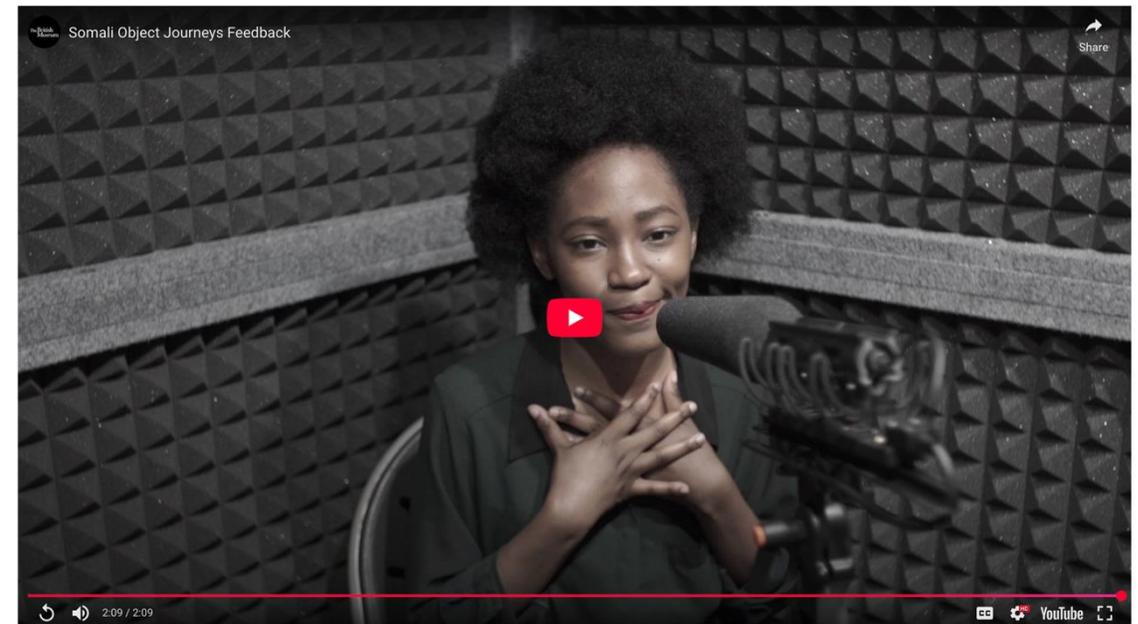
Right: British Museum website

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/learn/communities/object-journeys>



Re-Envisioning Native American Art at the de Young

Theresa Lola's interpretation of the project feedback



Poet Theresa Lola responded to the group's feedback which explored their impressions of the project, its impact and thoughts, to create a new piece of work.

What is it that we think we are doing when we invite citizens to participate?

- Recruiting new target groups (age, multicultural)
- Collect authentic materials that contribute to diversity in the Norwegian 'memory archives'
- Practice reciprocity (renumeration)
- Explore new types of (digital) documentation and processes

A university-archive research partnership:

New Voices in the Archive

A research theme in the Cultural Heritage Mediascapes project that investigates collective remembering, participatory media and a new generation of contributors to Folklore Archives in the digital age.



Today, one speaks of a memory boom, with new media serving as carriers of all forms of memory and changing the very act of recalling, remembering and (re)collecting.

As 'everyone' participates in producing multitudes of narratives, what kind of source material constitutes folklore archives?

The project investigates strategies to engage new generations in documenting cultural citizenship in their own time and age.



The research will center on the Norwegian Folklore Archives, exploring

- how people access and interact with historical documents on social media
- how new models of participation and digital tools may engage especially young people in exploring and documenting everyday life.

Engaging Volunteers

Visser, J., & Richardson, J. 2013. Digital Engagement in Culture, Heritage and the Arts, p. 30. <https://digitalengagementframework.com/>

Recruiting

Meetings of Oslo's neighborhood youth councils

Task 1

Brainstorming workshop at university

Task 2 Interviews

Diversity in voices represented in tradition archives

Task 3 Memes

Opportunity to develop civic identity

Reach and interest

Involve and activate

Task 3 Collect and contextualize memes

That would be a dream job!

Line Amira, send them to NFA.
Amira What?
Line *[in English]* Your memes.
Amira Oh yeah?
Line Your memes ...
Amira Oh, yeah.
Line ... send them to NFA.
Amira What is, what is Ennefffe?
Emily That's us!
Line Norwegian Folklore Archive.
Emily *[addressing Amira]* You could be, like, the official meme collector for the archive.
Amira Yes! That would be a dream job! God, that would be so much fun!
Ali Look, I'm not joking. I'm not joking, I could do it. Y'know, my camera roll is only memes.
Line We'll talk about this at the end.
[Amira and Ali look at each other, then high five.]

Some good memes <3 enjoy!

A few days after the meeting, in the closed Facebook group we (researchers) use to communicate with youth. Amira and then Ali post dozens of memes. Line, the archival researcher, comments on the memes, calling them "super-interesting" and an "incomprehensible genre." Ali playfully mentions a memes job at the ar-

if you're useless.



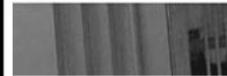
People can't use you if you're useless.



People can't use you i



if you're useless.



People can't use you if you're useless.



People can't use you i



Me realising I'm now an adult with actual responsibilities:



“The picture is taken from [tumblr](#), and the [screenshot](#) is from the Korean series "The goblin" The text points out that [adulthood is much more difficult than one first might think](#), and sometimes your whole life can seem like living someone else's joke #theGoblin #EvenIfItsAMemeTheSeriesIsSoGood”

-Ida, age 19

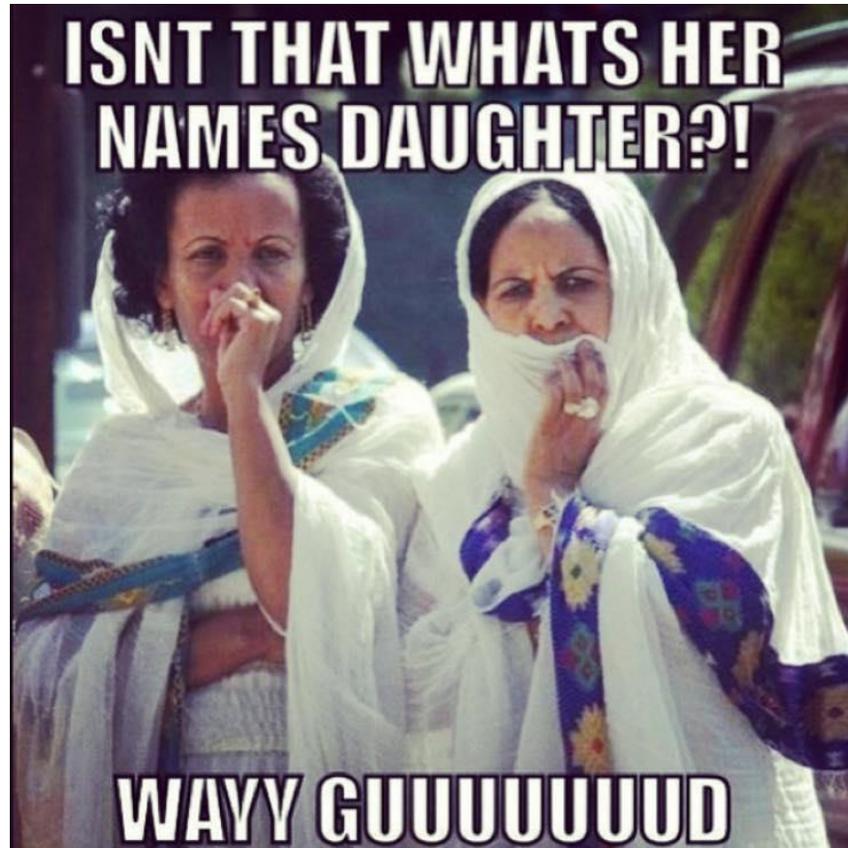
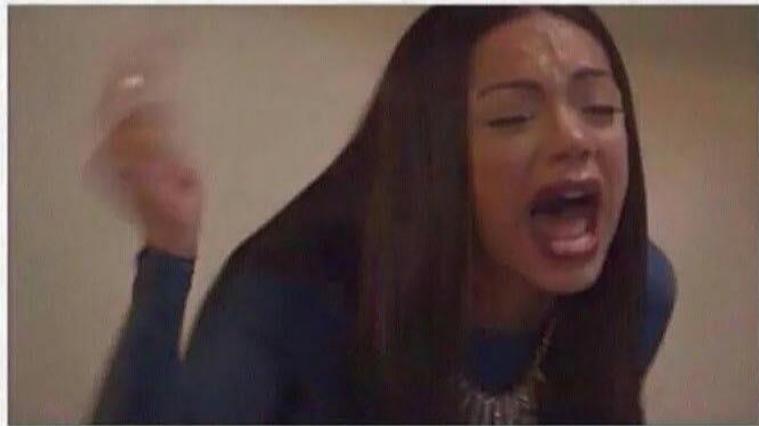
Curate and
interpret:

-Demonstrates
pop culture
literacy

-Articulates,
narrates identity

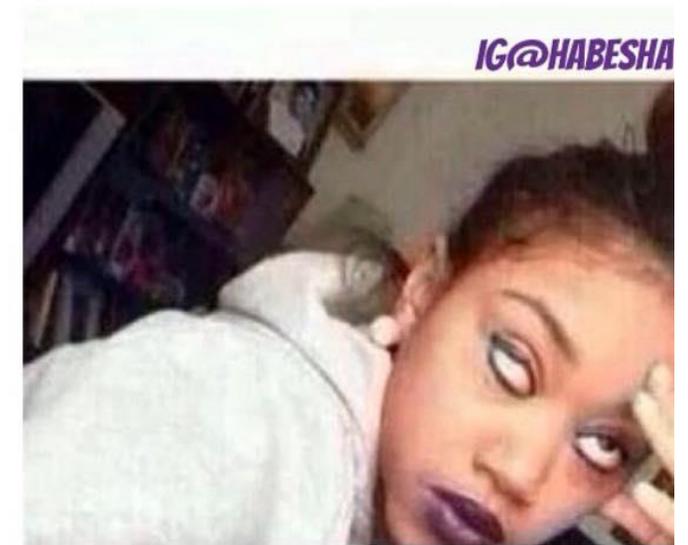
Habesha girls be like:

"I IGNORED MY RACIST PARENTS
TO DATE UR BLACK ASS N U
STILL CHEATED!!!"



Teacher: How do you say y
name agian?

Me: Here we go again..



« Habesha parents are racist even though they're black. They don't like other non-habesha black people. #nfs #racism #relationships »»

Developing 'civic identity' *via* the archive: active participants in Norwegian society with a strong commitment and responsibility to work with others towards a public purposes (American Association of Colleges and Universities).

Key features:

- Contributions aligned with volunteers' interests and literacies as well as institutional aims;
- Volunteers had responsibility for selecting and producing content that was engrossing and unique;
- Expertise as a team was valued by cultural institution;
- Reciprocity in form of remuneration and a certificate of employment as research assistant.



Participation in
the archive:
A model of caring?

Did we act with care in our interpersonal relations, or did we manage and control these relations in ways that reinforced institutional power structures?

Were volunteers given space to speak openly about their feelings about racism and ethnicity in the Norwegian context of messy, real life?



Project Team



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Associate Professor - Cultural History and Museology

Oswald, E. C., Esborg, L., & Pierroux, P. (2022). Memes, youth and memory institutions. *Information, Communication & Society*, 26(15), 2999–3016.



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Thank you for your attention!