Anna Foka: Critical Infrastructures

Abstract
Within the project Digital Models, one of the tasks of archivists and researchers is to digitise Carl Sahlin’s mining history personal archival collection. Carl Sahlin (1861-1943) was a businessman, a distinguished industry historian and a metallurgist. Carl Sahlin’s historical collection contains about 1800 archive capsules of mining history from the 1100s to the 1930s. This article identifies a number of issues related to digitization, most notably the discrepancies between this physical archival collection, its organization and its digital rendering. Infrastructure is discussed as connected mixed and vast nature of the archive: archive capsules are filled with press clippings, financial documents, correspondence, travel books, contracts, articles, maps, literature, stamp books, interviews with neat notes by Carl Sahlin himself. This article then offers an analysis of the discrepancies between critical versus mass digitization: while the museums need to increase the materials that are supposed to be digitized, research often dictates experimentation and a critical methodology of selection and digitization. In this talk I precisely concentrate on the presence of women in the archive. What is primarily addressed here are what can be coined Infrastructural Tensions- a term borrowed by critical digital disruption and organizational studies. Concluding, the article offers a number of recommendations on how to rethink the collection with digital technology in a critical way so as to include social/intellectual categories that correspond to critical research questions in the 21st century. I finally stress the importance of using current digital technology and inter-operatable platforms to open up the collection to a wider public (practices- prototype, social media) and to engage with the international community interested in social history so as to playfully bring critical gender studies perspectives on Sweden’s industrial and mining history museum collections.

Anna Foka is an associate professor in Information Technology and the Humanities at HUMlab, Umeå University, in Sweden. My latest project is funded by the Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg Foundation and investigates movement, transformation, and crisis through the prisms of digital technology and ancient history, using the second-century CE Description of Greece (Periegesis Hellados) of Pausanias. My broad research interests include cultural and social history, history for different frames, interfaces, and platforms, constructions and perceptions of socio-cultural identities, historical concepts of gender and sexuality, and the relationship between historical culture(s) and contemporaneity. I am currently researching identity as a spatial, social, and ethno racial assignment, and digital research infrastructures. I am mostly interested in the implications of adopting fast-pacing digital technology for knowledge production organizations, aka Digital Research Infrastructures (academia, schools, museums, archives, gaming, film etc).