

Helsinki Agenda

Strategy document on international development of new media culture policy. Proposed by the International expert meeting on media arts and media culture policy, Helsinki, August 22-23, 2004

Introduction

This document was produced in dialogue between international experts in new media cultural policy. The meeting convened during ISEA2004, the 12th International symposium on Electronic Art in Helsinki. The meeting was co-hosted by IFACCA, International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, the Arts Council of Finland and m-cult centre for new media culture.

The Helsinki Agenda recognizes Finland's pioneering role in media culture and arts, and in creating open access tools and accessible mobile communication technologies (software, technology and interfaces between information technology and culture). These broaden and deepen the role that media and information can play in civil society and knowledge creation. Finland's history recognizes the strong commitment to democratic and civic values in the media and information practices. This makes Finland an exemplar worthy of consideration and emulation in a variety of local, national and global contexts.

The constant change of new media culture makes policy creation and implementation a challenging task which can only be addressed through an ongoing dialogue between policy-makers and practitioners. ISEA2004 and other international events have demonstrated that the field of electronic, information and media arts and research has reached a level of aesthetic and social sophistication that makes the formulation of these recommendations possible and creates a climate of urgency that can further their realization.

The values of new media culture

New media cultural practices involve media arts (art practices that use information and communication technology, old and new media forms, electronic and electro-acoustic arts), hypertextual works, web based practices, digital media as well as interdisciplinary work between media art and performance, between arts and sciences, art and technology, art and software culture.

In our increasingly mediatized environment, marked by pervasive and ubiquitous computing and wireless devices, practices in new media culture no longer are limited to screen-based, audiovisual and interactive media content but address the wider social, urban and global context of the information environment, through new types of process-based, networked projects and genres.

New media's impact can be felt beyond the cultural sphere. Cultural practices in new media foreground culturally and socially innovative approaches to the development of technology, and there is a strong commitment to artistic research (including practice based research, as well as collaborative, cross cultural and cross disciplinary research models). This requires a foundation in critical independence so as to ensure the attainment of the highest aesthetic and social qualities in and through art practice, research and discourse.

Global new media culture is articulated through a series of interrelated hubs, overlapping networks and connected processes. Organizations, initiatives, individuals and agencies, as well as events and festivals, act as these hubs, enabling a systemic energy and dynamism.

The Helsinki Agenda acknowledges that New Media practices encompass a broad spectrum of

innovations and creative strategies, with artists working both as individual practitioners as well as in highly collaborative professional contexts. New media practices internationally have attained levels of competence and maturity that suggest that the following key principles be recognized:

• Art practice and research in new media is a key generator of new knowledge in art, science, technology, communication and education.

• Art practice and research in new media are important strands that inform the dialogue between practitioners, researchers, creative industries and the public.

• New media practices have developed forms and protocols of knowledge sharing and access based on principles of openness, collaboration and creative freedom. This independent inquiry is vital to the forging of a democratic cultural space within nations and globally.

• New media practitioners can revitalise museums, archives and other heritage contents by allowing for greater public access, public renditions and imaginative readings.

• New media artists create transformative cultural experiences that inspire communities and individuals and expand the scope of creative industries and technology development.

• New media cultural practice also informs larger social policies. By enabling and establishing deeper, as well as more pervasive modes of contemporary communication systems these practices lead to richer possibilities of social, inter-generational and inter-cultural communication, participation and access in our increasingly complex and multi-cultural societies.

Key recommendations for media arts and culture

In order to develop new media practice as a dynamic field it needs to be seen as highly international and networked, with practitioners and researchers working collaboratively across national, cultural and disciplinary boundaries. This is the direct environment of practice within which New Media has evolved and is destined to grow. Cultural, media and communication policies on national, regional and international levels need to be shaped to reflect this reality.

- 1) Freedom of expression and the independence of practice and research have to be guaranteed and vigorously protected in order to enable the attainment of the highest critical standards and a socially responsive and responsible form of practice.
- 2) Collaborative work requires practitioners, researchers, curators and critics to be geographically mobile, able to work together and respond to a wide variety of cultural and social contexts. We strongly endorse the need for creating structures that support the mobility of artists, practitioners and researchers in the field on a stable basis.
- 3) In developing international policies in new media, sensitivity to the varying geopolitical conditions is necessary.
- 4) The nodes and networks that constitute the backbone of global new media culture and need to be supported accordingly. Alliances between key actors need to be fostered and a climate conducive to collaborative competence development and co-production needs to be cultivated.
- 5) Support and attention to education, training and professional development is vital in a rapidly changing field, where educational programmes often lag behind the practice. This requires updating the content of arts education to reflect developments in new media, creating master classes for competence development and the support of informal education and peer learning environments for practising artists.
- 6) In many cultural contexts and countries, support and funding for new media arts and enabling mechanisms that promote a higher public visibility for new media arts are absent or negligible. The

support structures need to be reviewed on an urgent basis so that societies are not deprived of the benefits to creative and knowledge resources created by new media practice which are the basis of our contemporary cultural heritage.

7) Experimental processes and cutting edge practices in cultural technology development are vital to the dynamism of the new media field. They incubate innovations that often translate into applications with crucial social, industrial and educational implication. It is therefore necessary that Arts councils, cultural agencies, foundations, governmental and inter-governmental bodies support experimental processes and practices, and artistic work in the new media field that relates to public space and discourse. Especially when corporate or commercial support is not forthcoming, seed funding strategies and interdisciplinary programmes to support new openings are needed.

8) New media cultural practices require long-term, strategic investment. Arts councils, cultural agencies, foundations, governmental and inter-governmental bodies should support projects that mature over longer durations. This assumes that rigorous accounting and documentation maintain a high degree of transparency, public accountability and responsiveness. An insistence of quantifiable deliverables is counter-productive, especially if the practice seeks to break new ground, and be innovative.

9) The pre-requisite for building a viable and fruitful international networked context of new media practice is to strengthen national and local organisations, arts and cultural practice oriented initiatives and groups. This requires a support for chains in production, distribution, presentation, research and documentation of new media cultural practices.

10) Best practice models for activity at different scales (local, regional, national, international) need to be documented and made public so that policy makers as well as initiatives and organizations can learn from experiences in different countries and contexts and adapt them in order to respond effectively to local needs.

11) Structures that maintain a high level of dialogue between practitioners, and between practitioners and policy makers, need to be put in place both locally and in an international context.

Further proposals for action

The expert group is committed to work towards better integration of practice and policy in fostering the international development of new media culture. To this end, the group proposes further concrete actions such as:

- 1) IFACCA, the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies shall support the formation of international networks in new media culture through a mapping and research project. The possibility to establish a strand for new media culture in IFACCA meetings will be explored.
- 2) To create wider recognition to the role of new media arts in developing cultural information societies on an international level, the expert group proposes that the Helsinki Agenda will be presented in the ASEM Cultural Ministers meeting in 2005 and the ASEM meeting in Helsinki in 2006.
- 3) To further acknowledge and develop the Finnish models for open access, welfare society and cultural information society, the expert group proposes an international initiative to develop public domain technologies for cultural and social innovations.

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