

New Media Arts

Culture for Networked ... Societies

New media arts are a vibrant, transnationally networked, interdisciplinary field in which artists, designers and researchers collaborate in contexts that are culturally plural and technologically diverse. There is an urgent need to bring new media arts funding and support mechanisms to a sustainable level locally, and to substantially increase the support for international collaborations through events, networks, residencies, and productions. This document emphasizes the critical, conceptual and innovative role of new media arts practitioners in today's world, in diverse settings.²

New media artists are for networked societies what painters and sculptors were for industrial society, and video artists have been for the television generation. Media art practices are often socially located and are produced in interaction with communities. Current work on environmental media practices and artistic open source and social software projects are producing new knowledge and insights into global and local transformations that need urgent attention. We emphasize that while artists are not social workers, when successful, they function as innovative practitioners who can change relations between and within communities, and benefit society by constructing empowering media- and technology literacy and diversity. While other art forms use digital tools for their production, staging, and distribution, they rarely address conceptual or critical questions around computing, media cultures, networks, or mobile wireless public spaces. New media arts do.

New media arts are characterized by intense research and development. In turn, these result in new means of expression by modifying and creating new software and hardware, new aesthetics and new ways of engaging with participants or audiences. These skills, tactics and strategies are of great value to societies at large, as they arise from deep cultural and social insights and a thorough knowledge of both new and old technologies. This document suggests that while there should be support for new media arts practice as part of the creative industries, there is a greater need to engage with new media practices that are informed by the diversity of citizens' social

and cultural imagination, and thus offer more sustainable strategies for fostering creativity in society at large. We also suggest that support for 'new' media arts should encompass both new technology and the transformative potentials of 'old media', thus creating possibilities for diverse re-appropriations.

It is vital to recognize that art forms and technologies co-exist in different conjunctions across diverse cultural and social settings. The aim is then to seek ways in which media arts practices can build bridges across digital and analogue divides. The Mini Summit in Singapore underlined that even though media arts practitioners in European and Asian countries have a lot of experiences in common, the political, economic and culturally specific conditions for production and sustainability may vary significantly. Infrastructure and support models³ cannot be copy-pasted from one country to another. Instead, they require 'localisation' in the cultural, economic and social senses of the term. For example, in some locales mobile media labs support practitioners better than do permanent centres. In other contexts strategic investments in centres are important for running larger festivals, for sustaining the technical and staff infrastructures needed for regional and transnational networks, and for maintaining long term research and production collaboration.

It is a challenge for us all to create dynamic policy that recognizes changes in media arts, locally and globally, and to create permanent yet flexible support structures. It is sincerely hoped that in each member country of ASEF and IFACCA these points and recommendations are debated thoroughly and action taken as a result. Continuous collaboration and support by the host organisations to develop this common goal would be highly appreciated.

² New media culture was discussed already in the Amsterdam Agenda <http://www.virtueelplatform.nl/amsterdamagenda>. As a term, it suggests that new media cultural practices overlap traditional fields of art, even though media art is the most central part of its recent history. New media culture also encompasses creative software and media practices and new media activism, usually not part of arts policies. The vision has been that more integrative approach is needed within this vibrant cultural field than has been common in arts and cultural policy.

³ A well developed set of policy tools for media art and culture could include:
a) **productions** by individuals, collectives, associations, artist run companies, and transnational collaborations
b) **research** driven projects and programmes, often with transdisciplinary teams
c) **infrastructures** that include **organisations, networks** and virtual **platforms**
d) **physical spaces** such as media labs and exhibition venues

e) **festivals, exhibitions, conferences, workshops**
f) **mobility** support such as travel grants and shipping costs for **exhibiting**
g) **transnational collaboration** through **residencies**
h) **research & development**; and distribution of software and hardware
i) **documentation and publications** both on- and off-line
j) **policy** research and development, maintaining practice to policy dialogue

Recommendations

Education & Research

In most contexts arts education and research curricula and infrastructures lag behind changes that take place within media arts practices. Rapid changes in technologies used by media artists, and the transdisciplinary nature of production and research call for a more dynamic education and research policy.

Educational policies for media arts should take into account, and combine, formal and informal educational models, addressing different social and demographic groups. Research policies for media art and culture on the other hand should be based on transdisciplinarity, an ability to work with and develop collaborative projects with those trained in science, technology, social sciences and the humanities.

In line with a policy proposal from the Leonardo Education Forum during ISEA2008, it is recommended that funds should be granted for research projects that document and map out media arts research and education to better enable practitioners and policy makers to evaluate and redesign existing frameworks.

A more coordinated, effective action would be to explore the feasibility of establishing a transnational fund or collaborative funding programmes between several national funding bodies, so as to enhance the flexibility of support available to research-based media practice and its mobile, transnational and transdisciplinary nature.

Building Collective Knowledge

Centres, networks, and virtual platforms are useful ways to build collective knowledge about media art practices, and to effectively reach audiences locally and beyond. Networks and virtual platforms may also serve practical functions such as training and documentation, providing advocacy and creating connections, and advocate openness and accountability of practice as 'banks of media knowledge'.

Media arts and cultural policies should be sensitive to the diversity and the long-term impact of these forms of networks and organisations, and accordingly, recognize their funding needs as being long term and strategic rather than project based.

To foster sharing amongst translocally based initiatives, funders are endorsed to participate in helping to build 'com-

mon platforms' for the documentation of knowledge, ethical codes, terminology, resources, training and education, and policies and practices to inform and promote intercultural and transnational exchange, dialogue and policymaking. This could also be done through supporting collaboration between existing platforms.

Transnational Collaboration

Besides funding at the national level, we emphasize that art in the networked world requires flexible transnational funding programmes. This is critical if new media art is to sustain long-term, cross-cultural collaborative work.

It is recommended that national arts funding agencies, be they arts councils or ministries of culture, cooperate in developing pilot programmes that would support transnational collaborations free of restrictions based on the participants' countries of origin. The following concrete areas of support that should be undertaken over the next five years are especially highlighted:

- > *New media artist in residencies with an emphasis on networking and creating sustainable long-term translocal collaboration.*
- > *Research-driven media arts residencies & programmes with an emphasis on transdisciplinary collaboration with diverse institutions such as arts organisations, universities and companies.*
- > *Longer duration workshops and master classes.*
- > *Community arts and urban public space redevelopment projects.*
- > *Mobility of artists, researchers, art works and projects amongst festivals and organisations.*

Mapping & Evaluation

Mapping and evaluation of media arts, locally and globally, would benefit policy makers and media arts organisations in several ways. The results can be used to support practice: as a tool for advocacy, as a basis for policy development by observing trends and supporting strategy, and as a resource for knowledge sharing. In the past, relatively limited support for media arts organisations has had a strong impact on the arts, on research and development and on various local communities and international networks.

Funding bodies are encouraged to commission substantial further mapping of evidence of the impact of media arts practices and its organisations, and to help strengthen knowledge sharing and advocacy.

Open Source & Free Software

Open source and free software and DIY technologies are essential tools and platforms for new media arts and culture. Beyond functionality, open source often represents cultures of collaboration, sharing and promotion of access to tools and knowledge. The process of learning and development is as important as the technologies used and produced, often supporting innovative social practices.

It is recommended that art policies acknowledge the role of these software and hardware cultures as integral parts of new media arts, and also recognize their potential as tools for innovation and learning.

Crossovers & Mixed Economies

While government support for new media practices is absolutely vital, there is also a need to put resources into building a mixed economy of new media art funding, where foundations, larger institutions and, in some cases, the commercial sector contribute to supporting the field. Apart from arts funding agencies, other key players are supported by public funds, such as academic institutions, schools, broadcasting authorities, industry and IT development agencies that would benefit from greater engagement with new media arts practice. At the same time, the importance of informal exchange economies and practices of commoning should be acknowledged and fostered.

It is recommended that some of the existing collaborations between arts policy agencies and other government bodies with related agendas be documented for international distribution and evaluation. Policy actions should provide frameworks that aid forming mixed economies in addition to developing direct support tools.

Freedom of Speech & Intercultural Dialogue

In all instances, the freedom to articulate one's thought and practices without fear has to be supported and the autonomy of the artist, researcher and cultural practitioner respected. Policy makers should recognize the limits and, indeed the potential negative impacts of policy in special circumstances, and respect the 'arms length' principle. In some political environments the relationship between public funding and field of practice is highly problematic, and funding might therefore have to be more calibrated. In this regard, it may be important to create intermediary structures that operate between the government and media arts.

Policy should recognize the creative tension between independent and primarily state-supported practices, so as to ensure that marginalized voices find a space, and that practice that challenges the existing frameworks of knowledge generation and exchange – within and between national-cultural contexts – finds adequate support. Often in these situations the role of foundations that operate across borders has been crucial. National funding bodies should collaborate with, and learn from, these foundations.

Next Steps

The authors of this policy recommendation document embrace the dialogue that has taken place between policy makers, artists and practitioners during the past decade. However, there is a need to evaluate the impact of past policy and practice agendas as a means to improving future strategic collaboration, to inform and advocate ongoing sustainable dialogue.

It is recommended that a media arts practice and policy platform would be established, or that an existing one be supported. Its aim will be to share, inform and promote sustainable documentation as noted above and the range of developments occurring in this field, as well as providing public access to this information.

To ensure the success of these policies, it is recommended that IFACCA and ASEF consider hiring a media arts policy expert team for a period of up to 12 months to consult with key practitioner networks, funding agencies, policy networks and foundations in order to analyse, prioritize and implement actions recommended in this and previous documents.

It is recommended that this document be distributed to other key bodies that have had a significant impact on the development of this field. These may include bodies such as UNESCO (with regard to their digital arts and cultural diversity agendas), the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Hivos Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, Open Society Institute and Soros Foundation Network, to name but a few. It is also recommended to continue media arts and policy mini summits in the context of future International Symposia on Electronic Art (ISEA), which because of its nomadic nature brings together different regional networks, organisations, academics and media arts practitioners.

This document, and other outputs of the Mini Summit in Singapore are important steps in an ongoing process of dialogue and collaboration between policy and practice. While this document should be widely distributed, the process is as important as the product; trusting that ongoing critical discussion will contribute to a more informed understanding between media arts policy and practice.

This document was financially supported by the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF), the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA) and Virtueel Platform.

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With the support of the European Commission.



Appendix: Background to the Mini Summit on New Media Arts Policy & Practice, Singapore 2008

Background: Practice to Policy

The Singapore Mini Summit built upon earlier occasions where practitioners and policy makers engaged in dialogue on new media art practices, and respective national and international policies. It also highlighted new emergent questions and integrated viewpoints from both Asian and European local contexts.

An event held in 1997, *Practice to Policy – Towards a New European Media Culture (P2P)*, produced the first extensive report and a set of policy recommendations entitled the **Amsterdam Agenda**.⁴ Organized by Dutch media arts organizations that later formed Virtueel Platform,⁵ P2P argued for grounding policy on experiences of practitioners in the rapidly changing field of new media culture.

A *Mini-Summit organized during ISEA2004* in Helsinki, hosted by m-cult⁶ and the Finnish Arts Council⁷ in partnership with IFACCA, recognized Finland's pioneering role in media culture and arts and in creating open access tools and accessible mobile communication technologies that broaden and deepen the role that media and information can play in civil society and knowledge creation. The **Helsinki Agenda**⁸ further developed the ideas that emerged in the Amsterdam Agenda and particularly emphasized the need to shift new media arts and cultural policy to better support international, translocal, non-nation based cultural practices.

Subsequently, an International Working Group meeting on New Media Culture was held at Sarai-CSDS in Delhi, in January 2005 under the aegis of *Towards a Culture of Open Networks*, a collaborative programme developed by Sarai CSDS⁹ (Delhi), the Waag Society¹⁰ (Amsterdam) and Public Netbase¹¹ (Vienna) with the support of the EU India Economic and Cross Cultural Programme. The **Delhi Declaration**¹² referred to the rich heterogeneity of forms and protocols in the communicative and media practices in contemporary South Asia, emphasizing active content creation and process over a simplistic notion of access to ICT in the global South.

While earlier practice and policy meetings also looked at viewpoints from the local context and combined these with discussions on transnational and national policies, local media and cultural policy was addressed only briefly in Singapore, as policy makers were absent from much of the meeting.

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