

IFACCA response to the Helsinki agenda on the international development of new media culture policy

August 2005

Introduction

In August 2004, international experts gathered in Helsinki, Finland, for a ‘Mini-summit’ on media arts and media culture policy. The meeting resulted in the release of the ‘Helsinki Agenda’, which outlined the nature and values of new media arts and culture, and set out key recommendations and proposals for action for policies relating to new media arts and culture. The Helsinki Agenda recommended further action be taken by the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA). This document is IFACCA’s response to the proposals set out in the Helsinki Agenda. It provides background to the Mini-summit program, summarises the outcomes of the Mini-summit in Helsinki, and in particular the Helsinki Agenda that resulted from the Mini-summit. The paper outlines IFACCA’s response to the actions proposed for IFACCA in the Helsinki Agenda.

Background

IFACCA is the first global network of national arts funding bodies (such as arts councils and ministries of culture). One of IFACCA’s aims is to strengthen the capacity of arts councils and national culture agencies to meet the challenges and opportunities of globalisation and technological change. To do this, IFACCA has initiated a ‘Mini-summits’ program. Mini-summits bring together a small group of managers (10 to 20) from arts councils and culture agencies over two to three days to explore key policy concerns, develop joint initiatives and forge ongoing networks. More information on can be found at http://www.ifacca.org/ifacca2/en/organisation/page04_mini.asp.

As part of the Mini-summit program, the Arts Council of Finland, IFACCA and m-cult, the centre for new media culture, Finland, co-hosted an expert meeting on 22-23 August 2004 to share information on policies to support media arts and new media culture. Participants came from a range of countries, including India, Singapore, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany and the USA. The Mini-summit was held in affiliation with ISEA2004, the 12th International Symposium on Electronic Art (<http://www.isea2004.net>).

The mini-summit's aims were to:

- assess the implementation of new media policies (by looking at best practices as well as failures);
- understand the implications of media arts-specific policy in relation to a model where ‘new media’ is supported across the spectrum of all art forms;
- discuss new media culture policy, where media arts is a focus area

- discuss the increasing focus on combined research and production and the challenge the approach poses for traditional divisions in funding
- discover ways through which international collaborations (productions, networks, non-local organizations) could be better funded: the networked new media culture; and
- develop concrete collaborations, possible funding schemes, statistics accumulation, research and development projects amongst the participants.

Outcomes of the Mini-summit

As well as offering participants a chance to meet and debate key issues, the Mini-summit had two immediate outcomes:

- 1) the publishing of a number of associated papers on new media arts and culture policy in the Arts Council of Finland's quarterly journal *ARSIS*.¹
- 2) The release of the Helsinki agenda, which is described below.

The Helsinki Agenda

Mini-summit participants drafted and released a report entitled *Helsinki agenda: Strategy document on international development of new media culture policy*. The full report is at: http://www.ifacca.org/files/040916Helsinki_agenda_final.pdf.

In summary, the Helsinki Agenda has three main parts:

- 1) The values of new media culture, which describes a number of key characteristics of new media arts *practice*;
- 2) Key recommendations for media arts and culture, which outlines eleven key issues and principles for *policies* that target new media arts and culture; and
- 3) Further proposals for action, which lists the following three actions that would encourage better integration of practice and policy:
 - That IFACCA 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.

IFACCA response

At its meetings in Hanoi, Vietnam (October 2004), and London, England (April 2005), the IFACCA board discussed the issues raised in the Helsinki Agenda. The board considered a number key issues in the supporting of new media arts, including the following:

¹ Available at http://edmund.taiteenkeskustoimikunta.fi/download/ARSIS+verkko+3-04.pdf?lngDoc_id=1521.

- New media art is often highly internationalised in the way that it is created and presented, and this creates issues for funding bodies operating within national boundaries.
- Gaps and overlaps between agencies that fund new media arts (such as broadcasting agencies, film agencies, trade commissions, science and technology departments) create challenges for new media artists seeking assistance.
- Some new media artists face the disadvantage of working in countries where no programs exist to support or fund new media art practice.

For these reasons, and for the other reasons highlighted in the Helsinki Agenda, the board expressed its support for the formation of a network of new media arts funding experts from IFACCA member agencies.

However, the board suggested that the formation of such a network must be driven by interest among potential members. If a groundswell of interest in a network was established among IFACCA members, the board agreed to explore ways that IFACCA could facilitate the network. It suggested the following possible roles for the IFACCA secretariat:

- 1) Undertaking research via *D'Art* that maps the range of government agencies engaged in supporting new media arts practice in a selection of countries;
- 2) Facilitating the network via the IFACCA website; and
- 3) Considering further actions to assist the network, if it is established.

D'Art

A *D'Art* question would be a natural place to begin, as the *D'Art* process could both uncover information *and* establish the level of interest in participating in a network. Due to the highly specialised nature of new media arts and culture issues, the IFACCA secretariat would need to seek a member-partner with whom to develop, release and research a *D'Art* question. The question would aim to:

- 1) 'map' the range of government agencies engaged in supporting new media arts practices in a selection of countries;
- 2) uncover information on the different structures, processes and programs that those agencies adopt in supporting new media arts
- 3) uncover research on issues of government support for new media arts, and in particular on good practice in support of new media arts and culture; and
- 4) establish contacts to people working in government support of new media arts and culture around the world, determine the level of interest these contacts have in participating in an on-line network, and perhaps obtain ideas about what form the network should take.

The *D'Art* process could be used in a two-step manner: first, to find new media arts contacts in government agencies; and second, to follow-up with these contacts to obtain more detailed information. A precedent for this type of staged process is the arts and education *D'Art* (<http://www.ifacca.org/files/educationreport.pdf>), in which arts and education contacts were first identified, and then asked to complete a detailed survey form. The process was very successful in identifying contacts willing to become actively involved.

On-line network

If it is established that there is enough support for creating a network, IFACCA can work with possible network partners and participants to determine appropriate network structures and procedures.

Online forums and networks are not always successful. They rely on the commitment of participants and 'stakeholders': 'Networks...rest in the hard work and labour of individuals and organisations'.² The success of networks also depends on the network's structure, the formal and informal rules about how the network should run, and the codes of behaviour and habits that emerge over time and produce the a network's 'character'.³

IFACCA is a natural candidate to host an online network of new media arts experts from government agencies. But there are many possible ways to proceed in establishing a network, with varying degrees of cost and resourcing depending on the network's agreed objectives. The *D'Art* process outlined above could be used not only to gauge the level of the interest in a network, but also to determine what the broad aims and nature of such a network should be, if one is desired.

Next step

IFACCA members and other interested parties are asked to express their level of interest in any of the possible actions outlined in this response, and to provide their opinions on how they would like the secretariat to proceed.

Please send your comments to info@ifacca.org.

Alternatively, IFACCA's contact details are:
International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies
PO Box 788, Strawberry Hills
2012 NSW
Australia
Ph: +61 2 9215 9018
Fx: +61 2 9215 9111

² Tapio Mäkelä, Program Chair of m-cult, quoted in *Creating Connections: Trends in Government Support for Artistic Creativity*, Report on 2nd World Summit on the Arts and Culture, http://www.ifacca.org/files/IFACCA_2nd_World_Summit_%20Report_English.pdf.

³ Madden, C., 2004, *International networks and arts policy research*, paper presented at the Third International Conference on Cultural Policy Research, Montréal, http://www.hec.ca/iccpr/PDF_Texts/Madden_Christopher.pdf.