

Thinking Culture - National Cultural Policy Issues and the Role of Cultural Heritage in Finland

Introduction

The focus on cultural issues at the national policy level fluctuates over time in all countries. In Finland, we have seen the ups and downs of cultural policy and the appreciation of culture, as in other countries. This highlighting of culture on a policy level is significant since the national focus increases both direct and indirect financing, enhances public interest and realizes possibilities for the protection and fostering of culture in a way that will have impact far into the future.

Cultural policy work is done on many different levels, from ministries to NGOs. On the government level, there have been significant and interesting developments in Finland over the last few years, which emphasize the increased meaning and function of culture in the general well-being of citizens and the stability of the society despite the economic crunch. This work has mostly been carried out by the Ministry of Education and Culture but has involved other public bodies as well, starting with the Government and the Parliament.

The Ministry of Education was renamed Ministry of Education and Culture in May 2010 in a welcome bid to emphasize the large part of the content of the work done in the Ministry. It seems that society and the government are thinking culture on an increased level, a direction we cannot but feel is long overdue and will welcome with open arms. What this in practice means to cultural heritage remains to be seen. There is still work to be done and issues to be pursued, but the foundations are becoming increasingly solid and will provide good grounds for proceeding in the future.



Children's music orchestra Ammu! arranged a very popular a Kalevala Day concert of traditional music at the National Museums of Finland. Photo by Jouni Marjamäki /National Board of Antiquities.

Key emerging cultural policy statements Strategy for Cultural Policy 2020

Cultural issues laid down in the current Government Programme include the promotion of the diversity of arts and culture, rich cultural heritage, cultural institutions and services, and creativity. At the core of the Government view is the fact that art and culture promote the well-being and the quality of life of citizens and strengthen their cultural assets. By strengthening the cultural foundations of society, developing the operating conditions of creative workers, cultural participation and cultural industries, the Government seeks the promotion of education, creativity, skills and innovation, regional prosperity, employment and growth in national economy. This is pretty standard national-level policy and has been



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operational for several years now, however emphasizing the fact that focus on culture at least in principle starts at a very high level.

Among the most important policy statements in the sector during the last few years is the Strategy for Cultural Policy up to 2020 prepared by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2009. It is intended to steer the Ministry's action in the field over the coming years.

The policy states, among other things that:

The premise is that the significance of culture and therefore also cultural policy will continue to grow. This means that the field of operations and the forms and modes of action in cultural policy will diversify. New priorities will emerge, such as the social impact of culture alongside the economic one, the demands of sustainable development, and multiculturalism.

As a result of the demographic and technological development, the traditional cultural policy aims will have to address new challenges like accessibility of cultural services and quality assurance. Another challenge is to enhance social impact in the sector, while accommodating the demands of the public economy. Further, cooperation with operators in other sectors and in society at large will be to the fore, which will raise the profile of cultural policy in social policy more widely. Similarly, copyright is in a crossfire of many conflicting expectations. (Strategy for Cultural Policy 2009:45).

The primary desired outcome of cultural policy is a strong cultural base in society and favourable conditions for creative workers and producers of cultural services, actively participating citizens, the promotion of well-being, and the enhancement of the economic impact of culture. As the Ministry states, these policy targets are to be specified for each sector in sector-specific programmes and action plans. At the moment, no such policy for the museum sector exists, but new programmes to be prepared in the near future include a museum policy programme, as well as a copyright policy

document, and an architecture and cultural environment programme, to complement those policies that already exist.

Assessing impact

In tandem with the policy, the Ministry has launched a new initiative and published a report on impact indicators for culture. The background of the initiative is the general direction on governmental level and in the ministries of promoting strategic and knowledge-oriented governance, management by results and targeting and follow-up related to it.

Very generally speaking, this is a framework setting out indicators with the help of which the policy targets can be monitored by the Ministry and their impact assessed. These indicators are grouped under the policy targets set out in the Strategy (strong cultural base, creative workers, citizens and culture, economy and culture) and address all sectors of culture. There are 49 indicators in all to be followed, many of which would be relevant also for single museum organizations, but of which only some are directly related to the museum sector in general. These are: number of items in museum collections; number of items accessible online; exhibitions, opening hours and visitors. These indicators, along with the rest, are to be followed as time series to detect trends in changes supporting targets (Vaikutavuusindikaattorit kulttuuripolitiikan tietopohjan vahvistajina 2009).

The targets connected to these are many but here is a selection: maintaining and developing cultural services available to the citizens; securing equal access to culture; strengthening cultural identities and diversity of content; using cultural heritage education for all to enable in-



dividual improvement and active citizenship; ensuring the preservation of heritage to future generations and the protection of sustainable cultural environments; ensuring the availability of cultural heritage content on-line and securing its long-term storage; supporting intercultural dialogue; supporting the creative welfare society; supporting diversity and participation and so on. This work is well justified and sits well with similar indicator work done elsewhere in Europe. The indicators are not yet implemented but their employment is foreseen in the future and the discussion about them continues.

Future visions and well-being

In 2008, a committee was appointed by the Ministry to draft a proposal for a report on the Futures of Culture to be submitted to Parliament, as was called for by the Government Programme. In it, the future strengths of cultural policy are seen to be sustainable culture, cultural diversity and creativity. These are a precondition and a foundation for the societal impact of culture, people's well-being and the economy of the different sectors of culture. The Report was submitted by the Government to the Parliament in summer 2010 and is awaiting its endorsement. It is, like future visions tend to be, on a general level, but nevertheless includes as core strengths of future society cultural heritage and the availability of cultural content on-line.

At the same time with the *Futures of Culture* report, on the request of the Government, philosopher Pekka Himanen was asked to produce a report about the visions for the future society, where culture is at the core of success. Himanen sees that a rich multi-valued life is intimately connected to the grand challenge of



living in an inseparably multicultural world. According to him, culture is the spiritual source of a meaningful life. The report, submitted in early 2010, presents a vision where future national actions create the conditions for the flowering of humanism which will more and more enrich our lives (Himanen 2010).

The final policy to be mentioned in this connection is the cross-sector "Art and culture for well-being" programme, launched in the beginning of 2010. The aim of the programme is to promote well-being and health by means of art and culture and to enhance inclusion at the individual, community and societal levels. The three priority areas in it are: culture in promoting social inclusion, capacity building, networking and participation in daily life and living environments; art and culture as part of social welfare and health promotion; and art and culture in support of well-being and

"Animals on Seas" exhibition at the Maritime Museum of Finland presented seafaring animals from parrots to pigs and cockroaches. Photo by Erik Tirkkonen /National Board of Antiquities.





health at work. The programme puts forward proposals for altogether 18 actions geared to promote health and well-being through art and culture. They are grouped into actions relating to legislation, administration and funding, co-operation between the public, private and third sectors, research and the knowledge base, education and training, and information (Liikanen 2010). The programme includes several actions that have to do with cultural heritage, museums, access to cultural heritage and the cultural environment, putting them in the forefront of the well-being of individuals and communities.

These policies, although their implementation is just starting or is still to come, still highlight the growing interest on a national level in culture, both as a value-carrying entity in itself as well as an instrument creating an impact on society. The trends that are detectable in the policies focus on some key elements of cultural heritage; in the forefront among these are the value and impact of culture, culture as a means of well-being, accessibility of culture and perhaps most prominently, the need to promote access to digital cultural heritage.

Culture in the information society

One of the key areas emerging from the policies is the role culture is gaining in the information society. Internationally speaking, Finland is a fruitful combination of information and welfare societies. Recently critical voices have been raised regarding the availability of public services on-line; however, the capability of the citizens for uptake of new services is high. Increased immaterial exchange and a profound change in the way information is produced and disseminated characterize the information and competence

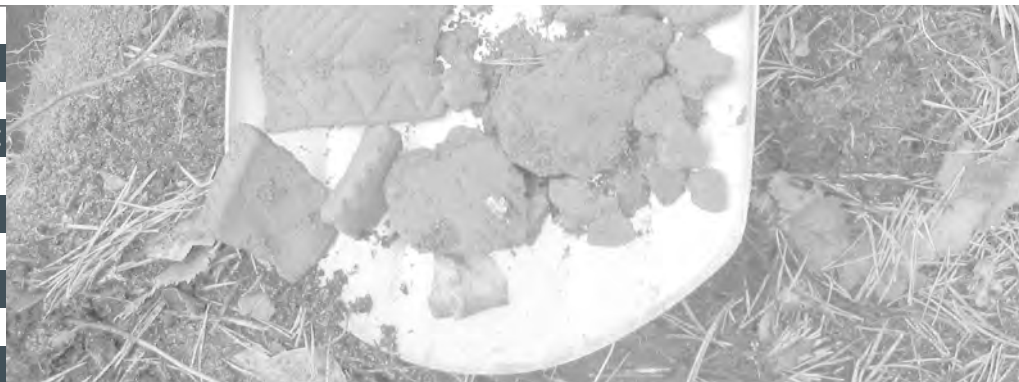
society. The mission of libraries, archives and museums as possessors, intermediaries and repositories of essential electronic information resources is of vital importance for such a society.

The information society presents enormous possibilities for cultural heritage. It is necessary that museum contents should be brought within the reach of common search possibilities to be accessible for all, regardless of time, place and abilities. Knowledge networks reach an unprecedented clientele and make it possible for museums to make their collections and knowledge reserves known to a broad range of clients, including new user groups.

Cultural heritage in digital format combined with spatial information and hand-held mobile devices opens up new possibilities in heritage education, cultural tourism and event experiences. Interactive services facilitate a new kind of approach to quality content and present museums with the fascinating but challenging possibility of user participation, content curation and inclusiveness. Digitization of museum objects and other materials creates employment possibilities for museum professionals all across the country and ensures the build-up of know-how. It also encourages the creation of new public-private partnerships. Content creation and setting up of services require co-operation among museums and between museums and other actors, creating new kinds of networks and business models.

Flagshipping the focus - National Digital Library project

If there is something highlighting the current national focus on cultural information society, it is the emerging National Digital Library in



Finland, launched in 2008 and expected to be completed in 2011. Increased funding by the state has been channelled to this project already for a number of years. It has drawn together an active core group of participants from museums, libraries and archives.

National information society policy and the Government Resolution on the Objectives of the National Information Society Policy 2007-2011 emphasize the development of common infrastructures and services that promote the use of mainly publicly funded electronic information resources. The National Digital Library project (www.kdk2011.fi) managed by the Ministry of Education and Culture is part of this infrastructure development. The mission of the National Digital Library is to promote the accessibility of the foremost national knowledge reserves in libraries, archives and museums and their usability in information networks and to explore long-term solutions to the preservation of cultural heritage materials in electronic format.

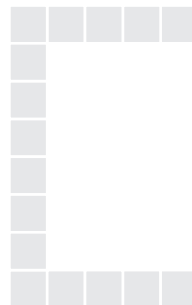
The definition of the National Digital Library owes much to the enrichment of the European Union's policies during the past ten years. Regarding the information society, a decade ago the European Union's activities relating to memory organizations and their materials were still limited to scientific libraries and digitization. In the European Commission's i2010 information society strategy (2005) and i2010 digital libraries initiative (2005), which further elaborates the strategy, the electronic information resources of scientific and public libraries, archives, audio-visual archives and museums are, for the first time in the European Union's activities, at the core of the information society.

These policies have been taken further in a number of more in-depth and complementary documents by the Commission, the Council and the Parliament. Ensuring the availability and usability of born-digital and digitized materials in the future is a goal towards which both the Commission and the EU Member States are working. To this end, the Commission and the Member States together have committed themselves to establishing a European Digital Library, Europeana.

The goal of Finland's National Digital Library is to ensure the availability of the electronic information resources of libraries, archives and museums now and in the future. The project focuses on common services, operational models and solutions. It aims at creating a common public interface for the essential electronic information resources of libraries, archives and museums, as well as their on-line services. The National Digital Library and the European digital library, Europeana, are co-operating closely. This collaboration ensures that the most essential materials of Finnish memory organizations will also be available on Europeana.

During this project, it has been noticed that certain national services are becoming increasingly relevant. These include, for example, the adoption and maintenance of services related to uniform resource names (URN), the retrieval of author information in different languages (authority database), ontologies, and geographic information. The establishment and expansion of these services would also serve other electronic services considered essential for citizens and authorities (Karvonen 2009).

In Finland, there are currently a number of ongoing European-level funded projects, in-



cluding the ATHENA project, that work nationally in close co-operation with the National Digital Library, ensure that quality to content from memory institutions enters Europeana. The public interface of the National Digital Library will be put into operation in 2011, whereas many of the projects are already experimenting first-hand with transferring their data and content to Europeana. These projects all generate necessary information that can be fed into the National Digital Library project, to ensure a seamless integration of data and a tested workflow in future transferring of content to Europeana.

There have been different national responses to European policy agendas aiming at facilitating access to digitized cultural heritage. In Finland, the national response has been to take this further in several policy papers and to start the development of a National Digital Library, acting in the future as an aggregator of content to wider services. But it will do much more than this: there are huge possibilities of integrating sectors, creating new services, attracting new users and creating more impact. This is why it is also making thinking culture easier than ever. Policies have brought culture to the forefront of the well-being of society, and now the time has come to put the policies into action.

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Archaeological investigations bring to light every year finds from European prehistoric cultures which often transgress today's national borders. Eastern Comb ceramics from Neolithic Stone Age from Karpankangas, Finland.
 Photo by Katja Vuoristo /National Board of Antiquities.

