

# Proposal for the Competition “Next Helsinki”

## E-mocracy, let the people decide:

The word E-mocracy is a made-up word to demonstrate the combination of electronics and democracy.

E-mocracy is a selection process of art, ideas and cultural contributions, giving the public the opportunity to decide for themselves what kind of art or media they want to be represented by.

This contribution proposes a website and a museum for the purpose of exhibiting objects that are subjectively selected by the country's inhabitants themselves: in other words, the community is the curator. Therefore, the digital revolution, or rather the internet, provides the ideal opportunity for applying this new system of information and media-processing technology. The media presented in this case is in contrast to the economically-obsessed and emotionally-branded art which is shown in museums like the Guggenheim, the Louvre or the National Gallery. In theory, the input of the museum can be derived from anyone, as long as the community approves and shows interest. Appreciation buttons on the internet site “E-mocracy.fi” allow the public to “like” certain issues, paintings, films etc. which could be subsequently voted and lead to the cultural assets being presented in an analogue exhibition.

The idea for this task is based on a social ideology and pays little heed to any formal architectural or technical principles. It essentially describes the concept of how Helsinki is able to create a unique image of itself and how to demonstrate that it is able to play a cultural pioneer role.

## Art:

Countless artists (in this proposal the term “art” refers to works of any creative expression) spend a great amount of money on their education, hoping that after graduation they are at least able to offset their

schooling outlays and make a living. Many of them then send requests to art business professionals, hoping for a miracle. E-mails which are received by these professionals are rarely afforded any serious consideration. Young artists often look for ways of getting into networks with lucrative contacts and at some stage their marketing strategy becomes more important than their creative work. This seems all the more disappointing since some of the artists generally believe that producing art is a “calling” and making money is incidental.

Art professionals usually recommend that the best way for an unrecognised artist to become successful is to start off at a regional basis. Furthermore, he should be able to describe his work in a way that makes his art comprehensible to everyone, regardless of whether they are a layman or an expert.

In this respect, one advantage of this new system of selection of the art to be exhibited in a museum is the opportunity for every artist in Finland, regardless of being well-known or not, to take part in this cultural evaluation and to obtain authentic feedback. In addition everyone gets the chance to display his work on public virtual space and to exploit his creative potential. It is the actual product of work that counts, not the name of the artist, writer, producer, poet etc.. The term “Equal rights for all” underlines the social idea.

A Guggenheim Museum, which was proposed in the previous competition, exhibits art which does not reflect the identity of Finland or Helsinki. This kind of museum is no more than a prestige building that could be found anywhere. As mentioned in the task, people may become indignant about what their tax money is being spent on. It is difficult for a politician to represent and stand for the needs of a democratic country and, similarly, a curator will have a hard time finding art that conforms to the cultural needs of a country. He usually has to

take what is on offer, assuming the financial resources are available.

### **The procedure of selection:**

It is expected that the contributions will be mainly digital. A painting or a sculpture, for example, will be scanned or photographed and then presented digitally on the internet. One advantage of the digital production of art is the fact that almost every Finn has access to a computer and the internet. Many Open Source tools such as 2-D Vector and 2-D Raster programs allow artists to produce their work without charge. There are also collaboration programs which allow people to have online meetings. In addition to instant messaging one can share images, have communal use of a digital whiteboard, use programs for brainstorming, modelling and animation. Further, programs for web design and web scripting, video tools and numerous other appliances may be employed. Free tutorials demonstrate how these programs are to be used. In theory this means that nowadays nearly everybody has the resources to convert his thoughts into "reality". It is not a matter of cost, more of the time being invested.

It is interesting to note that in the second half of the 1960`s and through the 1970`s this idea was already picked up in a similar way by the Italian artists of a movement called Arte Povera. Their works were usually spatial installations made from "poor" material such as waste, earth, broken glass, wood and so on. Artists worked against the values of established institutions of government and industry.

In recent times, the digital revolution allows everyone to take part in such a process.

Contributions which are sorted in a chronological order can be scrolled through by anyone. Different keywords or index words should be added to facilitate searches. Monthly themes could be set as a participation stimulus for artists. Issues and postings, as on Facebook, can be

commented on with other postings, pictures etc., thereby generating a strong momentum in the growth of topics. Once interest is falling, the contributions move down the chronological newslister. It will be necessary to archive these digitally.

If a certain threshold of “supports” are given to an issue on the internet site, it will finally be displayed in the museum. As an incentive for taking part in the display, artists who breach the threshold of appreciation would be paid a certain amount of money by the museum. The time and location of the upload and the examination of the contributions are of no significance. Naturally the contributions will have to be reviewed and quality-controlled in order to avoid vandalism, advertisements and inappropriate content. In addition, copyright laws need to be respected and sources of information must be quoted. The internet site will be maintained in much the same way as Wikipedia. This online encyclopedia is a further example of the engagement of people in a cultural/scientific project.

To avoid any kind of manipulation of the number of votes, registration is necessary to become an active member of E-mocracy.

Since it is impossible to forecast the technical problems this internet site may experience with its being the first site of its kind, for any maintenance becoming necessary the “*Procrastination Principle*” will apply. This expression indicates the solving of a problem after it has grown big enough or, as Wikipedia sees and handles it, “waiting for an issue to cause enough problems before taking measures to solve it”.

### Pop Culture?

The evaluation procedure on the E-mocracy site seems, on the surface, to be similar to the system of how pop music is rated. In this case surveys, the number of downloads and the number of purchases supply information about how much demand exists.

In contrast to art music, pop music is often characterised as “simple” or “trivial”, essentially due to the simple harmonics and “easy listening” features. To classify pop music as simple usually follows a conscious or sub-conscious comparison with classical music which is, as a rule, more complex in its melodies and rhythms.

Would the voted cultural goods be “trivial” too? Not necessarily, because in contrast to the musical evaluation system only people who are genuinely interested are willing to participate. These people are more likely to advocate a “sophisticated” taste, as opposed to the average man on the street, strongly influenced by the mass media, being interviewed on his musical preference.

### **The Museum:**

This proposal suggests that the architectural design will likewise be voted by the Finns. They will know best which structure represents their culture most fittingly and the risk of an inappropriate building is eliminated. This idea implies that the site “E-mocracy” has to be created before embarking on the planning of the museum, and it would soon become apparent whether or not people are willing to take part in this kind of voting system.

The Museum, which is to be located in the capital Helsinki-South Harbour, will serve as place of hypersurfaces; a system in which the visitor is able to interact on themes of selected social issues; a place where a tourist is able to take a more than a superficial view of Finland's culture. By virtue of its interior the museum will encourage people to hold conversations (live chats) with each other. There is also the possibility of analogue material such as pictures and sculptures being exhibited in the museum. For the purpose of holding panel discussions, live performances and concerts, a hall will be integrated in the architecture. A restaurant, ideally on top floor of the museum with impressive views over the South Harbour area, will be included in the

design. The food should be reasonably-priced and of good quality, and the interior design sophisticated enough to endorse the social aspect of the building. Naturally, there will be no admission charges for the building.

### **Why will this new form of exhibition work?**

One aim of this project is a greater citizen participation in culture without touching on politics. Through the internet, people from all over the country are able to interact with others who are interested in forming culture and caring about how they as Finns are represented. Just as the interior of a household depicts the character of the residents, this museum will describe the character of a whole country.

Instead of cultural assets being regarded as trends, they are very often designed as capitalistic conceptions with the community having tastes forced upon it. The public's reception of cultural trends are short-lived and temporary seasons of obsolescences which are created to support the perpetuation of capitalism. Industrial and fashion design is a modern substitution for the instinctive reception and expression of art. Art which is produced solely for public enrichment is seldom tolerated by any government. An example of this is the anti-capitalistic and anti-commercial movement of street art where the term "*Reclaim the Streets*" is of significance. In some cases the negative reaction is understandable when private property is being "painted" on. Street art underlines the need of artists to express themselves to the public. In relation to the museum the concocted term "*Reclaim the Culture*" would be an adequate philosophy and slogan. The cyberspace and the E-mocracy museum are able to create the environment and a platform for such needs. Street art motifs have ultimately been picked up by mainstream advertising; at least the public community has managed to set a trend in this case.

Nevertheless, if dissociation from the trends of luxury branding, mono-

culturization, top-down decision-making processes and privatization of common goods is one of the targets of this competition, public awareness needs to be raised. Public identity and confidence will be boosted by giving the community responsibility and the opportunity for involvement.

### **Similar Projects:**

The website [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com) is a good example of the distribution of information with no financial interest. TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) is a global set of conferences run by the private non-profit foundation, under the slogan "Ideas Worth Spreading" The site focuses on numerous scientific, cultural and academic talks. At TED the speakers are usually nominated.

In recent years the idea of Citizen Science (also known as Crowd Science, Crowd-Sourced Science, Civic Science, or Networked Science) has developed. This is basically scientific research conducted by amateur or non-professional scientists who volunteer to gather information for the purpose of evaluation by experts.

The following example of citizens engaging in birdwatching and documentation demonstrate the proliferation of an internet platform. The project eBird began in 2002 and quickly became a global network within which bird watchers contribute their bird observations to a central database. Of the 2.5 million people engaging with eBird, 1% (25,000) have submitted 99% of the data. This 1% includes the world's best ornithologists as well as less skilled but highly dedicated backyard bird watchers. By means of this website a vast number of people have access to a wealth of free information.

The 90-9-1 principle is a participation phenomenon occurring on Youtube, Facebook, Wikipedia and simple forum discussions. A basic

pattern of 90% of the users only view the content, 9% edit existing content and 1% actually create new content.

It is unlikely that the ratio of 90-9-1 will be the case with E-mocracy since the aim will be to provide financial remuneration (prize money) and the chance of achieving artistic recognition as an impulse for taking part.

Between 1925 and 1934 Otto Neurath, an Austrian philosopher of science, sociologist and political economist, developed the Isotype (International System of TYpographic Picture Education) in Vienna in order to educate people and enable them to take complex decisions in a representative democracy.

The GWM (Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum Wien) founded in 1925 took up the idea of museum pedagogics instead of the hitherto concept of exhibiting rare goods and treasures. No cultural or ideological ideas were conveyed but instead, the principles of sociology and political economics, which were scientifically generated, were communicated. Unfortunately, this idea of social education came to an end in 1935 due to the start of Austrian fascism.

Now, about 90 years later, people are “educated” by an abundance of media influences and are more or less able to engage in complex democratic decision-making. Naturally, not everybody has the inclination to participate. But the ones who are willing to be socially or culturally involved should have the chance to do so.



