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TOWARDS ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP ON THE NET

Possibilities of citizen oriented communication:
case studies from Finland

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Evolution of eCommunities -project – conclusive report summary

For the general research objectives of the project *Evolution of eCommunities*, launched in the spring 2001, were established to explore through research:

- What are the long-term social impacts of e-communities?
- What are the relationships between “traditional” information resources, such as administrative authorities or local media, and e-communities?
- What new journalistic forms and practices are enabled by technologically active e-communities?
- What are the advantages of linking multiple e-communities?

The projects were conducted in two towns in Finland, Tampere and Oulu. Two websites, Manse Square (<http://mansetori.uta.fi>) in Tampere and Neighbors (<http://naapurit.net>) in Oulu were used to publish the content and act as research environment of the project.

The research questions were operationalised into research projects on three different research areas. On the area of *citizen communication*, the research focused on two local interest groups: the gypsies of Tampere and the foreigners living or studying in the city, and the Internet pages of both. The purpose was to determine the changes and developmental processes Internet publication brought about for these communities. The result was that new communication technology offers various novel possibilities for communities and individuals - new abilities, career opportunities, better information sources and communication opportunities, and new means of problem solving. A more general model of digital empowerment originated from the developmental processes, a spiral of potential, which can expand into positive consequences for communities and individuals.

Ask about the gypsy culture -column on the Internet pages of the gypsies, could be mentioned as an example of innovations, where the wider audience can ask about the traditions and conventions of the gypsy culture. The large number of questions accumulated at the page indicates the need for this kind of intercultural dialog, and also shows that the Internet is an excellent medium for this.

Experiences about the contents, the maintenance, and development requirements of the resident maintained Internet pages have also been gathered along the project. In this regard, the conclusion also is that although independency in the work of the residents is the objective, basic services, such as training on Internet publishing and server space, are continuously needed.

A neighbourhood correspondent -project was implemented on the area of *local journalism*.

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The purpose of the experiment was to find out what manner of stories and news does a network of voluntary correspondents produce of their environment. Training was offered for their support, and an easy publication system for their tool. During the project, the correspondents have developed into committed and responsible writers and photographers. The contents of the articles the correspondents produce differ from the mainstream journalism. The articles cover a wide range of issues and have a personal touch to them. They are usually positive in their approach, since the own district and neighbourhood are positively evaluated. All in all, the project can be considered successful also in the sense of sociocultural empowerment. The correspondent activity, which may be called people's journalism to separate it from the news- or the public journalism, is an example of the digital empowerment process in the life of many of the correspondents.

On the area of *local publicness*, Manse Forum -section was further developed into a participation environment, supportive of civic activity and participation. In addition to discussion columns, its contents are, among others, thematic commentary articles, en-

quiries and an electronic civic initiative system. Public discussion was supported by offering discussion meetings, and designing Internet environments supportive of the themes concerned. The conclusion of the different experiments was that although some discussion and interaction did emerge, general societal problems, which impede public discussion, cannot be eliminated by means of Internet technology. The rules are not yet clear considering, for example, how voluntary public discussion should be taken into account in the communal decision making, and what is the relationship between political representation and voluntary civic participation on the whole. For the improvement of political discussion and participation, better use of the mutual network between public administration, the university, and civic organizations was considered important. To enhance such activity, research projects as well as procedures that elaborate participation opportunities, such as Manse Forum, are of significant importance in future.

An essential part of the research was *innovation, development and experimentation of tools and processes* together with the citizen groups. A publication system based on the open source code did primarily represent software development. That enabled the publication of the contents of different parts of Manse Square with even lesser information technology expertise. The potentials of the mobile phone and digital picture for local journalism and citizen communication were explored as another area of technology. In the project Picture Messages from Kaukovainio, in Oulu, it turned out that the camera phone can be a useful device in the Internet communication of local communities. The pictures and picture messages worked well to open public discussion, and the residents became eager to take their stand to the issues of the region, as well on the Internet as at the local resident meetings. Two Pictures of My Town -project, in Tampere, the residents of eight city districts produced a representation of their district with two pictures and a short text. The representations were published on the Internet and at Nokia Communicator -terminal. The contents

of the pictures rested mainly on well known, accepted pictures of the neighborhoods and their identities.

Evolution of eCommunities -project was also a media pedagogical experiment, where the whole project served as a developmental community and a means of sociocultural empowerment. The activity has signified a learning process for individuals, the participating communities, and the researchers who have supported the project. Problematic have been, as in the previous project, the impracticality and the high cost of digital technology, communication difficulties, and the general problems of voluntary work. In future, when civic based internet projects are put into practice, planning and joint reflection of the aims among all the project participants should receive special emphasis.

Evolution of eCommunities 2001-2004

	The gypsy site	Manse Forum, participation environment	Neighborhood-correspondents	Digital picture in civic communication
Contents	Gypsy culture, history, ask about gypsy culture	Development of participation tools, among others electronic civic initiative -system	Correspondents' own e-publication	Two pictures of my town -pictures My Kauko-vainio -picture messages and discussions on the Internet
Objective	Internet environment skills and visibility for the Gypsies	Support of public discussion and activity in different ways	Content and tool development for the needs of public journalism	Developing communal uses of picture forms

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Introduction: Towards Civic Oriented Information Networks

Information society and its development are often examined by observing and interpreting different quantitative indicators. Multiple times have the indicators proved Finland to belong to the leading edge of the information societies in the world. However, many intricate societal and cultural features of the communications technology use hide in the shadow of the seemingly objective growth calculations.

Although, in Finland communications users and networks have fast increased in numbers, the growth has also denoted widening in the distinctions. The benefits gained by technology have not divided evenly. Also the hopes concerning the democratizing impact of technology on society have proved to be premature at least.

The social scientific research relating to new information technology is often applied by its approach. It often explores the adoption processes and commercial potential of novel communications technologies. To meet the expectations directed towards the powers of information society of improving democracy and the quality of life of the citizens research directed towards the civic dimensions of information society is also needed.

This publication concerns the Evolution of eCommunities -project, which purpose has been to explore and develop citizen and resident oriented methods and contents for information networks. Since civic networks are assigned with various meanings in different discourses, the concept of civic orientation should first be closely examined. I divide the Finnish civic network projects roughly to three groups, according to their central objectives.



Civic network projects may be outlined, in the first place, from the angle of *individual citizen's rights, resources and services*. An aim to guarantee equal possibility of access to information and services by the desired means, either by means of electronic networks or by more traditional means, defines the concept of citizen's rights. The guarantee of rights also involves closer communications between citizens and administration. Citizens' individual resources may be improved, for example, by offering inexpensive broadband access, media literacy projects, or computer user training. Services directed towards citizens include, for example, electronic forms and other ways of distant communication with the administrative authorities. Therefore, the viewpoint is the improvement of the potentials of an individual citizen - at their work, at their everyday occupations, and in their free time - with the help of communications technology. An objective is also rationalization of the administration. Objectives generated from the rights of individual citizens can be found in many Information Society Strategies, among others in the Finnish Government Information Society Policy Programme 2003.

Development of communities and localities may also be established as an objective for civic network projects. In this case, the purpose is to improve the economic success of a region, its employment, vitality, or the development of positive local identity. Such projects encourage local communities to the Net, and emphasize the opportunities offered by new communications technology as well for the local business life as for the residents of remote areas. The viewpoint is not, therefore, restricted only to individual citizens, but it covers more widely the economic and social development of a region.

An objective of a civic network project may also be to intensify citizen *participation to planning and local decision making*, to develop *opportunities for publication and expression* and practices aimed to enhance open and reciprocal *public discussion*. Such projects endeavor to shape the structures and practices of the media and the

publicness more civic oriented. The citizens are seen as operators; individuals, groups, or communities, who are active in producing meaning contents, participating in public discussion and local decision making. Net publicness does not in itself ensure a harmonious community, but it is understood to act as a meeting place for diverging interests, where open and multivoiced discussion is especially emphasized in problem solving. Evolution of eCommunities -project, introduced in this volume, predominantly ranks into this group.

It needs to be taken account that the three-way division concerns ideal types, and that individual projects may include objectives from all the three types. All types of civic networks projects have, for example, emphasized the equal access of all people to the Net, and the significance of Internet skills. Civic network projects diverge in their assumptions concerning the sorts of activities networks should be connected with in individuals' lives, and the role of researchers in forging the practices of information society.

In projects based on individual citizen's rights, resources and services, the network user is perceived as an individual or as a user of services. Any pronounced, normative development ideas are rarely very visibly expressed in such projects. Consequently, the role of the network project experts is usually technical in the development projects.

In network projects relating to development of communities and localities the users are perceived as active members of their communities, but whose quality of life depends on how the development project succeeds to improve economic activity in the region, or to improve its image in the eyes of the residents of the region itself and the outsiders.

Projects aspiring to enhance participation opportunities of the citizens often firmly express ideas of public and societal capacity of the community and its members. Consequently, in these kinds

of projects researches or other co-operation partners participate in the activity by supporting the efforts of the communities.

The differences between civic network projects might also be illustrated on the basis of democracy and community concepts that influence in the background (compare Dahlberg 2001). For example, at the neighborhood work in Evolution of the eCommunities -project, the significance of communality highlights as uniting and interconnecting force among the residents (see also Doheny-Farina 1996). On the other hand, the development work of Manse Forum could be considered to have its roots in the deliberative concept of democracy, where the aim is towards diverse and multi-interest public discussion, even fair dissension (compare Ridell 2002).

Net sites as environments of research and development

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Technical and economic contexts of information networks change fast. This also poses a challenge for the social scientific research. How to study processes that are still in the process of becoming? Implemented by Journalism Research and Development Centre, Locality in the Global Net (Heinonen et.al. 2001) and Evolution of eCommunities -projects have adopted grass-root research approach towards the significance of the novel communications technology, especially considering civic communication, local publicness, and local journalism. Both projects have been implemented using action research methods in co-operation with different civic and resident groups. The projects have been experimental, rather than developing technology in itself, the focus has been on developing genres of content and concepts of action made possible by the new communications technology.

Foundations for Locality in the Global Net -project, launched in 1998, lay partly in the development of public oriented Net journalism. At the time it was concluded that Net technology enables – at least in principle – more interactive forms of representation and

genres than the traditional media. The project aim was to create such technical applications, production methods, and concepts of action to facilitate the birth of active public communication and discussion. The vision was that newspapers or communications companies should open up to the civic society. A new role for a newspaper might lie in serving as a local information channel and means of communal organizing (Heinonen 2001, 17).

Locality in the Global Net -project produced Manse Square as the platform of research and experiment, the contents of which were divided into three sections. Local internet publications were created in the neighborhood communities in co-operation with the residents. Manse Forum was established to advance public discussion. The aim was to approach locally controversial issues more thoroughly than in ordinary internet discussion. On the area of local journalism, the endeavor was towards journalistic practices emphasizing civic point of view and capable of utilizing the characteristics of Net technology. The crucial premiss in the development of Manse Square was to challenge the prevailing concept of audience as receiver and consumer, and rather to develop public oriented communicational practices and genres.

Section contents and activity objectives can be summarized as follows:

Locality in the Global Net 1998-2000

The section of Manse Square	Districts	Manse Forum	Manse Media
Basic contents	up-to-date activity information, local history, discussions, flea markets etc.	public discussion concerning city-wide issues, background materials, questionnaires for the decision-makers, election campaign support for voters etc.	local news, process news, background information -packages, multimedia entities
Activity objective	communication of information, creation of communality among the neighborhoods	creation of communication channels, participatory planning, citizen memory etc.	development of local journalism, emphasis on the viewpoint of the residents and the citizens.

Since the projects have been civic oriented in nature, it is natural that the life of the sites has continued after the project. An experimentation and research platform in its origin, Manse Square has evolved to be a part of the publicness and civic communication of the city of Tampere. Manse Square is in the process of becoming a “communal media” (Jankowski 2002, 8) of the Internet era in its contents and methods. Its contents and methods result from the decisions made by the active members of the communities themselves.

One of Locality in the Global Net -project’s final report (Heinonen et.al. 2001) conclusions was that by means of Net communication more diverse local publicness and support of communications needs of citizen and resident groups becomes possible. Problems and new questions did arise at the same time, however. Some of them were political, such as how to ensure all citizens the possibility of participating in Net communication. Other questions had

to do with problems and divisions brought by expensive and difficult technology. Whether the project had impact upon the local social life in the long run was also left unanswered.

The foundations of Evolution of eCommunities -project

Evolution of eCommunities -project, launched in 2001, continued the work done within Locality in the Global Net -project, in co-operation with civic groups. Evolution of eCommunities project objectives were established to observe and explore

- What are the long-term social impacts of e-communities?
- What are the relationships between “traditional” information resources, such as administrative authorities or local media, and e-communities?
- What new journalistic forms and practices are enabled by technologically active e-communities?
- What are the advantages of linking multiple e-communities?

Evolution of eCommunities -research divided into three wider research themes. On the area of *civic communication*, the research objective was extended to include, besides resident communities, also other kinds of communities and groups. By exploring and modeling the activities of the Net publications of the groups, the aim was towards finding out what common features do citizen-level Net communications possess, how the communities should be maintained, what kind of learning takes place in the communities, and also how co-operation among the communities could be enhanced.

On the area of *local publicness* the effort focused on improving the participatory opportunities of the citizens and citizen groups in the Net publicness and discussion. Manse Forum was promoted to become a participation environment providing for opportunities for civic activity.

On the area of *local journalism* was implemented a neighborhood correspondent -project, an experiment for finding out what kinds of network contents people would produce by themselves with easily usable publication equipment.

Innovation, development and experimentation of tools and methods together with the user groups was also an essential part of the research. Pure software development in the project represents the development work done with an open-source code publication system, which facilitates Net publication abilities of those with fewer software skills. Another technology related area explored the possibilities opened by mobile communication and digital picture for civic communication and public discussion.

Evolution of eCommunities 2001-2004

	The gypsy site	Manse Forum, participation environment	Neighborhood-correspondents	Digital picture in civic communication
Con-tents	Gypsy culture, history, ask about gypsy culture	Development of participation tools, among others electronic civic initiative -system	Correspondents' own e-publication	Two pictures of my town -pictures My Kauko-vainio -picture messages and discussions on the Internet
Objec-tive	Internet environment skills and visibility for the gypsies	Support of public discussion and activity in different ways	Content and tool development for the needs of public journalism	Developing communal uses of picture forms

Research approach

It might be difficult to try moulding Evolution of eCommunities -project into any one theory or a single research method. Firstly,

it is an evolutionary project, which methods are founded on participatory action research. The core idea behind the participatory action research could be expressed by the famous words of the pioneer of the field, Kurt Lewin, “If you want truly to understand something, try to change it.” Applied to the framework of the EeC-project, the thesis would perhaps go as follows: the dynamics of information society are best exposed as objects of research through activities that strive towards civic oriented information networks.

Secondly, it is a research project that sets development process and development activity results as objects of research on their part.

According to the principles of participatory action research, the research divides into cycles where the foundations are laid, the objectives set, and put into practice together with the chosen target group. From time to time, the gains are compared with the objectives, accomplishments and problems emerged during the activity are evaluated, and new objectives are set.

Civic orientation, already often times mentioned, has been acknowledged in different projects in slightly different ways. The crucial principle has been that the researcher sets the objectives of the development activity together with the residents. The intention, at least concerning long-term projects, has been gradually to increase the resident participation in directing and implementing the activity, and to decrease the researcher’s activity and participation. The lessons learned from this project also clearly demonstrate that independent citizen groups do need multi-faceted support in their activity, therefore final detachment has often proved impossible to realize.

In participatory action research the work of the researcher often takes different forms in different phases of the research. In many case, the role of the researcher comes close to the role of change aspiring sociocultural animator (Kurki 2000, 89). In the beginning of the project, the researcher may be the visionary and the

organizer of the action, then an instructor and a coordinator, and in the final phase a therapist or a co-researcher. In the report phase of the project, the researcher should fast be able to take the role of a critical and remote observer.

Participatory action research has often been criticized for mixing the roles of the researcher and the actor. According to two research projects, it can be said that it does lead to multiple problems. First of all, researchers commit themselves personally to the communities and feel the detachment phase painful, because the communities are left “alone” without resources. Secondly, researchers have difficulties in differentiating between singular case-bound characteristics emerging in the activity, and the more general phenomena that express the dynamics of society. Reporting and observing own activity is also difficult. In this report, the problems resulting from different roles have been taken account where possible. Researchers’ participation in action has been taken account also in the collection of the material, so that the researchers have not themselves interviewed the participants. This way the evaluations of the participants would not be influenced too much by redundant cordiality toward the familiar researcher in the interview situation. Citizens who participated in the projects gave also free-form comments on the chapters written by the researchers, and thus had the last word in issues concerning them. Citizens as well as researchers also appear in pictures on the pages of this report. The reasons are not – not at least solely – narcissistic, but the idea is to prove that the work in this project has, at least as its best, been dialogue between the researchers and the citizens.

Van Lieshaut, who writes about the civic oriented projects implemented in the field of new communications technology and the Internet, considers it important that the direction or the contents of development projects should not be endeavored completely to control from the beginning to the end. According to van Lieshaut, experimental projects should be built reflexive, and thus changes and new openings would be possible even during the project.

Such projects, according to van Lieshaut, have proved most fruitful especially as regards innovation and social learning. Although in this project, many sub-projects have been focused and controlled, Manse Square as a platform of experimentation and research fairly well fills the requirements of this kind of open and reflexive development environment. As regards Manse Square, civic orientation means that the participatory groups have the possibility to develop Web pages truly according to their own views.

Project organization, interest groups and networking

Journalism Research and Development Centre was in charge of the project launched in March 2001. The Centre established a project team for the implementation; researchers and research assistants from each sub-project participating in the team. The project was multidisciplinary, the participating researchers belonging also to other fields of research, among others Journalism and Mass Communication, Computer sciences, Regional Studies, and History. The project also offered opportunities for traineeship for students from multiple fields. Altogether 35 full- or part-time researcher and student worked under Evolution of eCommunities -project.

The work of the project has been under the guidance of a management team, which included a representative from the Centre, National Technology Agency and other interest partners. Partners to the project have been companies involved in communications business and telecommunications business. The role of the management team has also been pragmatic, since the representatives of the business partners have participated in the implementation of the project. Besides the partners represented in the management team, the project has also had regular cooperation with the cities of Tampere and Oulu.

Valuable for the research has been cooperation with Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab, and MIT Media Lab Europe. The cooperation relationship with UC/Berkeley Center

for Information Society opened when Maarit Mäkinen had been working there for the year 2003. A year's research in Berkeley CIS was possible with a separate funding admitted by Tekes for Evolution of eCommunities -project.

Evolution of eCommunities -project has been in close cooperation with two research projects of the Centre. Kesty-project is a research programme Information Society and Sustainable Development 2001-2003 of the Ministry of the Environment's Environment Cluster Programme. The results of this programme are used in this report in the chapter written by Heikki Heikkilä and Pauliina Lehtonen. Civic Innovations and Digital Applications -project (CIDA) closely connects with the analysis of Evolution of eCommunities -project results. CIDA produced empirically tested information of the social and cultural impacts of Manse Square. The concern of the study lies in analyzing and developing civic innovations and evaluating the experiences individuals have about digital applications supportive of the innovations.

Research activity and result analysis are supported also by a position of a Research Doctorate admitted by the Academy of Finland for the project. Doctor of Social Sciences, Sirkku Kotilainen evaluates the project and its results especially from the point of view of media pedagogy and social learning.

The contents of the report

The results of the project constitute three sections in content. The first section concentrates on *communication capacity and neighborhood activity*. At first, Maarit Mäkinen describes the general processes of digital empowerment coloring it with experiences gained from the Net projects of gypsies and foreigners in Tampere. One of the most important conclusions is that the digital empowerment of communities and individuals means increasing control over one's life and learning of the related skills. Communal networks are important sources of social innovation for their part.

In the next chapter, Virpi Kaivonen clarifies neighborhood activity at Manse Square e-pages. There residents' own activity has been supported by offering server space for the construction of web pages, instruction packages for e-publication, equipment on loan, and guidance and instructions for the development of neighborhood pages. Although it is difficult to transfer good experiences from one framework to another, neighborhood activity at Manse Square in any case gives a viable model of how to plan and implement resident-based intended projects.

In the third chapter, Ilkka Kumara describes the evolution and experiences of Neighbours portal in Oulu. The main activity objectives are the same kind as with Manse Square, but the implementation method is partly different. In Oulu, newspaper Kaleva offers server space and a publication system for the use of the residents who make neighborhood pages. Although the resources of the project have been restricted, the method of Naapurit.net has proved to be viable, and it is evolving by the joint power of the actors in Oulu.

The second content section examines studies that have explored *civic and resident oriented content production and software development*. Ari Martikainen clarifies journalistic contents produced by voluntary resident correspondents working at different neighborhoods. During the project, most correspondents have deeply committed themselves to the activity and developed into excellent web journalists. The group has partly adopted the working methods and style of expression of professional journalists, but it has also developed personal and individual touch. Martikainen has named the outcome "people's journalism", to separate it from news- and public journalism, where content production, and patterns of work that direct it, are firmly in the own hands of professional journalists.

In his part, Niklas Vainio analyses the development basis of a publication system meant for citizen use. Vainio also reflects on how citizen pages could be developed more flexible and easily main-

tainable social programmes. Social programme, here, means a system which function is to enhance the birth of communities, and interaction and networking among people.

Ilkka Kumara writes about the use of a mobile phone equipped with multimedia functions for communication needs of local communities. In Picture messages from Kaukovainio -project, youths were given camera phones with a task of expressing their views of the neighborhood of Kaukovainio by means of multimedia messages. The pictures were published at the neighborhood pages, where the audience had an opportunity to give comments on them. Pictures raised discussion concerning the problems and characteristics of the neighborhood, as well in the Net as outside it. The experiences show that the camera phone is a useful and developable device in the Internet communication of local communities.

Janne Seppänen gives an account of Two Pictures of My Town -project, implemented in spring 2002, where resident groups from eight neighborhoods produced a representation of their neighborhood with two pictures and a short text. Pictures were on seen both in the Internet and at Nokia Communicator terminal equipment, in application shown for international conference audience. The chosen technical publication platform and the assumed audience restricted the implementation of the picture pairs. The contents of the pictures rested mainly on well known, accepted pictures of the neighborhoods and their identities.

The third main section is about *civic activity and its development in the Net environment*. The research team Jenni Hokka, Markus Laine, Pauliina Lehtonen and Arto Minkkinen describe the experiences in supporting civic activity at Manse Forum section of Manse Square. The aim of the development activity has been to establish civic oriented applications, conventions, and modes of representation based on the strengths of the Internet. The aim has been successfully reached in many respects, because a considerable

number of modes of representation constructed by citizens have become established at Manse Forum. The research team evaluated the methods used for the support of civic activity reaching five theses in conclusion. Civic oriented Internet publicness should be further developed based on the theses.

Heikki Heikkilä and Pauliina Lehtonen write about a participatory action research project that was implemented together with residents from Tesoma neighborhood. Its purpose was to develop means for establishing local participation. As a part of a larger process of participation, the residents made various pragmatic proposals concerning participatory Net services, beginning from the principle of local responsibility on the part of the city instances, and an information system anticipating the treatment of issues important for the citizens. The key innovation of Tesoma citizen council was the idea of social navigation, where residents would be able to combine and analyze local information from different sources. Databases accessible through the city pages would serve behind the information search. Users could analyze information searched from the databases on a map base. The innovations of Tesoma residents demonstrate that citizen innovation is able to come up with new problems solving methods and means of influencing living conditions. Tesoma citizen council -project has its origins in the Ministry of Environment's Information Society and Sustainable Development 2000-2001-project.

In the final chapter of the report, Sirkku Kotilainen discusses the project from *media pedagogical point of view*. According to Kotilainen, the whole project has served as a development community that has supported networking and activities of Internet teams and other communities. The significance of the project lies in its role as a sociocultural animator, and in its encouragement of citizen activity – in making neighborhood pages, participating in discussion, making initiatives for improving the environment and developing new opportunities of participation, and in writing articles of the events in own milieu. The activity has also meant learning

process for individual people, cooperating communities as well for the researchers who have supported the action.

Pragmatic problems, and thus also limitations for learning, have been impracticality and high cost of digital technology, communication problems between the designers and the citizens, newness of the net activity, and the general problems of voluntary work. In future, when civic oriented net projects are implemented, planning and joint reflection of the objectives among the participants of the project should receive special emphasis.

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Maarit Mäkinen

Communication skills and digital empowerment

Experiences of gypsies' and
foreigners' web projects

One part of the research project was to develop multicultural community projects, in this case the projects of the gypsies and the foreigners in Tampere. The idea was to encourage communication especially in communities, which do not actively participate in the information society. These communities often experience communicational barriers due to linguistic or cultural otherness. In the project these groups were encouraged to provide content actively and independently and to enrich and give variety to local communication.

During the project two subprojects were carried out: an Internet project with a group of gypsies in Tampere, *Tampereen Romanit* (<http://mansetori.uta.fi/romanit>) and a web project with a group of foreigners in Tampere, *iTampere* (<http://www.itampere.info>). The both groups in the project created an online publication which represents the views of the community members and at the same time functions as an open communication space over cultural borders. I worked as a coordinating and supporting action researcher the years 2001 and 2002.

The gypsies' group and the foreigners' group had very different starting points. The gypsies formed a tight cultural community, and information technology did not have a significant role in everyday life. The foreigners, however, were a culturally heterogeneous group, in which the members mainly mastered information technology.



For the purposes of the research, twelve project participants were interviewed: six gypsies and six members of the iTampere project. The interviews were carried out using questionnaires with multiple-choice and open-ended questions.

In this chapter, I describe the changes and the development in the projects in these communities. I describe the conceivable changes from the perspective of communal empowerment. Did any empowerment or a change towards it occur in the communities during the project? For a start, I will determine the elements of digital empowerment and then study the empowerment process through the examples: the gypsies in Tampere and the iTampere-project. Finally, I will form a description of the prerequisites for digital empowerment, the progress of the process and its consequences for individuals and communities.

On the process of digital empowerment

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The concept of empowerment is ambiguous, and the term can be used in different ways. It has been used in educational sciences, psychology, sociology and economics, for instance. In power issues the concept has the meaning *empowerment-by-authorization*, in an individualistic sense empowerment carries the meaning *empowerment-as-enablement*. Since empowerment is usually understood as an inner sense of power, the term *self-empowerment* can also be used (Siitonen and Robinson 1998).

In this article empowerment is used in the sense of enablement, i.e. enabling people to do what is important to them. Empowerment is a continuing cyclic process which is realised in communities as well as in the personal life of individuals (Shaw & Shaw 2001). Information technology and Internet use are related to *digital empowerment* which refers to a wide range of new opportunities communications technology can offer for communities and individuals. It can mean new skills, enhanced career prospects, better information sources, information production and exchange, or solutions for everyday problems.

The central characteristics of empowerment are its process nature and context-dependency. Context is the prevailing situation and circumstances where the community and the individuals are. In the introduction of communications technology this means taking account of different needs. The Internet itself does not empower anyone, but it is essential how and in what purpose the Net is used in a given context.

Empowerment can be enhanced and supported from outside, but it cannot be forced. The process of empowerment can be encouraged with a project aiming to prevent digital marginalisation, but “the orientation of empowerment has to be enabling, not forcing” (Siitonen and Robinson 2000). According to this, so called constructivist viewpoint, people construct knowledge from their own experiences, and learning happens through participating and creating something new.

The networks in the information society are distinctively networks of communication and interactivity. Thus network communication readiness is a prerequisite for networked readiness. These capabilities may also be called as communication capital which makes social dialogue possible. Equal communication capabilities are essential in democracy and communities’ well being. Marja-Liisa Viherä studies networked communication readiness through three components: access, competence, and motivation (Viherä 2002).

The all three components are essential from both the individual and community perspective. The absence of any of them forms an obstacle to equal participation in the information society. In this research the interest lies, however, with the process of developing networked communication skills. This is closer to the reality where distribution of these components is simply not a possible solution to inequality. Digital empowerment is not a direct consequence of Internet access but a multi-phased process where the components interact. In the process it is possible to gain better communication capability and otherwise increase the well being of individuals and communities.

From the perspective of digital empowerment process the required components have to be arranged in a slightly different way than Viherä presents. Here, I add awareness as the first prerequisite. The first steps of the process are accordingly awareness, motivation, access, and competence. After these, the essential phase of participation is the opportunity to construct information. This means the ability and opportunity for active and interactive participation in online communication. Thus, the community members become a part of the digital empowerment process as developers, experts of their own life, and responsible participants (see also Kotilainen in this publication).

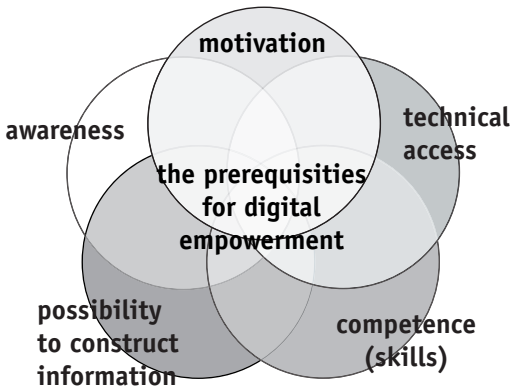


Figure 1 The prerequisites for digital empowerment adapted from Marja-Liisa Viherä's figure of networked communication readiness (Viherä 2002, 108).

The community projects carried out at Manse Square (Mansetori) emphasised the communities' responsibility for their own projects, content provision from the communities' own starting points, and goal setting from the communities' own needs and interests.

Encouraging the gypsies in Tampere going online

Gypsies are the oldest minority in Finland, but their position in Finnish society is often problematic, and feelings of inequality

are common in the group. There are 200–300 gypsies living in Tampere, the total number of gypsies in Finland being approximately 10 000.

The cooperation of the research project and the gypsies began in October 2001 when we researchers presented the project ideas to the representatives for The Association of Gypsy Music and Culture in Tampere. The web project and cooperation with the university were welcomed, even though the weak information technological skills of the gypsies proved to be a challenge from the very beginning.

In comparison to the other groups in Manse Square the group of gypsies distinguishes by forming an especially strong community with relatives and other gypsies. The group coherence showed when the gypsies preferred to participate in the project as a group. The supportive attitudes of family and friends towards the activity were integral. The project was based upon the premise that the researchers had a respectful approach to the gypsy customs and traditions.

It was essential for the project to take into account the exact physical and social situation where the gypsies in Tampere live and what specific problems and needs they might have. The question had to be asked in the Internet project: how could this community benefit from the Internet, and how could the Net improve or promote issues important to it? The operations model of other communities in Manse Square, such as neighbourhoods, could not be applied to the gypsy group because of the different context.

The first prerequisite for information technology empowerment is *awareness* of the opportunities technology and its implementation have to offer. Awareness is an important and, along with motivation, often a more significant factor than technical access when one chooses to or not to use the Internet (The Pew Internet and American Life Project 2003). Awareness means an insight into the potential of the Internet and how it can be put to use in a person's

life. If a community does not know enough of this potential or misunderstands it, the community is unlikely to find a reason for networking or the motivation for using the Net.

In the gypsy community all the prerequisites for empowerment and communication capability were inadequate. Knowledge of Internet use was poor or based on rumblings and far away from the participants' everyday life. At the beginning of the project a significant amount of time was spent to explain the basics, discuss, and create ideas. During the first autumn specially tailored Internet training was offered to the gypsies in order to enhance the group members' information technological skills and broaden their picture of the online world. At the same time an idea of community's own site was kept up. The site could be planned as the group gained competence.

Motivation is a critical element in any kind of development and learning. It is experienced personally, but environment and an encouraging atmosphere can have a remarkable effect. From the research perspective, motivation is the most difficult element to determine in the gypsy project. According to my impression the motivation varied greatly. The attitude to new things was enthusiastic, and the web project seemed to be supported by the community. However, the motivation was not always high enough to carry through the aim, and the young people who had been enthusiastic in the beginning seemed bored from time to time. I motivated them to edit the online journal with small fees, but that did not work for very long.

With multicultural communities it is indeed a special challenge to find interesting and essential issues for the group to put into practise in the Net project. The aims defined by an outside motivator are not necessarily natural to the community. In that case, the control and responsibility fall back to the outside researcher, who is eventually considered to be the executor of the project. On the other hand, almost every interviewee in the project answered that the gypsy web site was very important. The project was also

described as successful, even though wider participation and commitment were low.

In the gypsy community technical illiteracy was a clear obstacle to the progress of the project. In a community where literacy is not a matter of course among the elderly, and many members have an insufficient education, understanding or applying demanding information technology is nearly impossible.

To support this component of *competence*, specially tailored training for gypsies was organised, and the gypsies were encouraged to participate in other trainings in Manse Square. In addition, the young gypsies were offered an opportunity to study network publishing free of charge at an adult education centre. Later on, they were given an opportunity to take part in training in Nettinysse (a bus with Internet access) organised by the City of Tampere, but there were not enough participants. Most participants felt that it was difficult to follow the teaching and digest the information, which was due to both the unfamiliarity of the training situation and technical terminology.

The gypsies mentioned expensive computers as one obstacle to participation in the project. The members of the research project asked if it was possible to get a computer for the gypsy association from the City of Tampere, but the effort failed when the association closed down. However, Net access did not seem to be the greatest obstacle. The young people at the project computers were often more enthusiastic about online-chats than updating the gypsy web site or editing the electronic journal. One person already mastered the required technical skills and was an exception in the group of young gypsies. This person produced the most of the electronic journal and was interested in learning new things.

Digital empowerment is an active learning process where “the participants are experts of their own lives, and they take responsibility” (Foster-Fishman et al. 1998). The information is therefore not one-sidedly poured on the participants and the community in

order to create empowerment, but *the community participates taking responsibility and constructing knowledge*. The idea is that the group learns by creating and innovating things that interest the members and are based on their own experience world.

In the gypsy project the following ways were used to reach a participating and information constructing method of implementation:

The community's own interests and needs were identified to find out where information technology could be useful. Special cultural characteristics were presented on the www-pages to diminish prejudice. In addition, a Questions section was set up to generate dialogue between the gypsies and the majority population.

The community was encouraged to become active information providers. The content of the gypsy web site came from the gypsies, and the site was made from their perspective. The next goal was independent content production which, however, proved technically almost impossible.

Community's own projects were launched. An electronic journal by the young gypsies, Terne Kaale, was started. The young participants took reporter's, editor's, photographer's and web publisher's roles and they realised their own story ideas. A Questions section was realised on the web journal where the gypsies answered questions about their culture.

Steps of progress

In the process of empowerment communities and individuals can find their own resources, they develop, and help themselves. A project involving new communications technology can provide development in several ways; it can extend social networks and enhance participation, develop technical skills, create a critical attitude to receiving and producing information, and teach new

ways to act using new communications technology (e.g. Quan-Haase et al. 2002; Servon 2002).

According to numerous studies, active use of the Internet in the community means more contacts in real life and active participation in common matters (Castells 2001; Quan-Haase et al. 2002). However, it is controversial if activity in real life is a consequence of activity in the Net, or does activity offline correlate with activity online? Either way, online networks provide opportunities to broader social contact and interactivity.

In the gypsy project efforts were made to encourage change in several sectors. *Social networks broadened* into the direction of other communities in Manse Square, partners in cooperation, and university staff. Thanks to the project, new contacts were made with other gypsy communities, actors dealing with gypsy issues, and in the Questions section with the majority population.

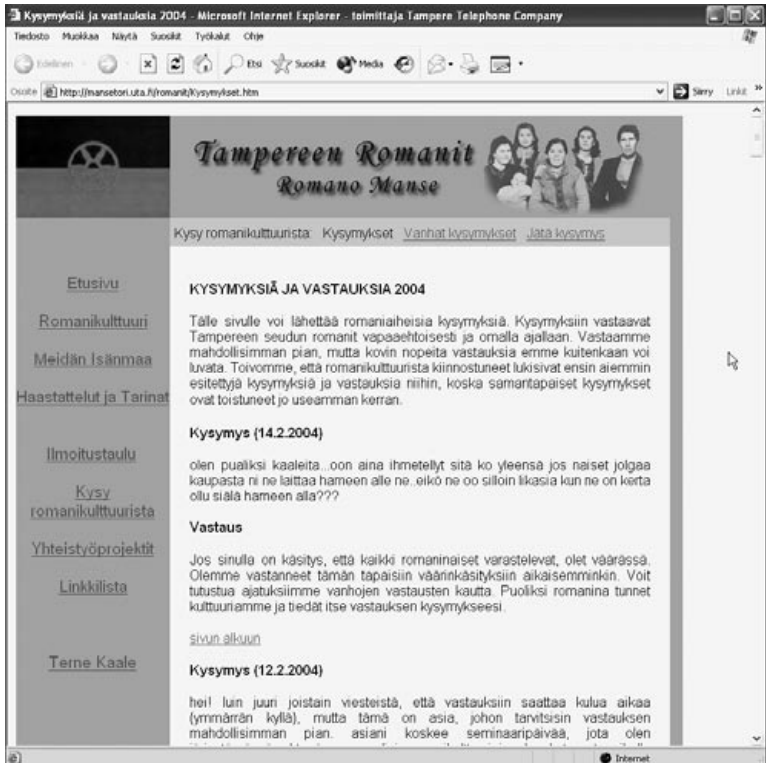
Changes in technical skills are often the most concrete development in the process. In the beginning obtaining technical skills may seem to be an obstacle to progress, but as the skills improve the change is rewarding. Many Internet projects have specifically concentrated on improving the citizens' technical skills. Skill changes in the community are an important step forward against poverty and marginalisation (e.g. Servon 2002).

Changes in technical skills in the gypsy project were fewer than desired. The training supply might not have met the needs of the gypsy community well enough, even though more energy was invested in it than in the other communities. Technical tools, devices, and applications were under the circumstances too demanding for the members of the community, because they lacked the basic technical skills. The joy of success and learning was discovered when pictures were published, which clearly motivated to continue. The skills of the community remained low, i.e. permanent outside support was needed for updating and maintenance of the web site.

One of the themes in training offered to the gypsies was information seeking on the Net, and the gypsies preferred to search for the kind of information they considered interesting and useful. It was surprising and inspiring for many to find topics, which were close to them. Content provision of their own was, however, regarded as highly challenging, although an important way to inform about gypsy issues. Only one person learned independent electronic publishing. But then, one's own information content provision was considered the most essential, even if outside help was needed for technical implementation. The participants also learned to piece together the principles of web sites and create suitable content. The gypsies wrote short articles and interviews, and illustrated them with digital photos they had taken by themselves. The content turned interesting and original.

In the process of empowerment the community can learn *new ways to participate, express themselves, and influence* on decisions about collective matters by using communications technology. The change contributes to the community's independent action and helps them reach their goals.

The gypsy community learned new ways of doing things mostly by using e-mail. The young project participants exchanged messages, and the most active member of the group, who was also active in gypsy issues, used e-mail to communicate with the city's authorities. The questions, which came through the web pages, and answering them started a completely new way of conveying the perspective of the gypsies and interacting with the majority population. This may well be conflict-prone in real life. It was an easy way to express, discharge, and correct opinions and feelings objectively, which was appreciated by the visitors on the site.



A question section started a new way of conveying the perspective of the gypsies and interacting with the majority population.

“The best thing was to get to express your own thoughts”

During the gypsy project *Tampereen romanit* site was produced, and *Terne Kaale*, a web journal by the young gypsies as a part of it. The web pages covered such topics as: The Gypsy Culture, Our Native Country (history and relation to the native country), Interviews and Stories, and Questions on the Gypsy Culture section. In addition, current events, such as concerts of gypsy music, were reported on the pages.

The content areas of gypsy culture, history, interviews and stories were created to tell the majority population about the gypsy culture from their own perspective. The questions section makes dialogue

possible which seems to be a wanted and welcomed opportunity judging from the feedback. The questions section was the most popular part of the site, and it received plenty of acknowledgement. The questions are typically concerned with special cultural customs, cultural identity, clothes, and social interaction.

Altogether 21 articles have been published in Terne Kaale. The project started in 2002 as a summer job for the young, and it continued at first based on fees, later on voluntary basis. The young people can write about issues interesting to them, illustrate the articles with pictures taken with digital camera, and, if possible, make the article available online. Terne Kaale journal has been edited by four young people, one of whom also created the www-pages of the journal.

The idea of the project was to familiarise the young with editing an electronic journal, working as a journalist and a photographer, and broaden their views through the articles. The young group members learned technical skills, writing, photographing, cooperation, and something of the rules of working life. They could express themselves freely and try new things. In addition, they had to take responsibility for their work and the equipment. The idea was to encourage the young to create and carry out interesting things as responsible participants in the project instead of being looked after and patronised.

The best thing was to get to express myself. -- I think it was just cool to be the journalist, with the camera and interviewing people and I could've done plenty of things. (a young man who edited the journal, Informant 1)

The topics in Terne Kaale covered young people's hobbies, interviews with gypsies, cultural issues, music, racism, and the young people's own experiences in the camps, drug problems, and illness of a close person.

The project with the young worked well for a couple of participants, but the others were unwilling to continue and take advantage of

the opportunity. For a couple of them independent work was not suitable at all. On behalf of the project everyone had a free choice i.e. the young people were paid for the finished articles but not for the time they spent at the computer. Participation was encouraged, but that was not enough for some group members.

The Internet project of the gypsies required continuous help from outside. In addition to the three gypsies who were active in the project, a varying number of gypsies took part in the trainings and the other events of Manse Square. The project seemed to get support in theory, but the responsibility for the pages fell to too few representatives of the community.

Some changes happened connected to digital empowerment in the process: technical skills enhanced, social networks broadened, and the participants learned new methods. The interviewees also told that, especially in the case of the young people, the changes led to increased competence and self-confidence and the feeling that the community had a possibility to influence. The conclusion could be that there was empowerment, but only for the active participants. The greatest obstacles to participation were connected to the prerequisites of the empowerment process which could not be enhanced enough in the project: awareness, motivation, and competence.

iTampere becomes a multinational communications forum

The Net project of the foreigners in Tampere was launched in spring 2001 with numerous meetings where different ideas were discussed, and different, often controversial, opinions on the web project were formed. The group of the foreigner participants found a somewhat common goal, which was to develop communication and publishing, while the method of implementation was difficult to agree on. From the very beginning the group was divided into technical realisers, who already mastered electronic publishing, and content providers, who were not interested in the technology. The majority of the participants in the meetings were students.

Since the students of hypermedia were already developing a web site eTampere aimed for foreign students, the group united with the student team. The technical competence of the student group was almost professional, which enabled them to design technically demanding functions but at the same time presented problems in mutual understanding and divided the group and the project into two areas of operation: development of technical applications and content provision. From the perspective of digital empowerment, the project-related goals of the participants were mainly to enhance their own competence but also to develop an independent medium for foreigners.

As in the case of the gypsies, the starting point for the project eTampere was collective activity, learning, and constructing knowledge. In a multicultural group the approach meant meeting very different people and respecting different experience-worlds. At its best, the group developed highly creative plans for the web pages, instructed each other in technical matters, and provided content on the iTampere web site that was different to the local mainstream information. Constructing information in a group which consisted of people with different cultural backgrounds was a challenging starting point. Despite the good skills of the participants it did not make the project progress easy.

The contents of the iTampere web site are:

- iJournal – An online journal edited by the foreigners
- Info-Files – Useful information for foreigners in Finland
- Discussion – Discussion section
- Events – A bulletin board
- Flea Market – A flea market section
- Global Village – The web site of the foreigners' association

The central part of the content is *iJournal* which developed into a significant part of the updated content of the site and an interesting forum for the foreigners' own opinions on living in Finnish

culture. The content of the online journal eJournal is provided by the editorial staff and the students of a Multicultural reporting course. The topics of the online journal cover Finnish culture, customs, food, and the life of foreigners in Finland.



iJournal was started by students and the research project together. It became a publishing place for foreigners' views on Finnish culture.

iTampere increased interactivity in the community

Broadening of the social networks was a remarkable change according to the foreigner participants interviewed. Over the project new contacts were made at least with other foreigners in Tampere, people involved in the Manse Square project, the university staff, organizations dealing with foreigners' issues, and the public officials of Tampere. Representing iTampere and iJournal may also have provided a new, participatory role in society among the other actors, which has importance.

The group had an average of good technical skills already before the project. This does by no means represent the average skills of foreigners in general but only the skills of the participants. Despite open invitations, there were only a few persons in the group

with a low level of competence. The active participants were clearly otherwise active as well, often educated and competent persons. However, the goal of the most participants was to enhance their technical skills; and according to the interviews, that goal was reached.

Other skill changes mentioned were connected with electronic publishing, editing iJournal, and working in an international project environment. The person, who coordinated the project the last year, considered project management skills as the most important personal skill achieved.

The foreigners considered the launch of their own publishing channel to be the most important change. This opened up the opportunity for foreigners to provide independent and autonomous information in their own online medium, which was an essential transition from the role of a consumer and receiver to the role of a producer and participant.

The iTampere web site started a local multicultural dialogue on the participants' terms which had not happened in other media. The achievements of the web pages mentioned were: the opportunity to publish one's own thoughts and express oneself, to be able to read the opinions of other foreigners, and ask questions about practical things. Again, these support the conceivable consequences of the empowerment process, i.e. increased competence and influence, as well as increased feeling of the significance of one's own opinions.

The social value and the value of content replaced technical values more and more during the project. iTampere had started out as a quite technical project, but there was a desire to develop it into a more valuable site in terms of its content, a site where foreigners could publish and communicate easily. During the project the group realised how contacts, socialising, and successful cooperation were the most important and challenging part of the project in the end. A participant of the technical team mentioned that the

most important personal lesson was that “technical views do not belong by any means to the most important things in this kind of project” (M02).

At the beginning, publishing was very hierarchic and multi-phased, and it did not encourage the writers to publish their stories by themselves. The technical team was developing its own publishing system which took its time, and publishing called for continuous technical support from the team. The persons with technical skills created impressive dynamic functions, such as a flea market and an events calendar which other communities were not able to implement. The remaining aim is to create an even more open publishing system, reduce hierarchy, and make publishing even more flexible.

Personal achievements mentioned in the interviews were a useful, broadened relational networks, better social and cooperation skills, better job seeking prospects, and “nice, new acquaintances”.

Positive and negative feedback

During the project there was at times even heated discussion about controlling the publishing of iTampere, the need of moderating, and decision making. The students, who had started iTampere earlier, formed as a technical team clearly a more responsible part of the group, and they were in control of the project more than the rest of the group. The responsibility was indeed gradually moved to the group members. After the second year of activity iTampere had become independent from the research project.

The absence of leadership and coordination was, however, considered problematic at the final stage of the project, since none of the group members really wanted to take the leader role. The competence of the team was mainly technical, and over the last years of the project more content competence, journalistic skills as well as coordination were needed. Teamwork in a group with very different people did not come easy.

We made the mistake of concentrating on technical points, and only after that tried to create an organisation around the media. It should have been the other way round. Maybe we have underestimated the number of people needed for that kind of work. (a male student in the technical team, Informant 3)

A Net project of a community is above all a social project which is supported by technology. The essential factors are cooperative networks, new contacts and participating possibilities. These were also regarded as the strong points of iTampere more than technical applications.

The foreigner participants of the project do not feel that they form a community of foreigners, but the cooperation that was built up in the project was considered important. That kind of activity and support network was needed. The interviewees thought that continuity of the web site is threatened by lack of time and volunteers.

Digital empowerment is a spiral of opportunities

Digital empowerment is a process which advances spirally from the preconditions via changes in knowledge and skills and to results which can be significant to the community and the individual. The sub-processes are not one-way, but there is interactive movement between them.

Empowerment may have consequences such as enhancement of skills and competence, feeling of influencing, increase in choice and freedom of choice, increase in having importance and feeling of being in control of one's own life. These consequences are possible through the preceding changes (technical skill changes, active networking, information-receiving and -providing skills, new learned methods). The spiral, then, begins from the centre of prerequisites and grows through interacting change processes to a variety of positive consequences for the development of the community.

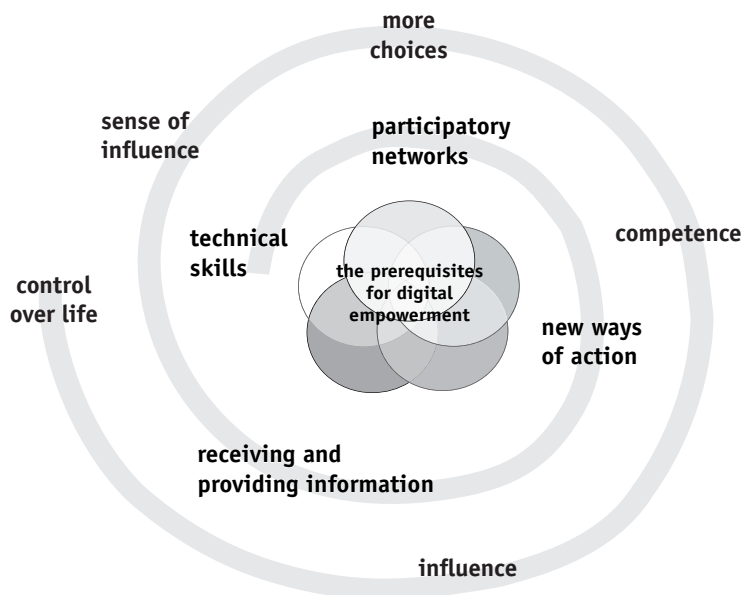


Figure 2. Digital empowerment advances spirally from the prerequisites in the centre (cf. picture 1) via changes in knowledge and skills to consequences which increase the well being of individuals.

The goals of the gypsy Internet project concerned mainly the prerequisites in the centre presented in the figure 2 (awareness, motivation, technical access, competence, possibility to construct information) and the changes in the inner circle of the spiral. Most changes in the outer circle require much more time, resources and other factors supporting the empowerment of the community than it is possible within the limits of one Internet project. The project may partly have enhanced competence and encouraged the members to influence the issues and the position of the community. The young participants also had the opportunity to test their competence in new areas and thus see new choices in their future.

Empowerment of communities and individuals means increased control over life and coping skills. With information technology communities can learn new skills and new ways to participate and influence. At the same time they gain new confidence and feel-

ing of control. Learning information technology is therefore not the most important result, but more like a tool to achieve something permanent. Digital empowerment can mean psychological empowerment (learned hopefulness) and also concrete achievements connected with competence, such as better job seeking skills or broadening social networks. A community can also empower through social support networks, which is one possible achievement of a digital community project.

The gypsies mentioned personal achievements like: increased self-confidence and confidence in their own abilities. From the community perspective the gypsies mostly mentioned that “the gypsies’ web site shows that the gypsies are also a part of the information society”.

The iTampere group of foreigners had technical knowledge, but the importance of social and coordination skills was emphasized during the project. The group did not consider itself as a community, and the group cohesion was low. The gypsy group was, however, a tight community with high cohesion, but the lack of technical competence set limits to progress and participation. The both groups valued their own publishing channel created in the project.

According to the interviews almost all the gypsies regarded the pages as “very important”. The iTampere group was a bit more critical, and the majority regarded the pages as “rather important”. The changes in the gypsy group such as enhanced technical skills, increased communication and a new publishing channel were equally emphasised, whereas the interviewees in the iTampere group emphasised the importance of a publishing channel. The gypsy group considered the confidence in their own competence to be a more important personal achievement than the iTampere group which emphasised the importance of a broadened social network. As for the community, the gypsies thought that their most important achievement was to become visible part of the information society. The iTampere group was more critical, and none of

the achievements was emphasised more than the others.

The communities' applications of information technology that were presented in this chapter are examples of digital empowerment. If the communities possess the required technical, skill-related and psychological prerequisites, they are able to participate and innovate methods and applications, which develop the communities.

Self empowerment arising from the communities' own resources is challenging, because we are used to being consumers of technical applications. However, the spontaneous technical applications in the communities have led to other important applications and social practices. Some of the most famous examples of civic innovations in information technology are Linux and applications of the World Wide Web and SMS communications technology. Other equally significant applications are social support networks, activist groups' online activity or communities which publish on the Internet.

Community networks are a potential place for useful innovations. Communities may use networks to share experiences and information as well as solve problems, which is useful to the development of both the community and individuals. Each member of the network, often unknowingly, adds something to the network that can be useful to others.



Pertti Palm

***The project had a good start
but the big changes are still to come***

The information society is still quite strange to us gypsies, and especially more young people would have been needed in the project. Well, the young made the Terne Kaale site, they got a little money for it, and wrote a number of articles. But when they did not get paid anymore the enthusiasm went down and articles stopped coming. We've talked about the possibility of continuing to pay small fees for the articles. That could motivate the young people to write. We've also talked about organising a new, two weeks' training that could increase the interest. It may be that using e-mail is the only thing people are going to learn in two weeks.

Now that a gypsy work group is being formed and the City of Tampere is supposed to co-operate I think that the City could organise a few days' training courses. A two or three years' information society project with computer skills training could really give some results.

We've had too little time with this project, but I believe the first fruits of the project will be seen in the

future. I have also been engaged in the project as a volunteer and it's very important to me. If 20 gypsies can be engaged in the project, their know-how is going to carry over to others and the project will give results.

The most important thing was that we got our own WWW-pages, thanks to you. I'm very happy about them and we've received praise for the pages. After a couple of years we can say that the project was a success. The gypsies are now well represented in the Tampere region. It's special that the Questions section has become so popular. Questions are coming from all over the country, and the pages have many visitors. Ten of our music recordings have also been ordered through our pages.

When Maarit told our association about the project, we discussed together whether to participate. Some of us were neither against nor for the project, but we decided to take part in the project after all. The co-operation with Maarit and Virpi went smoothly. One achievement of the project is that the pages bring out the gypsy culture, our important issues and music. Through the Terne Kaale site the young have also been able to come forward. I'm disqualified from telling what the project might have lacked. I think we reached our goals and aims. I want to thank you all for this project.



Timo Westkämper

iTampere is a service and a practice platform

● Tampere never became a tight community which could have functioned as an interaction channel between the foreigners in Tampere and the public officials of the city. Neither was iTampere at any stage a common web portal or conversation channel for communities in different countries. The connection with the GlobalVillage project is minimal and almost only based on friendships, not so much on concrete co-operation.

iTampere has mainly been a publishing portal of the writing courses by Mary McDonald and Kaarina Nikunen, conversation channel for exchange students at Tampere University, and a virtual flea market.

For the current project members, iTampere is in many respects also a service where updated technology is used at least every two years. It is an opportunity to practice and update web site designing and web applications. It is also a way to get to nice meetings with the people of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Tampere University and the people in the cultural administration in the City of Tampere.

I myself have been in the iTampere project for about

two years now. I have put in a great amount of my free time to implement new services, update the content, and keep up the relationships linked with the project. My most important relationships in Tampere are connected with the iTampere project, and I have not learned this much about web applications and electronic publishing in any other context. I feel that the technical implementations in iTampere have been the most important achievements during my studies.

iTampere consists now the same services which were defined in the beginning of 2001. The latest version of the portal includes three different publishing components. iJournal is a traditional electronic journal using the newspaper publishing metaphor. Forum is a blog-like conversation channel and Info Files is a Wiki-like collaborative publishing platform (<http://www.c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiDesignPrinciples>). The virtual flea market and the static presentation pages complete the service collection.

iTampere has not any special future visions, and the scarce resources set limits to the project. The intermediate goals are to adapt and update the services and possibly co-operate with other portals of foreigners.

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Virpi Kaivonen

Manse Square - an arena for citizens publishing online

The concepts of information society, knowledge society and civic society are currently discussed in plenty. Free civic action is presently considered as a key factor in the process of developing society. Acting in a civic organisation not only trains for various skills as a citizen, but, more particularly, the action multiplies cooperation between different actors and develops their social skills (cf. Niemelä 1998). Furthermore, as areas for learning, civic communities offer their members a possibility to add to their range of communication skills, specifically in the areas of capability and motivation (cf. Viherä 1999; Isohella 2001).

The purpose of the *Manse Square* project (in Finnish *Mansetori*) is to support and follow the networking processes of Tampere residential district communities not only in electronic information networks, but also in a physical environment, by taking position as a resource for residential district communities and as a junction for community networks.

In the present chapter, I will firstly discuss the initial stages of introducing residential district websites in Tampere as well as exploring the means applied in supporting the regional communities in their self-initiated actions. Secondly, I will clarify the contents and origins of residential district websites as well as the practices concerning their use. Finally, I will ponder the prerequisites for continuing to maintain citizen-based homepages. Thoughts of citizens published in between have been selected among the feedback given by participants of training courses as well as among the theme interviews for my Pro Gradu thesis (Kaivonen 2002) that were carried out during summer 2002.



Manse Square - a shared arena of residential district homepages

Already when carrying out *Locality in the Global Net* project, a site called *Manse Communities* was added to Manse Square as a publishing channel for citizens. As a result of cooperation between a researcher and citizens, three residential districts of Tampere opened their own homepages: Viinikka - Nekala in December 1998, Pispala in May 1999, and Kaukajärvi in May 2000. These three were followed, in their own initiative, by the district of Pet-samo in October 2000 and Haapalinnankylä in November 2000 (see Mäkinen 2000).

The *Evolution of eCommunities* project does not place emphasis on developing the residential districts' homepages to the extent that the preceding *Locality in the Global Net* project did. However, in order to ensure continuance and development also with regard to research, the first-mentioned project continues to support the civic action on the residential district homepages. Similarly, the activities of neighbourhood districts on Manse Square have been regarded significant also by the city of Tampere and its *eTampere* programme, *Infocity* as a subprogramme of which provides on-line services for citizens and supports their web-user skills. The city of Tampere began to fund Manse Square in 2001, which is when I was hired as a part-time neighbourhood coordinator, my assignment being to organise actions that support the residential district homepage projects.

Manse Square has taken shape as the headquarters for Tampere residential district homepages, and the online activities of various residential areas have formed into a citizen-orientated part of the *eTampere* programme. At the beginning of 2004, seventeen completed residential district websites are displayed on Manse Square. Furthermore, a few neighbour districts have created their websites in collaboration, and thus the total number of residential districts whose activities are web-mediated is twenty-one. The city of Tampere consists of approximately 80 districts; in other words, more

Table 1. The districts displaying their web-mediated homepages on Manse Square shown in the order of publishing 1998-2000

1. Viinikka-Nekala	12/1998
2. Pispala	5/1999
3. Kaukajärvi	5/2000
4. Petsamo	10/2000
5. Haapalinnankylä	11/2000
6. Teisko-Aitolahti	10-12/2001
7. Hervanta	2/2002
8. Tesoma	3/2002
9. Käpylä	4/2002
10. Hallila	5/2002
11. Järvensivu	6/2002
12. Kissanmaa	8/2002
13. Tohloppi	10/2002
14. Finnin-Lukonmäki	3/2003
15. Linnainmaa	5/2003
16. Hatanpää	6/2003
17. Lintulampi-Ryydynpohja	9/2003

Forthcoming:

- 18. Ikuri
- 19. Peltolammi

than a quarter of Tampere districts operate on the Internet. The districts appearing on the web are the following: Finnin-Lukonmäki, Haapalinnankylä, Hallila, Hatanpää, Hervanta (the residents' association of Hervanta), Järvensivu, Kaukajärvi, Kissanmaa, Käpylä, Linnainmaa, Lintulampi-Ryydynpohja, Petsamo, Pispala, Teisko - Aitolahti (including connections to sites representing various neighbouring villages), Tesoma, Tohloppi and Viinikka - Nekala. The district of Ikuri will soon launch their pages, and the district of Peltolammi is presently starting its homepage

project. New districts can still join in the action and publish their homepages on the Manse Square server. Only <hervanta.fi> website, maintained by the Hervanta EU project, as well as the site of the district of Härmälä, the first district site published in Tampere, are operated outside Manse Square via commercial servers.

Manse Square - supporting the citizens' own initiative

The starting point for the Manse Square residential district action is that local residents and communities create their websites by themselves and according to their own needs and interests. In most cases, local residents' associations are responsible for the currently displayed district websites, maintaining the site being one form of the activities of the association. The members of the Net team maintaining the site are, for the most, actively involved with the local residents' associations. The most active residents have taken on the task of acting as neighbourhood reporters of Manse Media or as content producers for Manse Forum.

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The main goal of the residential district website projects, started by the residents themselves, is to improve the communications of their area. A further aim of the projects is to encourage citizens to participate in local activities by increasing the opportunities for participation and expressing one's opinion via the Internet. Moreover, the project also aims at attracting even the unpractised users of the Internet by offering websites with information on local issues as well as surroundings that can be experienced as one's own.

Manse Square provides the district communities the following services:

- the use of a server free of charge
- basic training on network publishing
- limited advice and guidance service
- equipment to borrow and office space to be used

- common meetings for site maintainers and other Manse Square actors

Manse Square supports the districts in their own projects by offering them a free-of-charge server for publishing their websites, which is a significant contribution to small local residents' associations. Besides the cost-free server space, the umbrella community formed of district communities has attracted the districts to Manse Square. Even though the districts have not become actively involved with each other, it has become a natural choice to publish new district websites in connection to other similar sites. Manse Square has not been marketed particularly forcefully; instead, the districts have found their way to the homepage project either through personal contacts between residents of different districts or by visiting the website on the Internet.

The regular training packages on publishing in the Net are the most visible form of Manse Square supporting the district communities. Furthermore, within the range of their knowledge and skills, the employees of Manse Square have answered each of the questions they have been asked. Moreover, Manse Square became a forum for an experimental Net advice corner, during the existence of which the districts were able to turn to an advisor, who answered questions and even made housecalls when technical matters were concerned. The experience gained from the experiment as well as from the training will be discussed in the following subsection.

The district communities were responsible for arranging their own premises as well as purchasing their equipment and software. In most cases, this meant relying on household equipment, since public computers and other equipment are either inaccessible or do not exist at all, or they do not support the suitable programmes. Manse Square has provided the members of the Net teams with the opportunity to use the project office premises for creating and updating the community site. The project office is equipped with a modern and efficient computer with the general pagemaking and

image processing programmes, a scanner, memory card reader, and CD burner. What is more, a tape recorder and a digital camera can be borrowed from Manse Square premises. The *Tietotori* ('Net Square') situated in the new Sampola library in the district of Kaleva has made it more convenient for citizens of Tampere to create websites. Tietotori offers its clients, free of charge, twenty computers with suitable programmes for creating a homepage and processing images. Representatives of Manse Square were involved with the planning stages of Tietotori, and the Manse Square training is nowadays organised in Tietotori premises.

Manse Square also organises common meetings for voluntary site maintainers and other Manse Square participators and co-operators. These meetings aim at creating team spirit among active participators, with the purpose of acknowledging the voluntary effort put in by them and, thus, encouraging them to continue their work. For example, the tradition of an annual springtime celebration has been started during the past two years, when Manse Square roses have been given away to active citizens as a form of recognition. The thought of giving out Manse Square roses emerged when *The Finnish Society of Housing and Planning* acknowledged Manse Square with a rose and an expression of gratitude for exemplary work on Finnish community planning in spring 2002. Consequently, it was decided that Manse Square will give away roses to those voluntarily contributing to the project significantly.

In May 2001, the Manse Square consultative committee was established in Tampere as a cooperative body comprising the university, the city of Tampere and the local resident groups. The committee is meant to be an arena for discussion where different parties can openly and informally exchange their experiences and views on the development of the information society on the local level. In particular, the committee has attempted to introduce the point of view of the residents into the eTampere programme, and representatives of each of the districts appearing on Manse Square websites have been actively involved with the consultative

committee. The committee has been established as a direct line of communication between the residential districts and the representatives of the city of Tampere. Issues such as local democracy and the districts' possibilities of entering the Web have been under discussion in the meetings of the committee.

When crystallised to the essential, it can be said that the residential districts perceive Manse Square as a communicative connection which enables the residents' self-initiated activity. The following extracts from the feedback illustrate this perception:

'The homepages of one's home district are linked with a bigger entity and thus a larger network of civic society. It would be quite miserable to exist alone.' (Informant 9, female)

'It's important to be involved in it [Manse Square]. After all, we are a part of this city. [...] The way it is now, I think it works very well as a supporting net.' (Informant 3, female)



The residents actively involved with creating the website are also eager to participate in common events. Manse Square Christmas party in 2003.

Manse Square training: a boost for a start

The residential districts of Manse Square have not had access to a publishing system that would enable an easy production for the sites; instead, the Net teams have created the sites according to their personal skills and the available equipment. However, free of charge, Manse Square has arranged regular training on Net publishing for creators of district websites as well as other voluntary participators in various projects carried out by Manse Square.

A tailor-made training package has been designed at Manse Square in order to meet the needs of homepage creators on the beginner's level. A prerequisite, or at least the wish of the organisers, has been that the participants would have a basic understanding of computers, word processing, and the use of the Internet. The participants have been given the choice of either completing the training course as a whole or selecting suitable courses for their own purposes. Most of those who sign up want to participate in the training as a whole, and the ones that are accepted in the course have participated in the training rather actively. However, signing up appears to be easier than actually participating in the training, owing perhaps to the fact that training is free of charge to the trainees.

The Manse Square training has in the course of time established as an approximately twenty-hour package that proceeds in stages and is divided into the following three sections: planning the sites, implementing the sites and studying image processing. The participants of the course receive basic training on the 'FrontPage' and 'Paint Shop Pro' programmes. Although the training focuses on certain programmes, the core of the course lies in the general principles of creating websites. As the creators of the sites have access to dissimilar equipment, the information given in the course is, as far as possible, conveyed so that it will be understandable and applicable also in another kind of environment. The training courses are short, and, therefore, the participants have themselves been responsible for applying the knowledge in practice as well as furthering their knowledge and skills.



The Manse Square training focuses on network publishing. Image processing at 'Net Square' in Sampola library.

Positive feedback on the training

The Manse Square training has been very popular, and the participants have given mainly positive feedback on both the content of the course as well as the refreshments offered during the coffee break. Moreover, the participants have also been pleased with the fact that the training course offers the opportunity to meet people with similar interests from different districts of Tampere. The following excerpts from the feedback illustrate this:

A pleasant course with a very good structure. An entity that functions well. [...] This is also a nice way to meet "Net-people" from other districts. (Anonymous feedback)

Nice and practical, as you could put [the information] into practice straight away. Theory and practice well in proportion. (Anonymous feedback)

Less favourable criticism was given to the number of matters dealt with during some sections of the training, as this caused advancing too quickly during the lessons. Nevertheless, the feedback shows obvious interest in further training; among other things, in demand were further courses on the programmes applied during the training, as well as courses on other network publishing programmes and programming. However, Manse Square has profiled as a provider of basic knowledge and skills on network publishing, and therefore those interested in more advanced training have been pointed towards other educators in Tampere. The following excerpts are shown of critique:

The instructors were competent. However, sometimes it would be better to advance more slowly. (Anonymous feedback)

[The course was] good, but one has to gain more practice before applying the information. (Anonymous feedback)

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The training sessions have clearly shown that the residential district communities would benefit from all kinds of training, starting from the use of computers and the Internet. However, basic training is not provided by Manse Square, and the persons planning to acquire elementary skills have been directed to contact the Netti-Nyssa Bus, which is an Internet bus managed by Tampere city library.

Signs of communal learning

Peer training has been supported and studied particularly in connection to the *An information society for all* programme by the Finnish Ministry of Education as well as the *OSKU - learning regions* development project. According to experience gained from civic organisations (see Hanski et al 2002; Leppilampi et al 2003), a peer instructor, ie, a layman instructor who is familiar with the lifestyle of the group on a personal level, has very good potential for supporting the spread of information societal skills.

Similarly, the Manse Square training is based on the idea of supporting learning processes within communities. ‘The Manse Square approach’ means selecting the most advanced in know-how and skills of each district community and educating these few members further, with the purpose of ensuring that the information given during the intensive courses will most likely be adopted successfully. Thus, the aim of the approach is to educate mentors to teach other site creators in their own residential districts.

Almost all of the course participants have joined in the training as representatives of their own community. It appears likely that most of them began the course with the purpose of improving their personal knowledge and skills, but they have also shown an interest in participating in the production of their residential district website. However, according to a rough estimate, approximately one in ten of the course participants has not contributed to his/her district website project to any extent; the reasons for this lack of involvement have not been clarified. What is more, in addition to these people, approximately 20% of the course participants have quit their cooperation by six months after completing the training. Based on the aforementioned estimations concerning ‘drop-outs’, it appears that approximately two thirds of the course participants contribute to some degree to the creation and updating of their district website. In most cases, time seems to be the most significant of the limited resources concerning working for one’s community, which is also what Ari Martikainen has noticed in connection to the neighbourhood reporter project of Manse Media.

Signs of communal learning, or at least spreading the knowledge and skills acquired, have been detected; according to the preliminary results of Pauliina Lehtonen’s survey (2004), almost half of those mastering the basics of network publishing have instructed their own district’s website creators. Lehtonen’s survey was targeted at inhabitants residing in various districts of Tampere and possessing experience of Manse Square activities. The results of the survey cannot be generalised to include, for example, the whole

population of a particular residential district, but they do indicate to the fact that information is being shared and spread within the communities.



The course participants help each other during Manse Square training. Here they are learning to use the scanner at 'Net Square' in Sampola library.

The Internet adviser experiment: technical help wanted!

An experiment of instructing people to use the Internet was carried out on Manse Square from November 2002 until March 2003. A student of Tampere Vocational Adult Education Centre, studying for vocational qualification in data processing, worked as a Net adviser as a part of the practical training for the degree, and later as a part-time employee. The purpose of the experiment was to estimate the amount and the quality of assistance needed by those operating their household PCs. The employees of Netti-Nyssa, the city of Tampere Internet Bus, and of Mukanetti, a registered association of senior citizens interested in computing,

were also interviewed for the report written on the experiment (see Fonsén 2003).

During the experiment, Internet instruction was given to the team members of the Manse Square districts, and, through them to other residents of the districts in question. The Net adviser of Manse Square provided help and instruction on the use of computers, software programmes and Internet connection. There were no limitations to the service so as to better chart the problematic areas that would require advice. The service was free of charge, and the adviser was also prepared to make housecalls.

Tens of inquiries were sent by e-mail during the experimental period, and almost as eagerly people asked for advice by telephone. However, the inquiries were mostly made by the same people, which was relatively surprising since instruction service on computers had been asked for in several different occasions. In any case, the active inquirers made plenty of use of the instruction service, and the adviser was often asked for a housecall.

Most of the questions presented to the Net adviser were concerned with creating and updating homepages, which was to be expected since the instruction service was linked with the website activities of the Manse Square residential districts. The rest of the questions varied greatly in their content, and they were often very extensive. In the light of the experience gained on Manse Square and in Netti-Nyssa Internet Bus as well as Mukanetti senior citizen association, most of the people asking for help of a general, non-particular nature hold a rather limited basic knowledge on computers. In cases when the person asking for advice is unpractised with the use of computers, it is difficult for the adviser to give answers to the questions. It may be the case that the question is not properly asked due to the lack of knowledge, or the answer may not always be understood. Therefore, it is important for the adviser to aim at specifying the problem by asking further questions and presenting the answer in the most unambiguous terms possible.

The experiment showed that an apparent need for technical support and various forms of instructing exists, and it seems that people with a basic knowledge on computers can well be advised by e-mail or by telephone. However, for those with little experience on the use of computers, housecalls are a suitable form of service. Even more conveniently, a centrally located information desk would be ideal for both phoning in and e-mailing, and also for bringing in one's personal computer or booking an appointment for a housecall.

The experiment also indicated that the content of the services provided need to be clearly defined. The Net adviser, facing varied and challenging tasks, would benefit from a division of the field of services into sections, each of which would be managed by a specialised adviser. Furthermore, it would be reasonable to outline the advising to include only the basic programmes, and to charge a fee for the services rendered. The Manse Square Net instructions experiment was launched as a preliminary project illuminating the field for *eTukipalvelupiste* ('Support service centre') project, which continues to be carried out at present.

Bit by bit towards skills and understanding

During the time Manse Square has been maintained, the technical knowledge and skills of the residential district website creators have been improved, which fact is manifested in the higher technical level of the homepages of the districts today. The majority of the websites continue to be implemented in the common html-form; however, the use of more advanced techniques on the homepages appears to attract an ever-increasing number of residential districts. Manse Square occasionally receives preliminary inquiries on the variety of data bases and programming languages supported by the server.

The long-sustaining homepage creators have continuously been learning new skills, thus gaining confidence, and, furthermore, the technical skills of the Net teams have increased especially

owing to the participation of new members, as many of these are professionals or amateurs of computer technology. For example, the Viinikka-Nekala homepages were one of the first to be published in connection to Manse Square, and their technical outlook is nearly completely renewed owing to a new expert joining in the production.

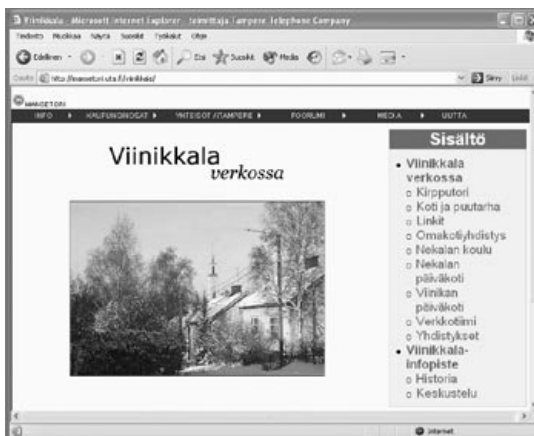
The trainees' basic skills on computer use have been rather good in average. However, homepage training has also attracted beginners, which may be due to the fact that the creation of the residential district websites is considered as a useful and meaningful channel for approaching the use of information technology. In cases when the training groups have not been full, a few beginners have insisted on joining, but the training has proved too difficult for them and they have discontinued the course feeling disappointed in themselves as well as in the technology.

Besides Manse Square, also other institutions have begun to target their educational resources towards realising their own regional and communal websites. As an example, Summer University of Tampere can be mentioned in connection to its village website project carried out during spring 2003 in the residential area of Teisko situated in the outskirts of Tampere. This project provided the representatives of nearby villages with information on forming a homepage as well as offering peer support for creating a village website. Manse Square was involved in planning the project, and the village pages were introduced to the Manse Square server to accompany the homepages of Teisko and Aitolahti.

Before the Evolution of eCommunities research project was completed, an easy-to-use publishing tool operated via the Internet browser was finalised to be applied by everyone at Manse Square. This tool enables creating and maintaining also the more simple residential district websites, which fact has been appreciated by some of the districts wishing to develop and maintain their homepages more quickly with the help of the new publishing system. Moreover, the designers have aimed at lowering the thresh-

old of participation by introducing the easy-to-operate technology, thus also attracting more users as well as creators on the website.

It remains to be seen in the future which systems will be considered best by the districts producing the sites. Sites that are individually and exclusively formulated from the beginning naturally allow complete freedom of creation, but their creation requires technical skills of at least some of the team members. In spite of being limited, for example, in the range of possible outlooks for the sites, the publishing system represents an easy and quick channel to introducing a website on the Net.



The Viinikka-Nekala homepages have been almost entirely reformulated. The front page before and after the reformulation.

Similar, and yet so different homepages

The aim of Manse Square is to encourage the creation of unique residential district websites that are characteristic of their residents. Therefore, the district sites are different in their appearance, and the practices of the Net teams vary, as the creators of the sites have been allowed to decide upon the construction and content of their pages. In other words, the composers of each site have been given the opportunity to ponder, what type of pages and what kind of content would best serve their community.

The angle or point of view applied on the websites has been discussed in connection to some of the districts. The residents' associations that maintain the sites are relatively neutral in terms of their activities, and, at the least, they are open for all the districts' residents showing interest in local matters. However, particularly with regard to a district with several local associations, the discussion concerning their website has focused on the demand that the publisher or writer of the published material needs to be explicitly indicated in order to clarify whose point of view is being presented. The following sentence by an interviewee illustrates this:

It needs to be quite clear whose [angle on the] history has been printed there. (Informant 15, male)

Although all of the district websites differ in their exterior, similar features can be detected especially with regard to their content. During the Manse Square project, the district websites have typically been formulated to contain the following sections: a description of the local history; a follow-up on the current matters of interest; a news corner publishing shared events; an introduction to or enlistment of local services, businesses and organisations; and a notice board or a second hand market. Each Net team has placed individual emphasis on the said sections according to the residents' needs and their own capacity of updating the site, possibly adding to the site other fields of interest or topics that will benefit the residents of the area. According to feedback from the

users, photographs are in the focus of the sites, and therefore a greater number of them would be appreciated, as the following utterance of an interviewee indicates:

Perhaps like pictures [ought to be added to the website]. Mind you, there are a lot of pictures there already, quite good ones at that. But there could be even more of them anyway.
(Informant 19, male)

The plans concerning message boards of the districts have not been put into practice as was originally outlined. Discussion is considered as one of the most central elements in creating interaction on the website. Various districts have attempted to maintain a message board both by means of a technological message system and manual updating. At first, receiving messages by e-mail and subsequently transmitting them to the website seemed a simple and safe solution which enabled screening the messages before admitting them to the Internet. However, most of the residential districts have found the practice inconvenient owing to it demanding plenty of work.

Manse Square applies its own technological message system, and the districts have been offered the opportunity to start an own message board within the system, but at the moment only three of them have chosen to do so. The reason for the low number of residential districts participating in this action is that in order to be accepted to join in the system, Manse Square requires each district to name a moderator to supervise the board, which task is considered too demanding and time-consuming by many of the smaller Net teams, whose members do not want to carry the supervision responsibility by themselves.

The three existing message boards serve as arenas for two different types of discussion: firstly, 'for and against' debate on current local issues (for example, the Pispala message board), and secondly, questions and answers on matters concerning the practices of daily life (for instance, the Hatanpää message board). All in all,

discussion taking place on web-mediated boards has been rather scarce during the years. Instead, the second hand markets have made many of the district websites more interactive. The following excerpt from an interview is shown to illustrate this:

Discussion, I guess there's been little of that now. I don't know whether people haven't just been interested [in the whole thing], or haven't the topics been such that people would like to exchange opinions about them.
(Informant 10, female)

Still irregular use of the sites

At least for the part of the residential districts that have maintained their sites for a longer period, the district homepages are reasonably well-known by the residents of the corresponding areas. However, according to Manse Square statistics and the estimations of the districts' residents, the homepages are still read relatively infrequently. A small group of residents tends to regularly use the web-mediated site of their district, but others enter the sites rather occasionally, as described by the following interviewee:

I rather think that it's more like checking them [the homepages] out sometimes, or pretty infrequently. So it's not necessarily a site that would be regularly visited.
(Informant 17, female)

The Net team members as well as the PR managers of the residents' associations have put in a lot of effort to publicise the homepages. The websites have been presented both in printouts of each district and in various common events of the districts. What is more, also the local media have paid attention to several of the latest arrivals to the Manse Square residential district website project. Furthermore, the homepages seem to be a relevant topic for local everyday discussions, particularly when an interesting issue is being introduced on the site, and personal contacts appear to be the most efficient of local information channels.

Table 2. The contents of residential district websites connected to Manse Square, shown based on department division in autumn 2003

	Finin-Lukommäki	Haapalinankylä	Hallila	Hatanpää	Hervanta	Järvensivu	Kaukajärvi	Kissanmaa	Käpylä	Linna-inmaa	Lintulampi-Ryydypohja	Petsamo	Pispala	Teisko-Aitolahhti*	Tesoma	Tohloppi	Viinikka-Nekala	
Archive	•			•								•			•			
Associations Organizations		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Children and youth							•			•			•					
Events Happenings	•	•	•		•		•		•			•	•	•	•	•	•	
Feedback		•		•					•			•	•		•			
Gardening						•											•	
History	•			•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•		•	
Links	•			•	•	•	•		•		•	•	•				•	
Maps	•	•		•					•	•	•	•	•	•				
Message board				• (•)		(•)						(•)	•				•	
News Reports	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•			•	•		•		•	
Notice board Second hand market						•		•	•			•	•				•	
Photo gallery	•	•	•		•		•	•					•		•	•		
Services Businesses		•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Other activities connected with the local content production																		
Column in Manse Media		•		•			•					•	•	•	•	•	•	
Mailing list							•					•	•				•	

(•) Manually maintained message board.

* Villages in Teisko and Aitolahhti have homepages of their own, too.

Visits to the residential district websites are considerably more frequent when the pages are fresh, new and widely publicised, but

after the rush in the beginning, the number of visits decreases. The lesser number of visitors has a negative effect on other visitors, as they need proof of the websites being used by others than themselves, as the following interview excerpt shows:

I would say [people] have become perhaps bored. Or when this [project] began, people were excited - at least those who usually are excited about these things - but it may be that it [the excitement] has worn off. [...] There have been few visitors lately, for example the discussion forum hasn't been that lively. (Informant 19, male)

Critical factors in the popularity of the residential district pages were regular updating and producing new content. In order to be visited more often than once, the sites need to be constantly updated; however, the Net teams are small in number, merely one to ten people in each group. In other words, as the mere task of updating demands plenty of time and trouble, there are too few members to put the plans and needs of the districts into practice. Many of the Net team members feel the updating responsibility heavy on their shoulders, worrying over not being able to update the homepages as often as necessary. The team members are aware of the fact that if the websites were always up-to-date, visiting them would be more pleasant, as the following interviewee reports:

There [on the homepages] isn't all of what could be, not even close. What's happening here [in the district] is not even near to completely reported on the website. And even if we think about future plans, I mean what's going to happen [in the district], it's not all there. [...] We would need a lot more people doing the updating and the designing to have all the information up-to-date. (Informant 1, female)

Another challenge for the district Net teams is answering to people's needs and interests in the content of the sites. Even the most industrious publicising will go amiss, if the residents of the district do not feel they need the site. The most significant use of

the district sites is passing on information and attaining it on local matters and events of interest. Furthermore, residents benefit from introductions on local associations and their activities, as well as articles on current matters of interest, advertisements on forthcoming events, and reports on these events. In addition to factual information, the websites enable checking contact information, opening hours and locations etc. The homepages are not generally regarded as entertainment, even though the sites will undoubtedly also be visited as pastime.

With regard to the district websites, some of the residents have expressed their wish to enhance their possibilities of affecting the decisions made over issues that concern their area of residence. In other words, they would like the city of Tampere to be more involved in the process of developing the districts also via the homepages; however, they also assume that the city officials lack in time and interest when local issues are concerned. At least as yet, the Manse Square district sites have not been applied as sources of information by the city authorities. The following quote is shown in connection to these issues:

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You could try to increase the possibilities of influencing the local matters by some means. What is more, it would be good to encourage the residents to a more open discussion on issues that connect us. Open and constructive discussion might benefit the area and its residents as well as naturally the decision-makers living there. [...] If it [the site] were used by decision-makers in order to find out how the locals feel about their decisions concerning the area - I think that's what [the site] could offer. (Informant 7, male)

Faith in the future

The Manse Square residential district project has succeeded in gathering a rather noteworthy crowd of districts of Tampere and their websites at the same Internet address. The districts considered it natural to publish their homepages at the same location

with other district websites. During the Locality in the Global Net project, researchers formulated the outlines for what Tampere residential district homepages could be like and how they could be realised. Subsequently, during the Evolution of eCommunities project the residents themselves have begun to regard the homepage production as a significant form of local action, or at the least an action worth trying out. The recently involved site creators have followed the example of websites that were designed earlier, then processing the ideas to suit their own purposes. Judging by the increased number of homepages, it seems that the group of web-mediated district sites is growing by itself.

A research conducted on the residential districts connected to Manse Square (see Kaivonen 2002) revealed three different means, as seen from the residents' point of view, for the Internet and the presently discussed homepages in particular to serve the local community: (1) making information communication more effective, (2) gathering local actors together and (3) enabling the experience of a sense of belonging to the community. The Internet can establish its significance by offering a form of enhanced information communication. At present, the information travels via the district Net teams to the residents, but it could also be transferred from a resident to another and onwards to actors of local associations and all the way to city officials. What is more, the Internet gathers also different actors of a residential district together in the same physical space to design the site and put the outline into practice, thus, through cooperation, reinforcing community spirit within the team. Moreover, the Net project can also invigorate the association in its other fields of action, and, furthermore, create and strengthen the sense of togetherness in the residents of the entire residential district area by offering an example of local industriousness and energy, which can be proudly presented to 'outsiders'. The homepages widen the whole concept of 'residential district' by providing an access into local matters also for those living elsewhere but, for one reason or the other, holding an interest and affection to the area. At its best, the Internet

can support the activities of local communities in all of the three aforementioned fields.

'Positive, yet passive' is a suitable description of the general attitude held by residents of the districts towards Manse Square and the connected district websites. The web-mediated activities are considered a worthy cause, but only few people are actually prepared to bring in their own effort. What is more, those who contribute to Manse Square and the related district websites are active also in other areas of community pursuit. In addition, the results of international studies (cf. eg DiMaggio et al 2001) indicate that the Internet as such does not seem to effect social communication or the degree of citizen participation. Instead of creating social networks and communal action, the Internet appears to enforce the already existing equivalents of these.

The role of the Manse Square project has been central in starting the residential district homepage activities as well as supporting the action once it was launched. However, the residents have become increasingly responsible for the action by themselves, Manse Square developing into a junction for network communities that creates connections between different parties and transfers information to those in need. The Manse Square residential district project, supported by the city of Tampere, has signified appreciation towards the efforts of the local residents to increase their information societal skills as well as to design network publicity.

The Manse Square training and instruction services have reached their goals of adding to the information societal skills of active actors as individuals, and, to a certain degree, the information and skills have also been spread onwards to other residents of the area. Although skills of applying information technology continue to spread, the Manse Square training and other activities have clearly shown that a great deal of guidance in the basics of the use of computers and the Internet are still in demand in the districts. Therefore, training and instructing rank in a place of high

importance in, for example, the Infocity project as a part of the eTampere programme.

Based on the experience gained on the Manse Square project, the following key issues in starting individual homepage projects can be compiled:

- providing an addition to the discussion on the necessity of web-mediated activities as well as making the concept more generally acceptable, which has locally been effected by the eTampere programme, among others
- recruiting active neighbourhood or residents' associations and groups that will adopt the maintenance of the homepages as a part of their communication
- piloting the starting and modelling processes concerning the homepage activities in a few selected residential districts
- encouraging to self-initiated action during the further stages of the project
- centralising the residential district homepages at one Internet address and offering basic services for an easy start for the district homepage projects
- providing a server space free of charge, which has steered the start of the project away from becoming a financial issue to the residential districts
- offering, free-of-charge, Manse Square training and also an access to other local educators' versatile training programmes
- introducing the site creators of different town districts to each other and thus enabling the exchange of experiences

Even though the residential districts of Tampere have set out relatively smoothly with their homepage projects, the Internet has not manifested its full strength on the local level as a tool for interaction within a community. However, the future holds great promises in this respect, as the Internet becomes more commonly used

and thus also the significance of the district websites will probably be enhanced. Nevertheless, these changes take place slowly, and a widespread and regular use of the district websites may well be years ahead yet. Thus regarded, the present Net teams of the Manse Square residential district project can be seen as pioneers clearing the way for future users and uses. The future of residential district homepage activities are crystallised by one of the interviewees as follows:

As the years pass by, perhaps the group of users only gets bigger, I mean those who will get acquainted with the use of the Internet and thus also these [districts' web-mediated] pages. Obviously these [sites] are still young, and it takes time for people to learn and take in what these could offer them and the whole environment [ie, district]. (Informant 7, male)

78 **An epilogue: the researcher needs to make herself non-useful**

Unlike the researcher of Locality in the Global Net project who was involved with starting the implementation of residential district homepages, the Manse Square neighbourhood coordinator was not assigned to build homepages and maintain them in cooperation with the district Net teams. The Locality in the Global Net project carried through the production of the homepages of three districts, and during the project the local actors became accustomed to the fact that the researcher arranged the meetings of the Net teams as well as acted as their Chairman, writing their memos and participating in the production of the pages by co-designing the content and planning the construction of the sites. Consequently, the researcher of the project took an authoritative position, and the residents felt that the responsibility for the district homepages fell upon the shoulders of the researcher and the university project.

For the part of the residential districts included in the pilot stage of the project, the process of becoming independent and the shift of responsibility has been managed in a favourable spirit. However, the process has involved some nostalgia, as the project's support has diminished into providing the server space required for the homepages and organising the training, with the addition of little technological help. As opposed to the nostalgic atmosphere in the pilot districts, their followers, joining by their own initiative, have been happy and enthusiastic to have access to a free-of-charge server to be shared with other districts as well as the opportunity to participate in the training, and for most of them these have sufficed, leaving nothing else to be required.

A few of the homepage creators would perhaps have wanted the coordinator to work more closely with them in connection to their district homepages and their implementation. Drawing the line as regards the borderlines of assisting has proved to be quite a challenge; in order to ensure the continuance of residential districts' web-mediated action, too much involvement in the matters of an individual district has been avoided on purpose.

With the support of the city of Tampere, Manse Square aims at carrying on its operation in the Net as a collaborative project of the eTampere programme. However, the financial resources directed at the continuance of Manse Square will be significantly diminished. In spite of this, the future for the residential district homepages looks promising, since the Net teams operate as their own units in relation to Manse Square, and, moreover, instead of financial matters dictating the quality of the homepages' content and action, the residents of the district themselves decide on these. The residential districts' websites will be born, developed, and in some cases perhaps discontinued, only as a result of the choices made by the residents themselves.



Terhi Mäkelä
Marke Härkönen

Web activities become a part of everyday life

In December 1998, the Viinikkala website was introduced as the first residential district website on the Manse Square server. The site was created in close collaboration with the University of Tampere, and the project was coordinated by an assigned researcher. The project started out well, meetings were held regularly and the participants continuously presented new ideas. However, ever since the researcher was withdrawn from her duties in the project, updating the site has fallen on the shoulders of a few residents of the district.

It was necessary for the project to become independent from the researcher in order to survive, but the disconnecting process proved to be problematic for the Viinikkala web team. Having participated since the beginning of the project, several residents dropped out, and thus a new web team was formed simultaneously with the attempt to grow independent. As a result, novel ideas became scarce, and particularly enthusiasm in putting the few new thoughts into practice began to fade. Unfortunately, this has remained the trend of the past few years for our website, with the exception of some erratic waves of fresh and revived spirit put into practice.

During the years, the local web team as well as the appearance of the site have transformed on several occasions. Some of the original team members now reside elsewhere, and some dropped out of the activities when their initial inspiration lapsed. The content of the pages has remained almost precisely as it was at the beginning, whereas the form has been entirely reshaped, with the exception of the magnificent history section featuring photographs as originally designed by students. The Viinikkala website found its present form during spring 2003.

All in all, Manse Square has served the purposes of our residential district very well indeed. The responsible researchers offered their dedicated and inspiring expertise for our use, and the necessary and relevant skills acquired in the training have been useful not only in creating the district website but in other contexts as well. The most significant contributions of Manse Square for us have been the free server space and the use of a computer in our district; without these, the activities would have been impossible to carry out. The common meetings were a source of ideas and inspiration for our activities, even if those willing to put the ideas into practice were few in number.

In principle, as the number of registered residents on the mailing list shows, inhabitants of the Viinikka – Nekala district are interested in the website activities. In practice, however, these people have not shown initiative in putting forth suggestions nor otherwise participated in the action. What is more, the neighbourhood associations and organisations have not supported our activities; in other words, we lack in a supporting network as well as in committed participants.

Nevertheless, the website has not been neglected at any

stage, and we strongly believe in the future of the site that has definitely claimed its position in our residential district. At the present, the *Viinikkala verkossa* ['Viinikkala in the web'] site fulfils its purpose as a static calling card representing the district to outsiders; the challenge lies in reshaping the content so as to provide the residents of the district with more current issues of interest and keeping these updated.

For us personally, working on Manse Square and in the Viinikkala web team has been very rewarding, and it has shaped into a variably tight part of our everyday life. Working in the project, we have formed new personal relationships and visited, for example, local day-care centres as well as old-age homes and the Iideshovi centre for voluntary mental health work, which has increased our knowledge of the district as well as created a sense of belonging to the community.

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Ilkka Kumara

Neighbours – a portal for districts and residents in Oulu

The website of Neighbours (www.naapurit.net) of Oulu is a part of the Evolution of eCommunities project. Similarly to Manse Square of Tampere its objective has been to offer local districts and communities of interest resources to civic communication: space for websites, support and training. Also, Neighbours is continuation to the Locality in the Global Net project, during which the website of the Raksila district of Oulu, located on newspaper Kaleva's server, was being developed into a wider portal for the districts.

Neighbours is physically located on the newspaper Kaleva's server, thus diverging from Manse Square, which is maintained by the University of Tampere. In Kaleva, the maintenance is carried through by an easy-to-use content management system requiring only basic knowledge of computers and the use of www-browser software but does not require skills in html or ftp.

In this chapter I will describe the progress of Neighbours and the research project in Oulu. Firstly, I will depict some typical websites and how the residents have been spurred on in Neighbours, and then I will focus on the content management system as well as the technical challenges. Finally, I will ponder the future of the portal.

The district websites – mainly channels of media

Compared to Manse Square the project in Oulu was rather small-scaled. All in all four people have been working as coordinators for Neighbours over the years, realising research, training and coun-



selling for the residents. Altogether five neighbourhoods or major districts have participated in the content provision for the website. In the early stage the districts of Kaakkuri, Koskela and Raksila came along. The hard-core of a few people was formed for each district, consisting mainly of resident and small property owner association activists or youth workers.

A representative district website in Neighbours includes a calendar of events, special sections for history and services and separate sections for association and youth activities. Furthermore, the portal includes a discussion forum for each district and a common electric flea market. Thus, the website has in most part functioned as a regional actors' media. In some districts there are hopes for developing the contents towards better versatility and presentation of the neighbourhoods. Certain neighbourhoods have among other things put up historical stories, even guides for making fundamental improvements in the neighbourhood.

The first months of the project were spent on plotting the needs and desires of the communities, and developing as well as tailoring the content management system. In the beginning of the year 2002 it was possible to launch the planning and implementation of the structure and layout of the website. The baseline was to maintain coherence in the layout. The programming phase was rather quiet from the communities' perspective. However, in the spring of 2002 there were regular collective gatherings held for monitoring the situation.

The prototype versions of the website were completed in May 2002 and further development of the prototypes was carried on during the summer. Orientation to the use of the content management system was held for each of the neighbourhood Net teams in the training facilities of Kaleva. In the autumn, the degree of contents on the website was sufficient and publishing became current. The neighbourhoods were informed about the existence of the website in different gatherings, meetings and regional bulletins.

At the turn of the year 2003 the amount of districts increased by two when the web pages of Lintulampi (major area of Höyhtyä) and Kaukovainio-Hiironen were attached to the website. The website of Lintulampi was transferred to the portal as such from the city's server. The pre-existing website of Kaukovainio-Hiironen was tailored to fit the publishing environment of Neighbours and at the same time the site became the most extensive measured by the contents. At the beginning of the same year, six districts were involved in Neighbours and the activity was lively. New training events were also planned for some districts for the spring.

Technical problems lowering motivation

In April 2003 Neighbours portal lost ground when a part of the web pages on the server disappeared, as did some of the backup copies. The websites of Lintulampi and Kaukovainio-Hiironen disappeared just as the residents of the districts had started adopting the sites and the makers had gotten into their strides. What's more, the web pages of the four remaining districts were returned to their previous standards. Fortunately, the database of articles was spared. All the same, erroneous references to the database brought on some disorganisation of the content for some of the pages. Yet another sign of bad luck was the disappearance of the newly constructed visitor statistics system of Neighbours.

Repairing the damages demanded considerable amounts of time over the summer. It was decided to append the website of Lintulampi only through a link from the city's website, where the original versions of the pages providentially still existed. The website of Kaukovainio-Hiironen was reconstructed as soon as material from the original website was available. During August, the website was ready to be published again, but the damage that had resulted from the interruption was difficult to replace. The update of the website had come to a halt and the updaters' level of motivation had decreased due to the inactiveness.

In September it was decided that extending the variety of districts in Neighbours would not be practical, even though eager potential newcomers existed. Instead, the focus should be on motivating the activity of the pre-existing districts. At the end of the year 2003 pictures from a Picture Message (MMS) Project (see Kumara in this volume) of the youth of Kaukovainio was enlivening the website. Along with the project the portal gained publicity. For instance, due to an article published in newspaper Kaleva and a link from its online version to the portal, the website was abundantly advertised. The Mobile Picture message project triggered a discussion of the image of the district of Kaukovainio and at the same made Neighbours more widely known in the local media.

In the absence of visitor statistics observation of discussion forums is the main means of evaluating the utilisation rate. Discussion has clearly become livelier on the websites of Kaakkuri and Kaukovainio and all in all the amount of visitors in Neighbours has presumably multiplied in the turn of 2004.

A complete system facilitated publicness

A fundamental difference between Manse Square and Neighbours is the content editor. In the environment of Neighbours, it is based on the HighTechForum content system that was originally developed for companies in the technology village of Oulu by Newspaper Kaleva. Over the project this ColdFusion-based system has been further tailored to meet the needs of Neighbours.

The content editor is www-browser-based. The user enters an address in the browser consequently starting up the editor, which then asks for username and password. The users can only be granted modification rights in areas determined by the administrator. The article is viewed in a specific mode: modifiable, published or archived. Changing the mode is simple and the changes are updated on the Internet instantly. Stories do not have to be written with the editor but they can be created with a text-processor and brought

to the editor by using the clipboard. The program enables writing new articles and modifying or deleting pre-existing stories. In practise making a new story is easy: the title of the story is written in its own text field and the text itself in another text field. After pressing the save -button the story can be updated on the site by choosing the command 'publish' in the shortcut menu.

The editor allows some simple modification functions: the text can be bolded, italicised or intended. It is also possible to make indexes or download pictures from one's own computer. There are a few tricks to facilitate the adjustment of the downloaded pictures. Furthermore, it is possible to create hyperlinks or links to the files.

What is the future of Neighbours?

The resources available for Neighbours have been unduly modest with respect to the project. The work contribution of the coordinator has mainly been taken up by refining technical details, and there has not been enough time for cooperation with the communities. Working with the communities would have been desirable especially in the early stages of the project, but it would be useful also in future in order to maintain community spirit. Just as the system was functioning and content provision was under way, bad fortune directed the attention to technology. It seems apparent that, say, two people, instead of just one, could have focused clearly more on the content and the provision of all-embracing support to the users.

The website as such and content provision for the site has passed off rather well. In the beginning the system caused some problems for a fraction of users and continuous revision training would have been in order. A www-browser-based manual, in which the most common functions were explained, was framed in order to alleviate the situation. The strict format of the pages has occasionally irritated more advanced users because it does not offer much space for creativity. Even the attachment of pictures to the text is made

unnecessarily rigid. Thus, a complete content management system appears to enable content provision even for those who do not master traditional methods, although making it more inflexible.

At the beginning of 2004, after the Evolution of eCommunities project ended, figuring out the fate of Neighbours has been started. Despite the website's rather quiet state, the neighbourhood portal has a clear potential and the existing maintainers are not going to be abandoned. Yet new districts are enthusiastic about gaining publicness for their matters on the Internet. The increase of visitors provided by the media shows that the residents have interest in their neighbourhoods and are eager to commit themselves to common issues. In addition to PR, a meaningful website requires contents. The provision of the contents demands a team that pulls together.

Who seizes the districts on the Internet in Oulu? The city, media or the residents themselves? In Oulu's circumstances combining regional information, which is related to the local democratic activities, and the residents' need of publicness, would seem natural. It would probably be easiest to join the making and maintenance of the sites around well-organised resident cottage activities, and the resident cottages could function as coordinators in their own districts.

However, the common portal for districts and residents should be centrally coordinated and have sufficient resources. Making the website known is another pre-condition to its functionality as a local media or civic web. In the future, it would be possible to connect a centrally organised announcement on paper to the functioning portal. At present, local cooperative working parties and residents' associations all struggle with PR alone.



Lea Salokannel

COMMENT

Closer cooperation in the future

This chapter describes the course of the project in Oulu well. There have been too many problems along the way. The greatest pitfall was the breakdown of the system, when the sites vanished just as they had been completed and set off with a lot of trouble. With Raksila this occurred too many times so that it almost seemed like mischief. Hopefully the picture material of Raksila is still safe somewhere in Kaleva. It is valuable and plenty of voluntary work resources were spent on it.

The frequent changing of the people in charge of the project has had a harmful effect. When technical support was needed it wasn't available, and enthusiasm faded in the flow of time. The format of the site is undeniably rigid, which can be seen in the output at once. At the residential district level, the resources of the Net team have varied and maintaining a functioning crew has been laborious.

The best was the exhilaration of the early years when our group made the first www-pages. Residents gradually joined the construction of the website and some

web-communication was formed within the community. The added value resulting from rapid announcing still has a crucial role in the activity of the residents' associations. However, the announcements don't reach everybody equally, which is why it's safest to keep using the traditional means of paper announcement. In the future I think it's important to strive for closer cooperation between the districts involved with the project. The cooperation should be regular, taking place in working pairs.

The gathered feedback of Neighbours from the community has been both positive and negative. Negative because nothing new has appeared on the pages of Raksila in a long time. That is undeniably true. Positive has been the wood-Raksila instructions for making fundamental improvements that can be found on the site when one needs additional guidelines on the subject.

The project is worth taking further because the benefits Neighbours offers the residents haven't quite been discovered in different communities yet. The website will work in the future if the community so wishes. There should be more interaction in order to find more people who would have the enthusiasm to act. Perhaps it's good to return to square one and plan a new concrete, collectively up-drawn model of action, based on the good experiences from the project. I still highlight the importance of the residents' initiative rather than official-led local democracy.



Aki Huhtala

COMMENT

The use of youth club website is minor

The article describes the activity well. Since I started updating the site I haven't paid much attention to Neighbours itself, but have only been updating the four pages of the youth community of Kaukovainio. The breakdown of the server in summer 2003 was an irritating setback. Fortunately, we only had a few pages there and it was easy to restore them in their original form.

I don't suppose the pages have gained a notable foothold in the youth club as a means of communication. A current issue is, that the site is not much used amongst the youth. Personally, updating the pages has been a somewhat secondary thing and I'm not too familiar with Neighbours. The editor does not encourage publicness.

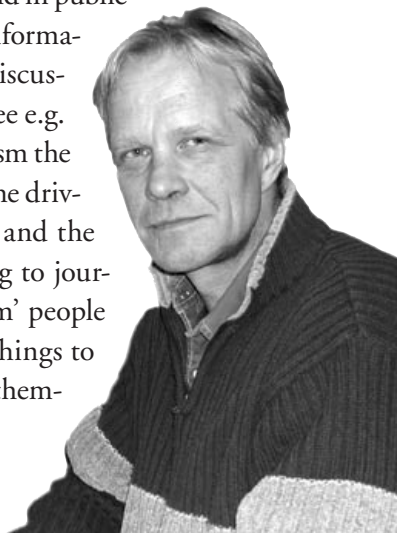
Ari Martikainen

Neighbourhood reporters: Together towards online journalism

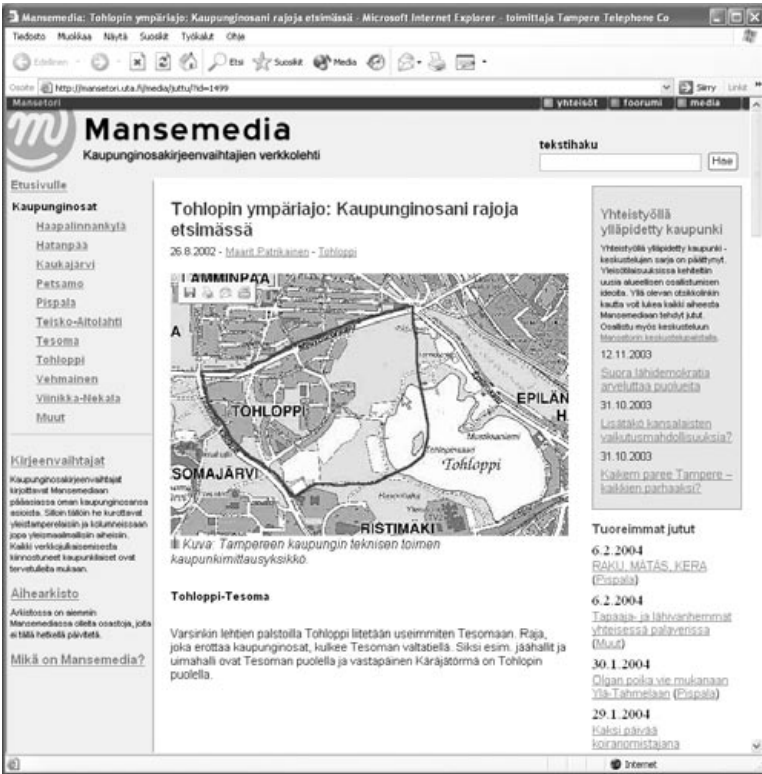
While planning the project ‘Evolution of eCommunities’, an idea arose: why could the residents not speak for themselves in local web publicness? Here the project was concerned with exploring new viewpoints about local publicity and local journalism on the Internet. What kinds of things do the residents find important and worth writing about? The answer to this question has been sought through the participation of residents, as opposed to the methodology of public journalism for example. That is why I introduce the concept of ‘people’s journalism’ alongside news journalism and public journalism.

Impartiality and objectivity lie at the core of news journalism. It is the duty of the reporter to write a story using many sources and taking all parties into account equally. Reporters should not express their own points of view but to state the facts normatively (see e.g. McNair 1998). Traditional news journalism has often been criticised for prioritising the views of policymakers and other official sources in the stories.

Public journalism responded to this criticism. The citizens are offered a more important role in the news and in public debate. Whereas news journalism gives information, public journalism evokes public discussion about the topics raised by citizens (see e.g. Rosen 2000). However, in public journalism the professional reporters tend to constitute the driving force behind the action. The stories and the statements of people are edited according to journalistic standards. In ‘people’s journalism’ people write the stories themselves. They have things to say about their own lives, and by writing them-



selves they learn to organize their thoughts, sharpen their opinions and listen to suggestions (Kurki 2000, 144). The concept of 'people's journalism' has been introduced in the context of socio-cultural animation, which is one area of social education. Essentially it means that by animating people you trigger off a process of self-expression, as well as organize activities and get people to realise that their actions in everyday life are connected to wider communal and social activities (ibid. 19-20).



The writer takes a closer view of the neighbourhood and reports the findings to others.

People's journalism as a concept would seem to fit well into the neighbourhood reporter project because the neighbourhood reporters have planned and written the stories themselves. The task of the researcher is to offer consultation in developing the ideas further, thinking about the structures of the stories, learning web writing

and computer skills. The stories have been edited but this has been done through discussion and in cooperation with the writers.

In this chapter, I will depict the process of people's journalism. Firstly, I will explain the early stages of the project, the training and the kind of stories the neighbourhood reporters have written. Secondly, I will depict the challenges of developing the publishing technology and the importance of the project through the interviews of the reporters. Finally, I will sum up the kind of stories and experiences people's journalism has produced in the neighbourhood reporter project.

Reporters all over the town

Neighbourhood reporters were recruited at first from Manse Communities. It was clear from the experiences in the project 'Locality in the Global Net' that it was not going to be too popular. At the outset, the idea was to form groups of no more than three people from a couple of neighbourhoods, and that these would then become neighbourhood editorial groups.

The first meeting at the end of May 2001 was attended by two local representatives who wished to report for the districts of Viinikka-Nekala and Kaukajärvi. Both of them had already been involved in the making of the websites of their own neighbourhoods. Two meetings took place in the autumn, and these were already attended by reporters from Pispala and Haapalinnankylä.

From the outset the project was promoted on the web as well as by adverts, which the reporters placed in their own neighbourhoods. As a result of these marketing initiatives, residents from different parts of the town contacted the project; thus it was deemed practical to work as one editorial group. The regular group meetings, for example, have involved the whole group, and the idea about different neighbourhood editorial groups was abandoned.

When the first year of activity came to an end in spring 2002,

there were eight permanent reporters in the project. After one year, the number of reporters doubled. At the time of writing this final report in November 2003, there are 12 reporters in the project. Approximately half of them have participated in the activities of Manse Square (Mansetori) in other ways as well, mainly in making the websites of the different neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood reporters across the districts:

Pispala	6
Haapalinnankylä	3
Petsamo Teisko-Aitolahti Tohloppi	2
Hatanpää, Hervanta, Kaukajärvi, Tesoma, Vehmainen, Viinikka-Nekala	1

The reporters have recruited other residents from their own neighbourhoods and received finished texts from them. The reporters have edited these texts and imported them along with the photos into the system ready for publication. These residents have not wanted to engage more closely in the project. The youngest writer in *Manse Media* is eight years old.

It has been especially important that the reporters commit voluntarily and represent the heterogeneity of the community. The age ranges from about 20 to over 70 years of age. The group includes working and unemployed people as well as pensioners and students. This has been both a restriction and an enriching challenge to the project.

One of the restrictions has been the difficulty of scheduling meetings and activities involving the whole group. It would have been easier to organise the activities if the group had worked together before and the people had known each other already. On the other hand, the fact that people did not know each other previously has

resulted in new acquaintances and experiences. There have been open and constructive discussions even about difficult topics, even though people in the group have different backgrounds.

The reporters have met regularly approximately once a month, except in the summer. Perhaps pressing practical matters have been prioritized too much in the meetings. At the end of the project, the discussions with the reporters revealed that people would have wanted more informal discussions. They wanted to discuss new story ideas as well as to assess previous stories together as this was deemed useful.

These meetings have been significant. It is not enough to communicate via e-mail; face to face interaction is needed. It is often the case that these meetings inspire writers to produce new web articles. It is pleasant to meet other writers and this keeps up the interest and the urge to write. It is within this group that reporters find mutual support as a part of a community. It has been the singular achievement of these reporters to encourage other writers.

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Internet Explorer browser window displaying the Mansemedia website. The page title is "Mansemedia: Mitä Kaukajärvelle rakennetaan?". The main content area features a news article with the headline "Mitä Kaukajärvelle rakennetaan?" dated 9.12.2001. Below the headline is a photograph of a construction site with a crane and buildings under construction. The article text discusses the development of the area around the center of Kaukajärvi. The website layout includes a navigation menu on the left with categories like "Etusivulle", "Kaupunginosat", and "Kirjeenvaihtajat". A search bar is located in the top right corner.

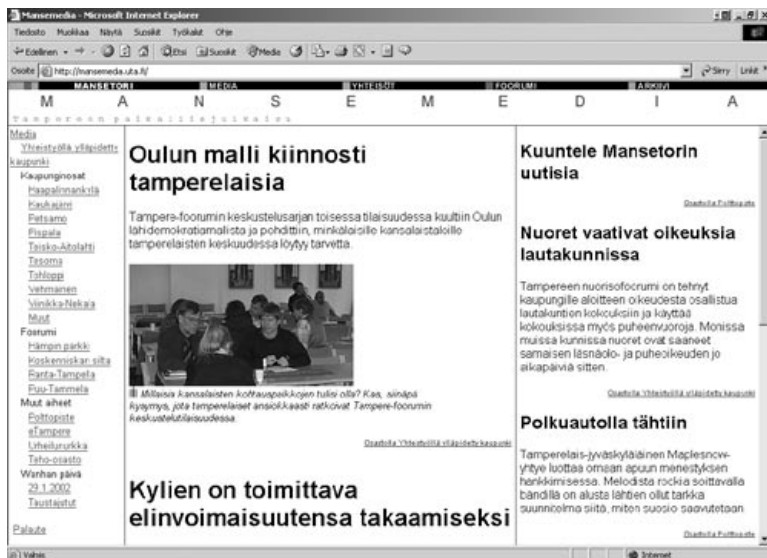
A story from a Sunday walk. A photo documentary depicts some building sites in the neighbourhood.

Establishing the neighbourhood reporters' web magazine

The publishing forum for neighbourhood reporters has been Manse Square's web magazine *Manse Media* which was first published on the web during the 'Locality in the Global Net' project in March 1999. At first the sections in *Manse Media* were based on the themes of urban planning projects covered in the Manse Forum. Furthermore, there was a section of stories produced about the neighbourhood communities that were involved in the Manse Square. The stories were written by the researchers in *Manse Media* and student trainees.

The stories by neighbourhood reporters were published in this section reserved for neighbourhood communities in *Manse Media*. It was problematic that the stories by neighbourhood reporters were scattered and often hard to find because there were also online articles written by the students of journalism. During the first year of the project the reporters requested that the section for neighbourhood communities should be divided into subcategories of different neighbourhoods. This enabled readers to locate stories of their own neighbourhood.

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The homepage of Manse Media before its redesign.

The redesigning of the publishing technology, based on the Web-dynamo system, started at the beginning of 2003. The students no longer wrote stories to *Manse Media* after the spring and the subtitle of the web magazine became “the web magazine of the neighbourhood reporters”. At this point the earlier name ‘korttelikirjeenvaihtaja’ (district reporter) was changed into ‘kaupunginosaakirjeenvaihtaja’ (neighbourhood reporter) on the writers’ initiative.

Most of the writers wrote a story of themselves with a photo, and these were published concomitantly with the redesigning of the system. This was a way to familiarise the readers with the writers – what kind of people write the stories.

When the system was redesigned, a long-hoped-for interactive element was attached at the end of the stories. This allowed readers to comment on the stories but thus far there has been very little feedback. The tricky problem of how to enhance the interaction allowed by the Internet in online journalism should be further explored in the future. The hyperlink for comments at the end of a story is too weak to get the readers to respond.

That is why there is a need for the kind of technology that allows writers to attach questions for the readers in their stories. This might, for example, produce new story ideas or new ways of looking at the stories that are already written. Professional reporters are often accused of not being ready for this kind of interaction. The problem of the reporters in this project is the exact opposite. They want feedback, interaction and discussion.

During the redesigning, the name *Manse Media* was being evaluated. Many found the name repellent in its technicality. The strangeness of the name had come up earlier in a user study of the Manse Square website. Many of those interviewed thought *Manse Media* stands for mass media in the city of Tampere in general (Mäkimattila 2000, 9). Because nobody came up with better ideas, the name of the web magazine remained *Manse Media*.



The front page of the redesigned Manse Media.

Practical training

The writers of *Manse Media* have four digital cameras at their disposal, and they have been told how to use these. Whilst strange at first, it has become a familiar tool to the writers. In the course of the project, people have increasingly used their own cameras or borrowed cameras from elsewhere. Predominantly photos are nowadays transferred into the story outside of the university.

In addition to technical instruction the reporters have had four intensive training sessions about making the stories. The topics were chosen according to their suggestions:

- getting the photographs online: general principles
- making an interview
- where can you take photos and where not (at least without a permission)?
- perfecting the language

The language workshop was given by Auli Kulkki-Nieminen, lecturer in Finnish language at the Language Centre in the University of Tampere. Auli Kulkki-Nieminen read texts written by the neighbourhood reporters in advance, and these were analyzed in the meeting.

I made concise two-page fact sheets of all the topics where I discussed the theme from a practical point of view. The aim was to draw up precisely some practical instructions that would be helpful in the making of articles. The difficulty in making these texts was how to write about the topics precisely enough but also for everyone to understand. I emailed the texts to the reporters as an attachment, and also printed them out for those who wanted them.



Perfecting the language with Auli Kulkki-Nieminen.

In addition, the editor of the magazine *Journalisti*, Timo Vuortama, who is an expert in media legislation, talked about the principles of legislation relating to publishing and the current situation of the new freedom of speech act being drafted. The event was originally meant only for the neighbourhood reporters but because the topic was so important and contemporary, people from other parts of Manse Square were also invited.

This training was organised in autumn 2002 and spring 2003 over a short period of time. The training was de-prioritised, however, when the development of a new publishing system began. After this, the time in the group meetings was devoted to thinking about the demands of the system, and to testing it. For this same reason, the idea to compile a concise data bank of the instruction sheets into the web for new neighbourhood reporters was not carried out.

The feedback of the reporters revealed that they found the language workshop especially useful, and wanted more of that kind of training. They also hoped for a similar instruction sheet about information retrieval.

Versatile articles with a personal touch

The neighbourhood reporters have written on a wide variety of topics. In general, the reporters have written about positive things they have experienced personally, and they have wanted to share this information with others as well. It has been a general trend that as the reporters gain more experience and confidence they become interested in writing columns and causeries for example. Their stories have a personal touch and the topics are often approached from a different angle than in the mainstream mass media.

In just over two and a half years the neighbourhood reporters have written 278 stories. During the launching period in 2001, nine stories were written. During the next year, 171 stories were produced. During the last year, the number of stories dropped to 98. Part of the explanation is that the old publishing system did not work well and was unreliable towards the end of 2002 and onwards, but also the fact that the new publishing system was not in use until the following summer. Furthermore, a couple of reporters who have been very active in the past have not had time to write to *Manse Media* as often, because of their other responsibilities and this has also reduced the number of stories produced. After that, approximately ten stories have been written every month.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the Mansemedia website. The main article is titled "Nekalassa juhlistettiin 50-vuotiaasta kirjastoa" (Nekala celebrated its 50th anniversary). The article text describes the history of the library and a recent event. Below the text is a photograph of a group of people at the library event. The website layout includes a sidebar with navigation links like "Etusivulle" and "Kaupunginosat", and a right sidebar with a search bar and a "tekstihaku" section.

The first story written by a neighbourhood reporter. The writer had participated already in the experiment of neighbourhood reporters in the 'Locality in the Global Net' research project which was conducted in cooperation with students.

There are so many articles that more specific analysis is impossible here. Furthermore, it is difficult, for example, to put them into different categories. The neighbourhood reporters move without trouble between different types of stories.

Story categories

Current affairs	149
Photo documentaries	21
Columns, causeries	22
Personal interviews, history	15
Advice articles	15
Fiction	8

The term current affairs encompasses a very broad range of subjects. They include, for example, information concerning forth-

coming events or reports of events, introductions of new local entrepreneurs, stories of different local clubs and their activities, and observations of one's own neighbourhood. The only criterion in this category is that the stories must be current in one way or another.

I have further categorised current affairs, photo documentaries and personal interviews, firstly according to whether the story is written about one's own neighbourhood or about some other neighbourhood or topic.

Story categories and themes

	Own neighbourhood	Other neighbourhood or topic
Current affairs	128	21
Photo documentaries	17	4
Personal interviews, history	14	1

The emphasis has clearly been in stories written from one's own neighbourhood. Of course, this was to be expected because the whole idea of the project has been to produce extremely local stories. On the other hand, it has to be kept in mind that writers were free to choose what they wanted to write about. In spite of this, most reporters have written only about things in their own neighbourhoods.

Secondly, I have categorised the current affairs into informative and subjective stories. The informative approach implies an impersonal way to write about a topic as in the mainstream mass media, whereas the subjective approach implies stories written with a more personal touch. This categorisation is difficult because many informative stories reveal at least some bias towards one's own neighbourhood.

	Informative	Subjective
Current affairs	80	68

Although subjective stories are in a slight minority, they form a significant percentage. This shows at the very least that the writers have not always sought to imitate the traditional way of doing journalism but that they have also personal views and the capability of expression.

Reporters have also produced some series of articles:

Teiskolainen juhannuskalenteri 2002 ['Midsummer calendar from Teisko 2002']: 12 parts

Teiskolaista laivaliikennettä 2002 ['Boat traffic in Teisko 2002']: 5 parts

Teiskolainen joulukalenteri 2002 ['Christmas calendar from Teisko 2002']: 12 parts

Teiskolainen juhannuskalenteri 2003 ['Midsummer calendar from Teisko 2003']: 4 parts

Kissakaksosten tarinoita 2003 ['Stories of the twin cats 2003']: 8 parts

Remonttiutiset 2003 ['Renovations 2003']: 7 parts

In the Christmas and Midsummer calendars, the festivals were approached both through fictional stories and through informative personal stories about the preparations for the festivals. In the stories of the twin cats, the way of the world was examined from their point of view. There have been stories of the history of boat traffic in Teisko, and the articles on renovation follow the progress of a one-family house.

Stories from the countryside: Teisko-Aitolahti

The district of Teisko-Aitolahti has to be discussed separately because in that quarter people have been especially active. The two

reporters from that neighbourhood have written 133 stories during the project. Teisko-Aitolahti is a rural area with small village communities. This may be the reason why the stories of both writers centre mostly on the local community and radiate pride of the excellence of their neighbourhood. In addition to writing a lot themselves, both reporters have also recruited other residents from the district as writers.

The reporters complement each other well. One has written stories about different events and occasions as well as about the history and people of the district in traditional objective style. Furthermore, the reporter has written some excellent causeries. The other reporter, however, writes from a more personal point of view, and the writing is closer to fictional narration.



Being a voluntary neighbourhood reporter has benefited both reporters in the labour market. One got a job as a reporter in the local newspaper whilst the other has occasionally written stories as a freelancer. The passion of these writers for the local neighbourhood and their active participation in the project suggests

that there is much scope for this media in sparsely populated village areas in the countryside.



Päivikki Kulju

From bank to a local newspaper through Manse Media

In the spring of 2000, I lost my job after working many years in the bank business, and I returned to my roots – languages and communication. It was through lucky coincidences that I found my way to *Manse Media*. In the autumn of 2001, I placed the village websites for Teisko and Aitolahti in Manse Square during the practical training phase of a new media course. It was then that I heard of *Manse Media* for the first time and became interested in writing articles about my own neighbourhood in the web magazine.

While hunting for stories, I got to know a reporter from *Teisko-Aitolahti* newspaper who was planning to continue her studies. It was through her that I got a place as a part-time employee in the newspaper in autumn 2002.

Manse Media played an important part in my gaining employment. Firstly, it was one part of the chain of lucky coincidences. Secondly, I was able to improve my journalistic skills in *Manse Media*. I had the chance to practice

making stories and interviews, writing and taking photographs. I received feedback that I have been able to utilize in my new job in the local newspaper and that I have used to improve my self-esteem, which was damaged in the bank business.

I have been working in the local newspaper over a year now and my employer has promised that I can continue. The worst thing in being a full-time journalist is that I have not had time to write to *Manse Media* anymore. Luckily another reporter from my neighbourhood turned up. She produces texts rapidly while taking care of her three children and completing her secondary school education via distance-learning.

Developing technology with the users

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The publishing technology and its development has fundamentally influenced the work in at least two ways. Firstly, the previous publishing system known as Square became almost unusable as early as the autumn 2002 due to lack of updating. Some reporters did not write stories because the technology did not work. Secondly, in the spring of 2003, almost all the time in the meetings was devoted to the designing, developing and commenting on the new system.

The redesigning of the publishing technology was based on the Webdynamo system. The work started in the beginning of 2003 and the reporters were immediately included in the redevelopment. They were asked if they had any wishes concerning the requirements imposed on the system and the redesigning process was presented in meetings during the spring. The functioning of the system was also tested with some reporters.

The idea was to develop publishing technology together with the users. This was partly because everybody had some experience of

the previously used Square system and it was assumed that the reporters would have noteworthy proposals for improvement on the basis of these experiences. They did come up with some proposals, however in the final interviews with the reporters in October it unexpectedly turned out that many did not feel that they had participated in the developing process.

Sure you can have all kinds of good ideas but making those happen may then be so difficult that if you don't understand that you can't go anywhere (Informant 6, female)

Many reporters mentioned experiencing difficulties in communication. They find computer technology so complicated that it feels awkward to start giving advice to the experts.

The experiences from the use of the previous system might in the end have been more of a disadvantage for the development of a new one. When the developers consulted the users in order to find a technical solution to their needs, the users approached the question on the basis of their experience with the old system; they tried to correct its faults and emphasised technology too much. From the developers' point of view, the users should have demanded more extra features. From the users' point of view, the developers were on such another level in computer technology that they did not even dare to advise them.

At least I sure have the kind of difficulty that when I see that these guys are experts, know what they are doin', so damn, you don't dare to advice them, like do it this way. (Informant 7, male)

Many users were disappointed because there were difficulties in previewing the articles and this made the processing of stories more difficult. In the system, the article can be previewed in the revision phase before saving it. The preview window, however, shows the layout of the story incorrectly, and this confused many. The reporters thought they had done something wrong, although after saving the story in the preview window, the layout was right.

Another example that caused problems was naming the picture files. The system does not accept file names with Finnish letters ä or ö, or an empty space (e.g. the ball.jpg). Most of the reporters are so familiar with computers that they avoid using these letters in file names. Quite a few, however, put pictures with an empty space in their file name into the system. After this they were wondering why the picture did not appear.

The abovementioned examples depict a problem in improving technology: the developers and users view the matter from different viewpoints. Even development that genuinely takes the users into account seems to end up in developers having to focus their resources in the functioning of the whole system. Fixing a small mistake may mean you have to think the logic of the whole system anew. The users on the other hand get grey hair from sporadic mistakes, such as the above examples, which hamper their work. Essentially, developers look at the whole picture whereas users concentrate on details.

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Developing computer technology that is easy to use feels sometimes overwhelmingly challenging, especially when resources are limited and the schedule is tight. Therefore, the reporters showed understanding for the technicians:

But they are like 'system needs polishing'... I think the idea is real simple. So that if it only worked, like, how you think that it should work. (Informant 2, female)

From writing stories towards publishing stories

It has been the aim of the project that the Manse Square website continues to be updated even after the project has ended. For this reason, especially during the last year of the project, a question was raised about how to publish the stories in the future. During the project the researcher has usually checked the stories before they get published. However, the reporters from Teisko-Aitolahti published their own stories without supervision from the summer 2002 onwards.

It is technically easier than before to publish the stories in the new system. At present, six reporters have the right of publication to their own stories. However, there are other obstacles to publishing. The neighbourhood reporters have been doubtful about their abilities to review others' stories. People hesitate in taking the responsibility relating to publishing.

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The reporter writes about herself.

It is interesting that the neighbourhood reporters consider *Manse Media* as exclusively a web magazine and not as some kind of a free discussion forum. Although the reporters have been free to choose the subject matter, *Manse Media* is seen as a medium in which you have to organise and direct in some way.

But the situation, generally, that you'd have like an editor or some colleagues who, like, approve of the stories, so there is no quality check... it's totally worthless then, although the ideas might be valuable... I don't think you should aim at having a free forum... it does not mean censorship to be an editor, the editor checks that it is high quality. (Informant 11, male)

Neighbourhood reporters committed to the project

The reporters have been interviewed twice during the project. At the end of the first year of action in January 2002, a student of journalism from the university interviewed eight reporters who were involved in the project at that time. One of these reporters has since left the project. Instead of doing separate interviews, in October 2003 I discussed experiences with nine reporters in groups of three. I also interviewed three reporters separately who have been less involved in the project lately.

The group interviews were decided upon because the reporters have turned out to be good and constructive talkers in the group meetings. Secondly, there is a lesser risk of interviewees starting to assent to the opinions of the researcher with whom they have become acquainted during the lengthy project. I believe that this was a better way to obtain genuine and honest experiences.

Web communication skills and community feeling

There were clearly two motives in becoming involved and staying in the project. For some, the priority was to write about their own neighbourhood and to increase the community feeling. For others the emphasis was on developing their writing skills and professional proficiency.

Those who had lived a long time in the same neighbourhood want-

ed to make it more well-known and bring out its better aspects. Those who had moved only recently, on the other hand, wanted to get to know the life and people in their neighbourhood better by writing stories.

Because I like to write and I wanted to get to know the life and people in my neighbourhood... I think you should bring up things from your own neighbourhood and even achieve something with those stories sometimes, hopefully. (Informant 2, female)

The voluntary aspect was highly appreciated. It was seen as the basis for everybody being able to come along just as they are and write the kind of stories that reflect their personalities. The fact that it is voluntary brings freedom.

...I've stayed in this just because it's voluntary. If I get some assignments then I don't... then I have to quit. (Informant 10, female)

On the other hand, some reporters hoped to get assignments and story ideas. This emerged even in the work during the final phase of the project. Some reporters felt that they would accomplish more if someone gave them some orders. They did not want strict leadership either with topics given from above, but they felt that story ideas from other people were important.

The voluntary aspect can also make you feel you are obliged to write. Many reporters admitted feeling guilty and having a bad conscience, if they did not write stories regularly. However, they emphasised that the guilt arose from within. Nobody felt they had been forced from outside. With a couple of reporters who wrote actively the guilt manifested oppositely. They felt occasionally that they were writing rather too many stories, and were feeling guilty for the fact that “again there are many of my stories one after another”.

Lack of time has restricted those less actively involved in the project. They had got involved at a time when there seemed to be enough time. When the life situation changed, they focused on more important things. At the same time, they have still wanted to keep neighbourhood reporting in reserve, as a good opportunity when they have time. The lack of time has had an effect also on how often the other reporters write. Many reporters have had outbursts of writing when there has been time and ideas. After that there may have been longer periods when they have not written.

Content before technology

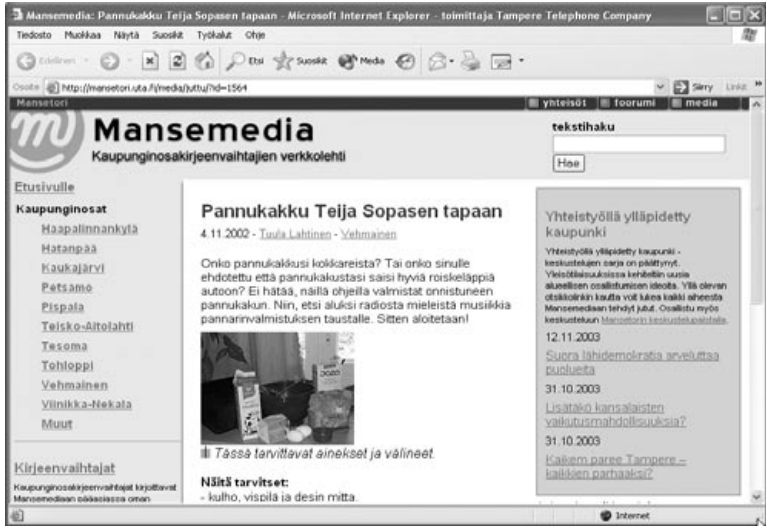
Some basic computer skills are needed in web writing. The reporters have been willing to learn these skills. However, nearly all interviewees thought of technology as an unpleasant but necessary evil.

I've noticed that when I need to do something, I start, like, gradually to find from the thingie and then I ask about those things. So the technology helps the content. (Informant 3, female)

The publishing system of *Manse Media* was exclusively treated as an easy-to-use writing aid which is studied as much as is necessary in order to write the stories.

I learn what I need for doing the job and just hope that the equipment works. I don't know what to do if it doesn't work. And I ain't gonna learn more. (Informant 1, female)

The reporters hoped to receive instruction in the use of other technical equipment, especially the digital camera. Only a few were interested in adding sound or pictures to stories. The interviewees thought that a web magazine is a good media for local publicity. At the same time they pointed out that there are still many technical barriers and obstacles in accessing the web.



Advice article: Making traditional Finnish pancakes.

Responsible texts

All the interviewees had had some previous experience in writing before becoming neighbourhood reporters. Many of them had even published their texts in occupational or personnel magazines for example. Their aim was to develop more versatile writing skills.

Ordinary topics about everyday life were close to them. The comments also revealed an inclination to write about things and people in their own neighbourhood positively; to make people aware of the heroes of the everyday life.

It wouldn't be so bad to have influence but really it is mainly about making people aware, I guess. I want to show that in, well, one-horse towns there are all kinds of things going on – all kinds of people and talented clever people who do all sorts of things. (Informant 5, female)

Some of the reporters wanted to give rise to debates about the important things in their own neighbourhood, especially town and traffic planning.

Publicity was one of the themes in the discussions. Nobody felt it problematic to write web articles under their own name. This matter was shrugged off and the discussion moved into the responsibility of the web journalist. The following quotation shows that in a familiar neighbourhood some stories may not be published for human reasons.

I didn't finish an article about a person interested in cars because, well, I took the pictures and everything and wrote the story but then I like stopped when I started to think that I have written about this persons' studies, I have taken photos of motors and an old car and two different collections in the garage, that I figured, like, 'hello, if I put this into the Manse, then soon it will be nicked the whole garage'. (Informant 9, female)

The reporters also discussed the role of being a journalist, which they had learned through their work. Many of them stated that they have to make the stories more neutral than the material permits when they are writing. Reporters have to be able to take the role of an unbiased observer – to write something they do not agree with. The sore spot of local journalism was uncovered at the same time. In a small neighbourhood where people know each other, it is not wise to write too offensively about anyone in case you want to stay in speaking terms with your neighbours.

A strong commitment to the project

Many had expected to have a wider circle of readers when joining in the project. The writers wanted the stories to make a difference, and were disappointed when there was no feedback about the stories. It is illustrative that so far the writers have commented on each other's stories and thus given encouraging feedback to their colleagues. The problem of familiarity in *Manse Media* and the whole Manse Square had been deliberated earlier in the project. Different marketing possibilities have been planned enthusiastically.

I've also been thinkin' that so few people read this Manse Media but that I haven't yet figured out what it is but I'm gonna put there some competition, because we get no comments so we should do something like that. I know, like, roughly those who, our neighbourhood shopkeeper reads, so I always ask like "have you read, there's a story?". Then he always goes and reads it in the evening. (Informant 12, female)

The familiarity problem applies to the whole Manse Square website. The people behind the site have had many ideas to improve its publicity (see e.g. Kaivonen 2002, 86-87). One of the best ideas from the neighbourhood reporters is to spread print-outs of the web articles to popular areas in their own neighbourhoods. At the moment, however, the system does not produce print-outs with the right kind of layout.

Their commitment was also clear from the final discussions as the reporters came up with lots of new development ideas and suggestions for improvement, although it was already known that the operations of Manse Square were going to be reduced considerably after the project had ended.

The future was contemplated when the "old stagers" thought what the conditions for newcomers should be, and what kind of rights they could be given at first. When the skills develop, people are willing to even take on the role of a gatekeeper that goes along with being a journalist.

I guess it would be good that somebody wrote stories and then someone else could publish them, like, before you, like, find your own style or something, then you could like give publishing rights. I don't believe that, like, right away in a welcoming package you'd have publishing and everything. (Informant 9, female)

Not alone but together

The interviews revealed that being a neighbourhood reporter was regarded as communal in two ways. Firstly, the group meetings were considered important. The reporters hoped particularly that there had been more time in the meetings to assess the stories together. Their comments highlighted the importance of learning by doing and discussing together.

Yeah, sure thing. There are lots of interesting people... Some have already done an awful lot of these stories, so that they can sure give good advice. (Informant 6, female)

On the other hand, the reporters hoped that there were more people from their own neighbourhood writing the stories. Here the reporters also noted the problem that in the web magazine the stories are under sections named after the neighbourhoods, but in fact there is often only one writer behind the stories.

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I thought I'd be, like, one, that I'd bring one viewpoint from this neighbourhood into that sector and then lots of other interested people. (Informant 3, female)

Nearly all reporters felt they were writing stories to *Manse Media* as the representatives of their own neighbourhoods. The discussions highlighted among other things that the reporters have got to know new people by writing stories. It was also noted that being a neighbourhood reporter has opened up doors to places and people that you would not get to see as an ordinary citizen. And the people who have been written about have been pleased.

They have been very pleased... who I have written about. And this renovations series that's goin on, the bank manager can always check from the website how it's goin. At least they told me that the bank manager is following it up. (Informant 12, female)

Some of the reporters were willing to work as a web journalist of their own neighbourhood, for whom people could bring either fin-

ished texts or story ideas. This has happened during the project in practise as some of the reporters have put stories from other people into the website.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the Mansemedia website. The browser's address bar shows the URL 'http://mansetori.uta.fi/media/juttu/?id=1883'. The website header includes the Mansemedia logo and the tagline 'Kaupunginosakirjeenvaihtajien verkkolehti'. The main content area features an article titled 'Pankkiautomaattiloite vireillä Hatanpäällä' with a sub-headline 'Kasvava asuinalue vaatii palveluja. Siirtolapuutarhankatu 2:n aktiivinen asukastoimikunta valmistelee adressia käteisautomaatinanomiseksi Hatanpään kaupunginosaan Tampereelle. Ihmiset ovat osallistuneet sankoin joukoin kirjoittamalla nimensä adressiin.' Below the article is a photograph of a group of people sitting around a table, with a caption identifying them as 'Nuoria ja Merja Linkomäki'. To the left of the main article is a sidebar with a list of neighborhood news sections under the heading 'Etusivulle'. To the right is another sidebar with a search bar and a section titled 'Yhteistyöllä ylläpidetty kaupunki' containing several news snippets with dates.

Mobilizing information: Residents claim automated teller machine to the new suburb in Hatanpää.

Towards people's journalism?

At the beginning of the research, the idea was to develop new kinds of forms of web narration. It became apparent rather soon, however, that in a learning process this challenging and based on voluntary help, there are no resources for any big innovations. As the research has proceeded, the main idea has become learning new things and how that is done.

It has been a process of sociocultural animation supported by the research project and web media. Essentially, it means that by animating people you trigger off a process of self-expression. The concept of people's journalism is interesting in this context. The tasks of people's journalism are information, training and

the mobilization of people. People have things to say about their own lives and with the help of people's journalism they encourage others to act. Through writing they organise their thoughts and their thoughts reach other people, maybe even policymakers (Kurki 2000, 144-145).

What kind of stories and experiences have resulted from people's journalism in the neighbourhood reporter project? The residents feel various things are worth writing about. When story ideas are not prechosen but the starting point is in your own ideas, the result is a many-sided collection of stories reflecting the personalities of the writers. Initially, the following observations can be noted:

- **Positive stories.** Many reporters write about the good things in their neighbourhood. The number of stories dealing with negative things in a critical way is astonishingly small considering the amount of stories written. The own neighbourhood is experienced in a positive way and the reporters want to convey this also to others.
- **Sharing information with others.** The neighbourhood reporters do not inform; they share information with others. The advice articles originating from everyday experiences and observations, for example, carry a message: I have experienced this, maybe you will also find it interesting and useful.
- **Commitment.** Many reporters find this kind of work important. They are committed to their own web magazine, interested in its future, and are willing to do something for this future.
- **Responsibility.** Along with commitment, the reporters also take responsibilities. Although there is certain freedom in writing, the web magazine is not a discussion forum. People want somebody to read their story before it gets published.

At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced the concept of people's journalism alongside news journalism and public journalism. The classification does not mean, however, that these would be

mutually exclusive alternatives. The stories written by neighbourhood reporters could, for example, be one source of articles for professional journalists. Having already been written, the story has been taken above the idea level and foundations laid for further analysis.

Well, I think this is an interesting hobby and it also like keeps you connected to the surroundings, your own neighbourhood. You, like, keep your eyes more open there and observe things more like this, like, you think whether this could be something you should write about. (Informant 1, female)

Internet is a new medium, and its rules are still taking shape. The traditional newspapers, for example, have found it difficult to figure out how to use the Internet in a new and meaningful way that would also benefit them commercially. From the viewpoint of journalism, you could predict on the basis of this study that in future there will be small neighbourhood magazines on the web produced by the residents themselves. These will not have big circles of readers, but they report important and interesting things from the local neighbourhood of the residents. The professional journalists use stories written by the residents as one story source and discuss some of these topics in the mainstream mass media. Realistically, there is reason to point out that, for the moment at least, neighbourhood magazines could not survive by voluntary means; some kind of support is needed.

The commitment of the reporters is indicated by their worry that so few people know about *Manse Media* – and in fact the whole Manse Square. If the achievements are measured by the number of readers, this kind of experiment would be easy to dismiss as marginal and trivial undertaking by the citizens.

The importance of this kind of action, however, can be considered from another viewpoint as well. Such is presented by Clemencia Rodriguez (2001) who introduces the concept of citizens' media as a substitute for alternative media. Alternative media as a con-

cept may easily create a kind of confrontation to the mainstream media and forget that citizens' media experiments, such as the neighbourhood reporter project, are important because they penetrate into the prevailing media system. In these experiments, it is possible to question the inbuilt rules of the prevailing journalistic culture. At the same time, the reporters learn through their work to become more conscious of their own surroundings and acquire powers to influence it (ibid., 20).

Producing alternative messages is more than just a challenge to the mainstream media. It gives the possibility to depict yourself and your surroundings, to define your identity with signs you have chosen yourself instead of signs given to you from outside – to be the narrator of your own story (Rodriguez 2001, 3).

The neighbourhood reporters have learned computer skills needed in the making of the stories as well as content-related matters of web writing through their work. This way their confidence in their own work and in their own skills has grown. Know-how and participation has strengthened their self-awareness.

I think it's, like, good that everybody writes so different kinda stuff, that everybody has the chance to do... sure, there are these moral kinda rules and things, but, like, that people have not been put, like, into pigeonholes... so that this has to be done like this and like that, but it's so different, like, different kinds of stories. (Informant 9, female)

Epilogue: The researcher as a tight-rope walker

Both ordering coffee and buns, and theories of citizens' journalism whirl in the head simultaneously (Ahva 2003, 92).

The research project 'Evolution of eCommunities' has been action-oriented. The task of the researchers is not merely to observe the subjects but to act together and activate the people involved in the project. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that Virpi Kaivonen, the neighbourhood coordinator of Manse Square, and

I have also worked as reporters in the neighbourhood of Petsamo in addition to our research work.

An essential aspect of this project has been the fact that Manse Square website continues to exist after the research project. This has meant that, especially at the end of the project, it has been necessary to think how the reporters can continue their work more and more independently. The researcher shall not do things for the people in this situation but to encourage them to do things by themselves.

On the other hand, this has been a challenging learning process for the neighbourhood reporters. They have learned computer skills, web writing, and discussed the responsibility questions relating to web publishing. They have experienced ups and downs in the course of the project and especially in the downs, the researcher is easily seized by an urge to take over the reins in order to save time and trouble.

In a methodological introduction about Finnish village research, for example, the roles of the action-oriented researcher have been diverse: expert, animator, shaper of possible activities, mediator in conflicts, instructor, publicist (Hautamäki 1989, 30).

Taking the role of animator is a kind of continuous balancing act. In some situations something has to be done for the people. At the same time, it has to be kept in mind that at some point you have to make yourself redundant, and things should proceed on their own. In practise that means making choices continually.

The action research at hand has included a lot of common activities with the reporters. The further the research has proceeded, the harder it has been to place oneself in the cool role of the researcher. The subjects are suddenly collaborators and friends, who are eager to learn. And among friends you do not achieve much with mere theorizing.

Researcher: *If we go into these group meetings, how have*

you experienced them, are they necessary?

Informant 11, male: *Well, yes. There has been enough food at the coffee table.*

Researcher: *Coffee and buns.*

Informant 11: *Yeah, you've served coffee and buns.*

Researcher: *Something else?*

Informant 11: *That's of course the most important.*



Tuula Lahtinen

Comments give extra boost to writing

The report depicts *Manse Media* and its reporters explicitly. I think it covers the project well and the comments from reporters add a nice zest to it. The report clearly demonstrates that the reporters have been motivated and that the work itself has been enjoyable. It also shows that the reporters are pleased with their leaders.

The marketing and advertising has not mirrored the success of the project. Why? Generally, at least in the district of Vehmainen, too few people know *Manse Media*. The local shopkeeper has sometimes printed out my stories and put them on the wall in the shop and

I did get one advertorial published in the newspapers *Aamulehti* and *Omakotiviesti*.

Writing and taking photographs has been enjoyable. The children, friends and relatives have been with me in spirit. I have always told them about a new story and also urged them to read it. The group meetings every month are important; they give a boost to writing. Writers may gradually drop out of the project if nobody comments on the texts at all.

For me, writing to *Manse Media* has been a good thing if only for the reason that I have really been writing. I always think writing is fun but the act of writing itself easily remains only a thought. I have been thinking that the Vehmainen section should focus more on the events and people of the neighbourhood. At the moment, it is mainly one writer's own website. On the other hand, nobody has complained.

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Niklas Vainio

Starting Points for Communal Publishing

Manse Square is a website that not only offers information but invites users to participate in the creation of its contents. In Manse Forum one can begin maintaining a specific subject, Manse Media encourages people to become neighbourhood reporters and in the Manse Square website for neighbourhood sites users are being offered a chance to make a home page for their own neighbourhood. The website breaks the boundary between the producer and the receiver of information.

In the beginning of this chapter I will approach the starting points and the stages of implementation of the development of a content management system in different parts of Manse Square. Based on these experiences I will then present an ideal model for system development in communal publishing. At the end of the chapter I will discuss the means of making Manse Square and other similar civic communal websites more easily modifiable and reflect on how to facilitate the maintenance of such social software.

The term social software refers to a system whose purpose is to promote inter-human communication, networking and the creation of new communities (cf. Social Software Alliance 2003). The objective is that the basis of such software will be on various communities' needs of publishing and presentation.

System Independence and System Facility at Aim

At the time *Evolution of eCommunities* project was launched, the technical implementation of Manse Square website was based on the solutions found in the preceding project



Locality in the Global Net. The project had its own www-server utilising Microsoft Windows NT 4.0 as operating system and Microsoft Internet Information Server as server software. Manse Media aside, the contents of all the websites were produced with Microsoft Frontpage or corresponding freeware tools, some of which require understanding of the HTML-language and knowledge of FTP-programs. A system called Square, created during the project, was made use of in Manse Media. Dnews and Dnews-web software were also used in order to facilitate network debate. (Halttu 2000, 105-118.)

However, many users found Frontpage and HTML solutions awkward to use, which raised the threshold for publishing. In the beginning of Evolution of eCommunities project, it was determined that Manse Square needs a web-browser-based content management system of its own, not requiring knowledge of any particular software or understanding of the HTML-language. The purpose of the content management system was to enable easy maintenance of the different sections of Manse Square as well as to replace the Square system, which was malfunctioning due to compatibility problems with more recent browser versions.

The first attempt in the development of the content management system had its basis on the use of Zope application server. However, several problems occurred during the process resulting in the termination of the system development in the end of 2002. The second attempt was initiated in the spring of 2003 and it was based on a development platform called Webdynamo. Webdynamo resulted in the successful phase-in implementation of a content management system in different parts of Manse Square by March 2004.

Zope is a development framework that is used for the implementation of customised sites for content management, intranet and portals. The software is developed with the Open Source principle, meaning that anyone can use, distribute or modify the soft-

ware according to their individual preferences. The software was originally developed by Zope Corporation (www.zope.com) but today it has a wide developer and user base (see www.zope.org). Even though Zope Corporation sells Zope-based products and services, the realisation of the Zope system in Manse Square was decided to be carried through without resorting to the products available. The passage from Windows NT- and Internet Information Server platform to GNU/Linux and Apache platform was launched simultaneously. The rationalisation of the change was the increased reliability, openness and modifiability provided by GNU/Linux system.

The development work was started at the end of the year 2001. The core of the system was a content management tool that would be available for all parts of Manse Square. The tool was also expected to replace Manse Media's previous software, Square. Furthermore, it was desired that the system would be supplied with a search function, a notice board and a debate system. Also, the development of a tool for facilitating the update of neighbourhood sites was planned. However, the development of such a system turned out to be too complicated and laborious for just one person to handle and as the Zope developer community could not provide with the kind of assistance that had been expected, the development was halted.

Experiences on development work done in the Zope environment can be found elsewhere as well. The Finnish Service Centre for Development Cooperation (KEPA) has implemented their website (www.kepa.fi) using Zope. Also in Kepa, Zope was perceived to be a complicated but a versatile platform with a high threshold for understanding. The implementation of Zope in Kepa was launched in 1999 and since then two technicians have proceeded with the system development. The system does not function fully without technical support because the texts to be published require HTML format. Therefore, a large part of the texts pass through the technicians. The site has 10–15 content providers

and all published material goes through the editorial staff at some point of the process.¹

After the experiment with Zope, the construction of a content management system in Manse Square was restarted, this time starting to build it on the Webdynamo platform (www.webdynamo.org). The basic idea of both Zope and Webdynamo is that they work as motors generating the HTML pages viewed by the user by attaching the text and the pictures from a database to the layout the developers have defined. Webdynamo, too, is open and free software, but it does not have the wide developer and user base of Zope's. However, Webdynamo was chosen as the technical solution because the person working for the project is the developer of the system and therefore familiar with it. It would have been possible to buy the content management system as a complete product. Yet, developing the content management software as a part of the project made it possible to customise the system features and user interface to meet the specific needs of Manse Square. Other baselines were the independence of a specific browser and the striving for the use of free and open source software. The technical solutions developed in the project can thus be distributed applying the principle of free software.

The leading idea in the development of the Manse Square content management system has been the ease of use. According to Jacob Nielsen, the usability of a system can be divided into five aspects, which are learnability, efficiency of use, memorability, exiguity of system errors and user's personal satisfaction (Nielsen 1993, 25). Amongst these factors learnability in particular has been emphasised in order to minimise the amount of things to memorise.

¹ A conversation with Keka's managing editor Jukka Aronen and system designer Kalle Korhonen in August 2003.

Neighbourhood Reporters as Test Users of the System

The implementation of the system was done phase by phase starting with Manse Media. The Square system that had been utilised in Manse Media had its shortcomings and deficiencies and there was no one left in the project to proceed with the development of the system. In Square, the neighbourhood reporters were mainly unable to independently publish their own stories, and it was desired that the new system would support independent publishing. In connection with the system reform, it was also desired to highlight the role of the reporters in the layout of Manse Media by presenting each of them with a description and a photo. The site was revised in order to make it to more clearly resemble a news flow like format. Previously, the right margin of the page had been reserved for stories picked out from the news flow, now the margin was reserved for changing topics as well as for Manse Media related extern links.

A meeting was held to plot the needs of the reporters. At the meeting the reporters were asked to explain what sort of qualities and functions they desired from the system. At this stage the reporters were not shown any kind of a demo version or delineation of the system, although, usability research has shown that the users have more ideas after seeing a demo than before (Nielsen 1993, 88-89). The idea was to plot the needs of the users so that no ready technical solutions would direct the thinking process. However, the plan of action did not generate expected results. In research interviews carried out by Ari Martikainen, one of the reporters felt that system development without any pre-existing model was difficult (for more details see Martikainen in this publication):

I don't know how far they've proceeded with it now, but if you asked people what you want, no one would be able to say anything when you have to start from nothing, but when the system is ready, it's easy to find the downsides that must be improved. (Informant 10, female)

After having seen the demo, the reporters were mainly satisfied with it. Hence, a fairly well functioning system was introduced in the next meeting and comments about it were gathered. Some of the users' suggestions were neglected, either because they would have been too laborious to carry through, or because the developers thought such changes would have caused inconsistency in the user interface and would thus have complicated its learnability.

The next stage of the development process was user testing to which four reporters were selected. Some of them had experience on Manse Media's previous system, some of them did not. The group consisted of both men and women. The sample of four is rather small, but based on earlier experience the most critical usability deficiencies can be detected even by a small test user group (Nielsen 2000). Further problems have been detected and corrected since the introduction of the system.

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The test was carried out by giving the test users tasks and by observing how they performed and what type of mistakes they made. As the test users were performing the tasks, they were encouraged to think out loud, in other words to explain their train of thought. The purpose of the method was to find inconsistencies in the user interface and to outline the test user's perception of the system. The test tasks consisted of representative user tasks for Manse Media as searching for a story, reading, editing and adding a picture. The test was followed by an informal conversation with the test users, in which they were given a chance to express their opinions on the system and its usability. (About usability testing see Nielsen 1993, 187, about thinking out loud 195-198.)

Finally, the system had the following functions:

1. In order to write a story, the reporters log into the system with a user name and a password. When once logged in, the site functions as for other users, but in connection with the stories there are links for editing and for creation of new stories.

2. Stories are edited and new stories are created using a www-form. In the form there are separate fields for the title of the story, the name and e-mail address of the author as well as own fields for the lead, text body, extra information box and the subject of the story. Also the pictures related to the story, the name of the photographer and a caption can be defined in the form, see Figure 1.

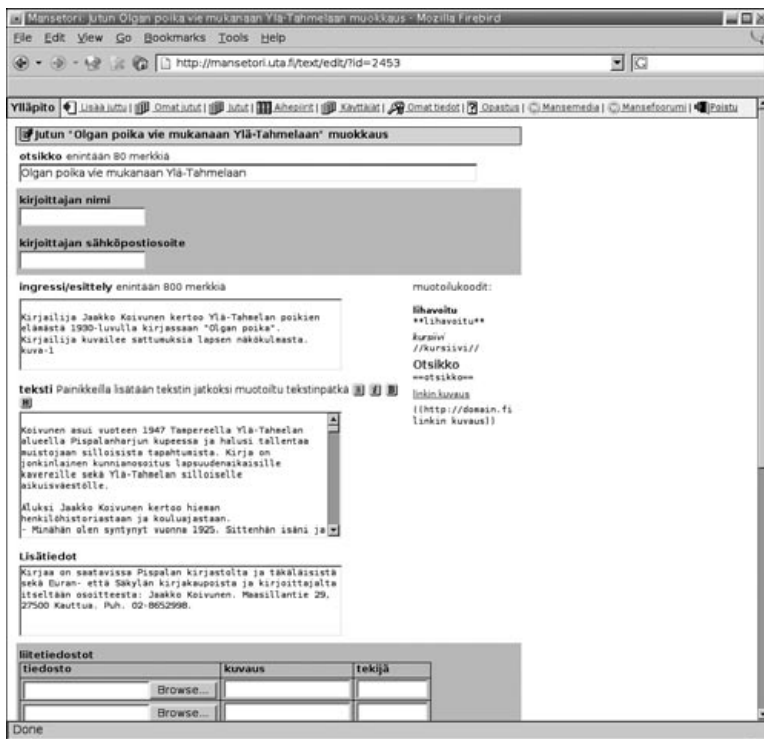


Figure 1. The form for editing and creating stories.

3. The stories must be confirmed in order to publish them on the site. The upload also plays out through the system and the admission rights can be given to different users.

4. Each story is linked to the authoring reporter's personal presentation page. The presentation page consists of a photo of the user, a brief background, e-mail address and a list of stories written by the author. (Figure 2.)

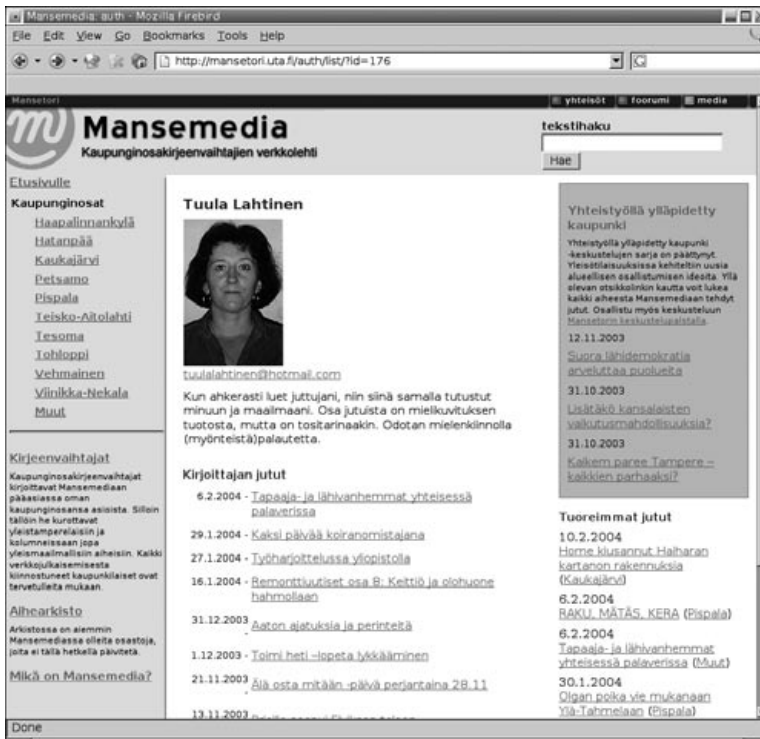


Figure 2. Reporter presentation page: a list of stories and some personal information.

5. It is also possible to make a specific subject matter listing showing an introduction to the theme and the titles of the most recent stories in the right column, see Figure 2.

6. A search function was added to the site for finding old stories.

When the new system was ready to be launched, the reporters were trained in making and publishing of stories. At the time of the launch, Manse Square was employing a trainee who was available for assistance and advice with problems related with the use of the system.

A More Explicit Manse Forum and a Tool for the Neighbourhoods

The implementation of the content management system for Manse Forum was started off in June 2003, after the completion of Manse Media. The layout and structure of the Forum had been revised several times already during the projects Locality in the Global Net and Evolution of eCommunities. As a result of the revisions, the structure of the site had become difficult to follow and the layout was altering from section to section. Not all the website maintainers had experience on user interface design and as there was no technical solution or set of rules behind the realisation of the user interface, the result was rather inconsistent. The editing of pages was done using editors such as Microsoft Frontpage or Dreamweaver. After the editing, pages were transferred to the server with an FTP program. The users were offered training in the use of the editors, despite of which many users did not know how to use them.

The reform of Manse Forum was lead by a desire to make the site easier to use, as well as to amend the Forum's structure by improving its functionality and by making it more distinct. Offering users a simple www-browser based update system would attract more volunteering maintainers for the site and thus facilitate the work of the pre-existing maintainers and would thereby increase the frequency of updates.

The comments and preferences that arose from the Forum as well as the experiences gathered during the implementation of the new system of Manse Media were taken into account as the content management system was being developed. During the planning phase, the system was discussed in two events at the meetings of the Manse Forum Net Team. Subject to a tight schedule, there was no time to introduce a system demo to the team. However, it was explained that the system would be applying the same principles as Manse Media. Partly due to the lack of a demo, only few ideas for system qualities were brought out in the Net Team meetings.

In regard to user interface and layout, the realisation of Manse Forum was decided to be carried through similarly to Manse Media. Consequently, the congruence of the user interfaces of Manse Forum and Manse Media would improve usability, as the two user interfaces would support each other. As in Manse Media, it was decided to automatise the Forum so that the texts filed in a database would automatically be organised in three-column templates. Parallel to the automation, the layout and user interfaces of the different topics in the Forum were standardised. Furthermore, the outline of the topics was changed in order to enable users to see the topics all at once in the navigation bar in the left margin. The middle column was reserved for the stories, the right column was to be left for the most recent titles and for links to the Participate section of the site. A search function was placed on the top of the page. (See Figure 3.)

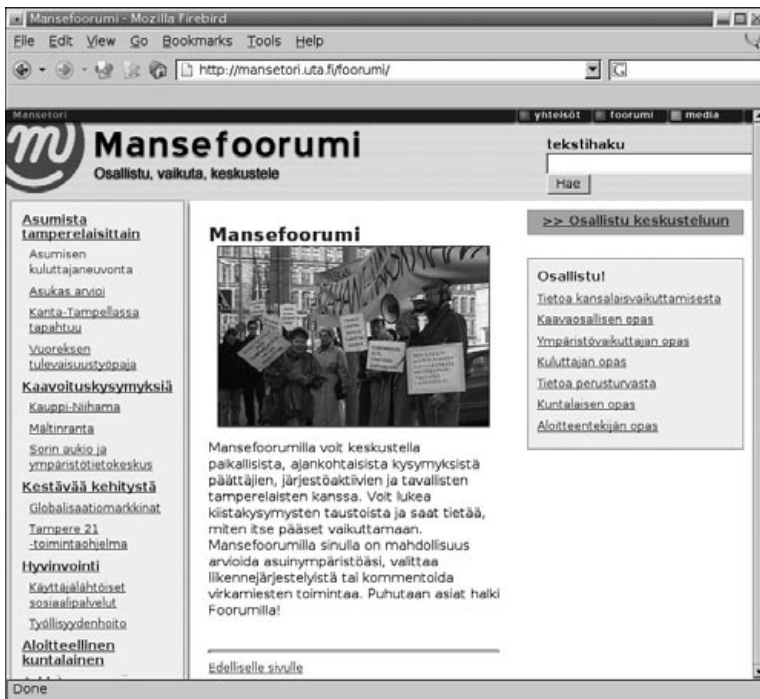


Figure 3. Manse Forum.

The maintenance functions, that is the creation and editing of stories, are generally the same as in Manse Media. However, the attachment of files such as the minutes of a meeting, pictures or audio files has been made possible in Manse Forum. In addition, the stories can be submitted as Word or RTF files, in which case, though, the styling, pictures and other facts must be entered separately.

The wide variety of layouts and user interfaces in the Forum's HTML pages made the transition from HTML pages to a database laborious. The layout and navigation system of the HTML pages was coded in the content of the files using elements such as FONT and TABLE. Therefore, in order to transfer the files to the database, the actual contents of the files had to be separated from the files. A tool for deleting defined fragments of the code was created for this purpose, and the files were then dealt with, one by one, using the tool.

No systematic research on the experiences of the use of the system has been done for this report, but a few comments have been received from the users. The comments show appreciation of the new search function and indicate that the users find the new system easier to use than the previous update method. Some comments also pointed out the size of the middle column being too narrow for certain pictures and maps. Whether there is a need to revise the user interface or not, will be judged after more experiences have been gathered.

A Basic Tool for the Neighbourhoods

At the final stage of the project, a special tool was created for Manse Square's neighbourhood site, Manse Communities. The tool enables the communities to manage the site similarly to Manse Forum. At the time of writing, the construction of the tool was still incomplete, and so no experiences of the use of the tool have been reported.

Central features of the tool:

- The possibility to create a website consisting of different sections and related stories similarly to Manse Forum, using a browser
- The possibility to attach pictures and other attachments to the story
- The possibility to choose the font, colours and logos for the website
- A site element featuring the latest news titles for chosen neighbourhood
- A notice board for the neighbourhood.

The functions of the tool are limited but include the basic functions for management of the Neighbourhood site. The technology utilised supports the adaptation of the tool for all willing neighbourhoods, at the same time allowing other neighbourhoods to hold on to their own solutions in case they wish to do so.

Towards Easier Content Provision

The needs of the users were endeavoured to be met in the system development and efforts were made to engage the users in the system planning. However, the schedule of the project was too tight to give enough room for user meetings and tests. Since the development work of Manse Forum took place in summertime, no user testing was done on the site. Therefore, some planning solutions had to be found without counselling from the users. The best means of creating a system simple enough from the perspective of content provision and publishing would be to develop the system in cooperation with its users. Awaking the users' needs, openness about technical solutions and the system designer's capability of collective learning are all matters to be emphasised in a communal process (cf. Kotilainen in this volume):

1. The needs of the users are being plotted by asking appropriate questions and by presenting examples. The purpose is to find out

which problems or needs are being handled, not to define the details of the technical implementation.

2. The basic principles of the system, layout and user interface are being determined. A demo version is made and feedback is asked for from the users. Based on the received feedback, the demo is being modified followed by another round of feedback. The cycle is repeated within the frame of time available so that no major problems persist in the end.
3. A consistent user interface is created for the system. Feedback is asked and flaws are being corrected. User testing.
4. Usability problems that appeared during user testing are being corrected. In order to ensure system functionality in all circumstances, a systematic operational testing is being done.
5. The system is complete. The users are being trained and the system is being introduced.
6. Feedback is being gathered during the use of the system and possible malfunctions are being corrected.

All of these stages were included in the development, although some of them had to be cut short. A retrospect usability evaluation of the system has not been made, but some sentiments have come up in the research interviews:

Because this is a new program I can't use it very well. I feel like I'm only bumbling about with it. And then the publishing thing, there are too few buttons so I feel I can't do anything with it, that I'm just bumbling about. (Informant 9, female)

Yeah, I think this is easier. This could be learned at the first try. When we were counselled about Square, I didn't learn how to use it after all. (Informant 1, female)

Well, I think it's the same with this system and Square has been on the same level too, that it's difficult to make it any easier. (Informant 2, female)

It appears that the system in Manse Square became relatively easy to use in regard to formal management. However, is it also easy in terms of content provision? Can the provision of different contents to the system be done easily and without great efforts?

Lowering the technical threshold by simplifying the technical implementation eliminates some of the problems related to content provision but it is not enough. Crucial is the sort of settings the system offers to the user in terms of participation in the content provision and the position and role the user is being offered. The existence of social processes and the communities' internal practices such as brainstorming, the management of editorial staff and responsibilities as well as the practises of motivation and acknowledgement are also of great importance. A content management system should therefore be seen in a wider context than just as a technical system.

Approaches to Communal Publishing

There is more than one way to allow users to participate in content provision. Next, I will introduce three different approaches. Content-related distribution of power and the role of the user are the points where the three approaches differ from one another. The outline for the approaches consists of *communal portals*, *weblogs* and *user-collaborated sites*.

By a communal portal I refer to communal sites that function as service directories offering different services and information on various subjects (debate, notice board, link lists). The information packages are provided by a limited number of people and user authentication is required for the modification of the contents. Communality is provided in most cases by means of debate groups and commentary. Manse Square mainly falls into this category. Manse Square offers information on Tampere-related matters, advise for involvement in decision-making, a debate group and free web space for publishing of www-pages. In order to participate in the

maintenance of different sections of the site, contact with the administrators of Manse Square can be sought. The administrators can then deliver the volunteer a user name and password required for the selected section.

Frequent update and chronological order of the contents as well as the users' possibility for commentary are central features of weblogs. I will divide the weblogs into public and private weblogs. The division does not describe the receiver of the content, but the nature of information provided by the blog. With a public weblog, I refer to a site, handling news topics of a certain subject matter that the users can comment on (see Independent Media Center, <http://indymedia.org/> and technology and culture related Kuro5hin, <http://www.kuro5hin.org/>). With a private weblog I refer to a site based on the same technical principles as public weblogs but that is maintained by and under the control of a private person.

Private weblogs can apply a variety of styles and methods. Some blogs work as public diaries, others comment on news events of the day or other www sites, others work as the author's personal letters to the editor or as columns. There are numerous private Finnish weblogs on the Internet at the moment (see <http://www.pinseri.com/bloglist/>).

Weblogs produce communality that rises from discourse. In public weblogs the users use either their own names or pseudonyms while discussing given news matters. Regular user bases reading and commenting on the news often form around the blogs. A whole culture with a particular sense of humour and its local celebrities has evolved around some blogs. The above-mentioned site Kuro5hin, as well as the hacker site Slashdot (<http://slashdot.org>) are examples of such weblogs. Manse Square, Manse Media in particular, resembles a weblog, although web debates have not resulted in the formation of any kind of a community around the site.

The private blogs and how they inter-connect is far more interesting than the public blogs. The authors of private blogs (blog-

gers) follow other weblogs and sometimes comment each other's opinions in their blogs. This often leads to conversations, debates and arguments between two or more bloggers. The discourse is not concentrated on one site but rather takes place between the sites. What is interesting in weblogs is that even though only one person has the authority for one blog, anyone can set up a blog of their own and take part in the conversation, provided that the blog attracts readers. (On the communality of weblogs see Rodzvilla (ed.) 2002.)

The idea of user-collaborated sites (wiki) is rather radical: any user of the site can immediately modify nearly any page without a username or a password. By clicking a specific link on each page, the user can enter the editing mode. The user's modifications appear on the page immediately as the changes have been submitted without anyone checking up the changes before. The websites applying such an approach usually make use of the technology known as *wiki*. "Wikiwiki" is Hawaiian and stands for fast or speedy, and refers to the effortlessness and the straightforwardness of the editing of the wiki-sites. Ward Cunningham, the founder of the first wiki-site, gave the technology its name (Leuf and Cunningham 2001). Manse Square does not apply wiki-like functionality.

A thought of a site any user can edit is new and baffling. What is going to follow the fact that anyone can edit the contents of a website? Are the sites going to lose their credibility and turn into a playground of vandals? Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org, Figure 4), an encyclopaedia created by the users, shows that this is not an inevitable consequence. At the moment there are some 200 000 encyclopaedia articles or entries provided by the users in Wikipedia. Surely there is some intentional offensive editing, but one of the features of the wiki-technology is that all the earlier versions of each entry are stored and can thus be returned by anyone who discovers vandalism. (Aronsson 2002.)

200 000 entries indicate that the wiki-technology might build up the online communities more effectively than many other ap-

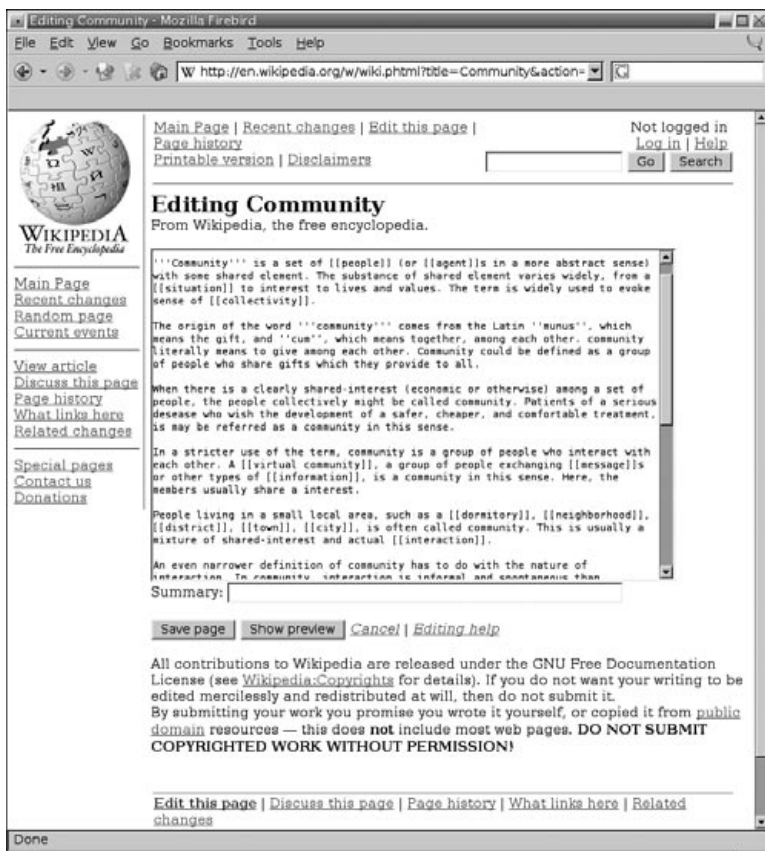


Figure 4. *Wikipedia editing mode.*

proaches. Wiki enables instant participation. Authorization does not need to be applied or waited for and memorising of passwords is not required. Wiki-technology offers users the role of an author and administrator at the same time forcing the user to take the responsibility that follows the freedom.

Several views have been offered to describe the influence of the Internet on responsibility and morals in general. Hubert Dreyfus (2001) for one has claimed that the Internet as a disembodied and anonymous meeting point leads to the loss of meaning and commitment and to nihilism. However, the low degree of vandalism in Wikipedia suggests that in spite of the anonymity, the users' behaviour is guided by some kind of a feeling of responsibility and

morals. It is possible that this morality is strengthened by a revelation of the existence of the Wikipedia community or the feeling of belongingness with it.

A Civic Communal Website as Social Software

According to the previous division of approaches, Manse Square falls clearly into the first category, communal portals. The means by which Manse Square has been outlined and the technology used to modify it are forming a website that does not offer much space for new question phrasings and topics. In order to improve Manse Square as social software, it would be useful to develop the functionality of the site in a way that would allow anyone to easily and spontaneously bring up new themes. How could Manse Square or civic communal sites in general then, become examples of good social software evoking inter-human communication, networking and the creation of communities (cf. Social Software Alliance 2003)?

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Both weblogs and wiki-technology consist of ideas by means of which Manse Square could be directed towards these aims. It would be possible to offer the users of Manse Square a weblog of their own. Content provision for weblogs is easy because the threshold of writing blogs is much lower than that of becoming an administrator of a forum. In one way some of Manse Media's reporters are already authoring weblogs while writing stories about their everyday life.

In certain parts of Manse Square it would be possible to apply wiki-technology thus allowing any user to edit the contents of the site. For the previously introduced Wikipedia the technology works well, but how would it work for a site like Manse Square with many of its subjects politically explosive? Is it going to be possible to create the same sense of responsibility in Manse Square that keeps the vandals under control in Wikipedia? It will be useful to seek answers to these questions in the future.



Kaisu Sillanpää

COMMENT

Technology Does Not Stand in the Way of Participation

It was early spring in 2001 when Ari Martikainen arrived at the website administrators' meeting in Kaukajärvi to recruit new reporters. A deep silence reigned amongst the small crowd of participants after he had spoken. As a representative of the Kaukajärvi society I felt it was my duty to make sure that my neighbourhood keeps up with the development, so I signed up as a volunteer.

Ari offered me private lessons in the use of the Square system in the library of Kaukajärvi. With difficulty I learned how to manage the program. I didn't pay attention to the functional mistakes I made but asked the editor to correct the mistakes as I sent my story off. When the system started acting up, my willingness to publish stories diminished. Due to my own lack of competence, I didn't know what the problem with the program once again was.

The new content management system was easy for a technology phobic person like myself to learn. However, naming the pictures caused some problems. Writing the name in lowercase letters without blanks seems to be the general rule and not just in program in question. The threshold for direct publishing to the Inter-

net vanished. The possibility to edit an already published story is a good thing.

The previous format had a more shifting appearance on the Internet. Skilled authors published spectacular pictures and I reckon that in Square the pictures were of greater importance than the text. Now the contents of a story have gained importance and some pictures make it livelier. After all, writing is harder than the attaching pictures. However, technology is not in the way of participation in the correspondence.

I'm proud of my participation. When I first joined the Kaukajärvi neighbourhood Internet crew I was still in the dark. I had become familiar with a couple of computer programs in my work place and thanks to my children I had a computer at home. I used our PC for occasional word processing and Internet banking. I thank Manse Square for the training and for a fine hobby.

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Ilkka Kumara

Picture Messages from a suburb in the city of Oulu

Mobile phones equipped with multimedia communication capabilities (MMS) have become accessible to the masses. In the visions of the network-operators and mobile phone industry, MMS will fast spread as a logical step from the text messaging. The development has been compared to the leap from the times of the radio and the monochrome television to that of colour television. Moving image is also fast making its invasion into the mobile phone communication (see e.g. Kasesniemi et al. 2003).

The most visible novelty of the multimedia mobile phone is the built-in camera. Digital camera has already allowed busy picturing of everyday life, and made the sending and sharing of photos easy. The camera phone is expected to further lower the threshold of taking pictures, and to encourage the tendency of carelessly snapping pictures anywhere and anytime (Koskinen et al. 2001). A separate camera needs to be taken along, while the built-in camera of the mobile phone is always there. Unlike a separate or a digital camera, the camera phone brings with it a new social dimension to photographing. Pictures taken with a built-in camera make it possible immediately to share them anywhere (Soronen 2002).

Even the everyday mobile phone communication is connected with different locations in many ways. For example, a conversation often begins with a question and an explanation of the receiver's whereabouts (Kopomaa 2002). People take pictures with digital or traditional cameras to depict their life: their times, their environment, and their whereabouts. Visual communication often connects with space. The mobile picture is a continuation of traditions, but the pictures



are more often series of pictures snapped from the immediate environment (Koskinen et al. 2001).

Photos are stored in albums, and Soronen (2002) asks, what actually does happen to the multimedia messages and video clips that people consider important. Do they give birth to services that enable the user to store MMS-messages into private or public Internet albums in the web? Could the material serve as a basis for interaction or as an impetus for other citizens? In the context of digital pictures, Internet album services have already emerged, and it is possible, for example, to send picture messages to the Internet site of the city of Tampere, to record the everyday life of the people of the city.

As technology develops, mobile appliances become increasingly integrated into the public networks and their communal features. Together with local and novel social dimensions of the multimedia communication this raises the question of how to use the camera phone in the modern local communication. “Evolution of eCommunities” and “Locality in the Global Net” -projects have, for their part, proved the Internet as a potential publishing medium for the local communities. Neighbours in Oulu and Manse Square in Tampere have risen to significant forums for local journalism and civic communication.

In this section, I explore the use of the mobile phone, equipped with multimedia capabilities, for the communication needs of the local communities. In the project called *Picture Messages from Kaukovainio*, youths were provided with camera phones, and they were given a task of expressing their ideas of Kaukovainio as a neighbourhood, by means of multimedia messages. The messages were put on display on Kaukovainio’s own Internet site, where the audience had an opportunity to comment on them. On the basis of the picture messages and the discussion that resulted, the local actors formed their own opinions of the benefits of the project. What was the resulting local image of Kaukovainio like? What kind of discussion, aimed at the locality, did the pictures develop?

Would the material that resulted in the process be useful on the region's Internet site?

First, I present the foundations of the mobile project at Kaukovainio, and the implementation of the picture project. Subsequently, I analyse the picture messages and the discussion on them, and I also discuss the experiences of those involved in the study. Lastly, I assess the possibilities opened up by the camera phone for the Internet communication of a local community.

Mobile pictures as building blocks of the local image

Kaukovainio is a suburban situated at about four kilometres distance from the centre of Oulu, a city in the north of Finland. The suburb was mainly built in the 60s, and there lives about 5300 people. Half of the area belongs to one-family houses and terraced houses. They represent only one tenth of the number of the apartments compared with the blocks of flats. There are plenty of houses on rent by the city, and the social status of the area is quite low. The population is aged, and there are more one person apartments than others counted together (The annual book of statistics of the city of Oulu 1999).

Nearby of the well-equipped shopping centre are situated an elementary school, a library, a congregation house, and a youth house. There are many day-care centres and a home for the aged on the region. There are also found units of a polytechnic, a school of culture and technology, and an adult educational centre.

In the 60s and 70s, Kaukovainio was labelled with an image of a rough and violent area. Especially the local actors, and most of the people living in the area, too¹, consider this image mistaken

¹ Based on the discussions in the electronic version of Kaleva newspaper.

and outdated. Those in favour of Kaukovainio mention for its advantages the closeness of nature, spaciousness, peacefulness, good traffic and bus connections, and extensive services.

Kaukovainio is an active community, and the region also has its own Internet page in Neighbours Internet portal (<http://www.naapurit.net>). The aim of the local resident association is to make use of the Internet to report about the everyday life of Kaukovainio and Hiironen, and also to increase the esteem both the residents and the outsiders hold the region, in other words, both to encourage the regional identity of the residents, and to create a stronger sense of identity as a locality.

The identity of localities involves their typical characteristics, which separate them from other localities, and on the basis of which the symbolism, the images, and the expectations are born that are linked to those specific localities (Riikonen 1997). Whereas local identity or local consciousness indicates the way people feel that they belong to a certain locality: they see the locality as a whole, are conscious of its specific character and attributes, and feel togetherness with others living in that locality (Paasi 1986).

In the wider area of Kaukovainio functions a local cooperation group, which is a body for the implementation of local democracy. The members of the group represent the actors of the region broadly: administration, public health service, social services, entrepreneurs, education, and the church. Children and youths are especially emphasised in the annual budget of the cooperation group, and therefore it is interested in the local problems and the views held by the target group towards the region. The views of the children had recently been listened to, so the youths were the target of special interest in the autumn 2003. From the foundation of local activity *Picture Messages from Kaukovainio, Oulu* was shaped into a local-communal project.

The youths' picture messages leading to interaction

The organization of the picture message project was integrated into the ADP-classes of the ninth-grade school children. Students who lived outside Kaukovainio were given for their task to describe the theme “Kaukovainio” by means of picture messages, and those living in Kaukovainio had “My Kaukovainio” for their theme. The message had to consist of a picture and an illustrating text of one sentence, and the message should be such as to generate discussion.

The students were given a preparatory class on the subject in September, where I, together with the researcher Sirkku Kotilainen, clarified the purpose and the implementation of the research project. The students prepared and planned the task for ten minutes. In this way the process was in a way left to settle for the next few weeks. This proved to be necessary, since especially some of the boys seemed to have difficulties in clarifying their thoughts on the subject. The general ethics of taking pictures was also explained. The students filled a pre-questionnaire on class concerning their use of the mobile phone and its relationship to other media.

Only one boy did not own a mobile phone, but the ordinary communication with it was familiar for all the students. They told they used mobile phone especially for sending text messages and to be in the reach, but many try to avoid unnecessary phone calls. The usual phone bill ran from 8 to 40 euros, and the average was 21, 24 euros. Two students told that they did not know the size of their bill or their balance limit.

The picture project was carried out on the upper grade of Pohjankartano comprehensive school, on the classes of the ADP-teacher Sari Merihaara. In the three groups there were 28 students in all, of which there were 8 girls and 20 boys. During the following two weeks each group took twice on foot at Kaukovainio for

a few hours at a time, equipped with my advice. At the first time, I also showed the students how to use the camera phone. There was one camera phone for every three or four students, but everyone was expected to create and send at least one picture message. I also observed students' reactions in the field to the technical side of the communication.

Besides for the student groups, the phones were also available for loan for anyone willing during one week day on October at the resident premises. The aim was to collect a small comparison sample along with the material produced by the students. The opportunity was seized by six people in all, 24-32 in age, two couples and two single men, all residents of the wider area of Kaukovainio.

Students sent 33 MMS-messages in all, of which 28 were accepted on the Internet page. Five messages were left out either because of a missing text or of an irrelevant theme other than Kaukovainio. The six persons who had loaned the phone at the resident premises sent 11 messages all together, which were all accepted to the Internet.

On the last week of October, the picture messages were collected to the Neighbours portal, onto the web pages of Kaukovainio, to be seen and commented. The picture messages were also projected on the wall of the residents premises for a week during the opening times of the premises. In addition, the Saturday flea market, among others, was also made use of because of its popularity. The aim was to bring the project also into the reach of those, who did not have the access or the skills to use computers or the Internet. During the project the computers at the resident premises had "Picture messages from Kaukovainio" as their opening page. Some dozen people did come to see the picture messages at the premises. The messages raised some discussion, but people did not venture to send their comments to the Internet.

The students followed the discussion going on the Internet on

their classes in November. After that I collected e-mail feedback, where I asked them to describe their experiences of the picture message project. I also asked the local actors to follow the picture message web page. The project was then discussed at the annual resident meeting and at the resident premises on those days when the messages were on seen there. Finally, I collected e-mail feedback from the local cooperation group. In the feedback I asked them to tell about their thoughts on the Kaukovainio of the youths, and if there was something to be learned about the project as regards to the group's work. I interviewed the active members of Kaukovainio-Hiironen residents association on the issue of the usability of the project material on the Internet page.

Publicness in the local media

From the beginning, the purpose also was to bring the project into the attention of other local media, as soon as the messages had been transferred into the Internet. Neighbours web pages are known only by a few due to the lack of marketing, therefore, the picture messages would not have received any wider public attention.

It was most natural to use one from the background forces of the project, Kaleva, the biggest newspaper of the Oulu region in the north of Finland. An article about the picture messages under the title "Kaketsu is a rough place, they say. There is black humour in the pictures taken by the youths" was published on the Today-column in Kaleva. At the same time Neighbours page was linked to Kaleva's electronic paper, Kaleva.plussa, with a banner put in the upper margin of many of the pages. The picture message page had its own link on the opening page on Neighbours (Naapurit.net) as well as on the other strategic pages.

A reporter from Oulu-Radio, the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE, also visited the resident premises in order to hear about the activities and events of Kaukovainio region. In this connection the project was brought into the attention of the radio audience.

The researcher as an activator of the process

The attractiveness of the picture within a picture message is integrally related with the accompanying text (Koskinen et al. 2001). In this study, the students were instructed to accompany the picture with a text, which would serve as an opening for discussion, and messages without texts were discarded. There was a ready point of view for the contents analysis of the picture messages and the discussion that resulted. How do the picture messages relate with the prevailing image of Kaukovainio, in other words, with the identity of the locality. The analysis was made according to my experience and knowledge as a researcher (Pietilä 1995).

Picture messages from Kaukovainio -subproject was integrated to the action research approach of the whole project. As an organizer to the project, I actively participated in every phase of it: in the orientation to the task, in the field activities, and in the collection of the feedback. I have been in a central position in connection with the local actors, which participated in the project, and I also lived at Kaukovainio for five years during the project. My role as a researcher has clear connections particularly to those responsible of the village studies (see Kuula 1999).

The study material is diverse, and it consists of the observations made during the project, the MMS-messages published on the Internet and the argumentation that followed, the discussions at the resident premises, and both the e-mail and the interview feedback collected from the study groups.

Smooth and compatible technology

Nokia 3650 camera phones with a built-in camera, which reaches VGA-resolution (640 x 480 pixels), was used in the study. The amount of the pixels is adequate to make the publishing on the Internet possible. The youths handled the functions of the phone easily, despite of the novelty of the Symbian user interface. According to the feedback, sending MMS-messages was considered

easy, although the basics of the MMS-messages were only shortly covered in the field. Only one student informed having been unable to send the picture without help.

SIM-cards and DNA-subscriptions were loaned from Oulun Puhelin Oyj. The subscriptions had GPRS capabilities and MMS settings ready in them, and suitable settings for photo shooting had been adjusted to the phones. The phones and the subscriptions worked without any technical problems, except for one phone, which lacked the appropriate settings at first.

Picture messages were sent by means of multimedia messaging service, MMS. Multimedia message differs from the ordinary text messaging, since it allows image, sound, and even moving image to be attached to the message. When sent from one phone to another MMS message is created as a complete entity, a narrative representation, and it reappears in the receiver's appliance as similar as possible. In the study, the messages were sent to an e-mail address that had been inserted beforehand into the contact information menu of the mobile phones. When the MMS was received, the message decoded automatically into attachments, picture into .jpg-format and text into .txt-format.

Messages were added to the Internet pages of the wider region of Kaukovainio-Hiironen by means of a specific form, which compiled the thumbnails and the representation files of the picture into the browser's index, and the message text and a link to the picture files into the database. So the messages went through a manual filter in the study. Online implementation was given up because there was not enough time to test it adequately.

From the database the messages were picked to the web page by means of clauses created with the Cold Fusion -program. On the main page (picture 1) picture messages were on display in miniature size (125 x 94). Under each picture was a 15-character excerpt followed by three dots (...) of the related text. Only a part of the text could thus be seen, which was hoped to entice in open-

ing the picture. Under the message text was marked the number of comments received by that picture, so the visitor did not need to click the pictures open one by one in order to see the comment situation.



Toinen puoli...
(8 kommenttia)



Kaketsun suosit...
(19 kommenttia)



bussipysäkin ko...
(14 kommenttia)



Unimaailma...
(7 kommenttia)



Mäntyjen seassa...
(8 kommenttia)



Kaketsulta hääm...
(11 kommenttia)

Picture messages with their texts. With a click the picture and its comments opened in own window.

The clicked picture opened in a new window in a larger size (580 x 435). Under the picture the actual text was marked with red colour to separate it from the comments that had been given. Also the pseudonym of the sender, and the time of sending in minutes, were given beside the comment. In the lower part of the page was a form for the sending of an own comment. A comment sent under a pseudonym was directly after its sending attached to the comment string. Moderation was done afterwards, and the owner of the pages had a hidden master page for erasing any comment.

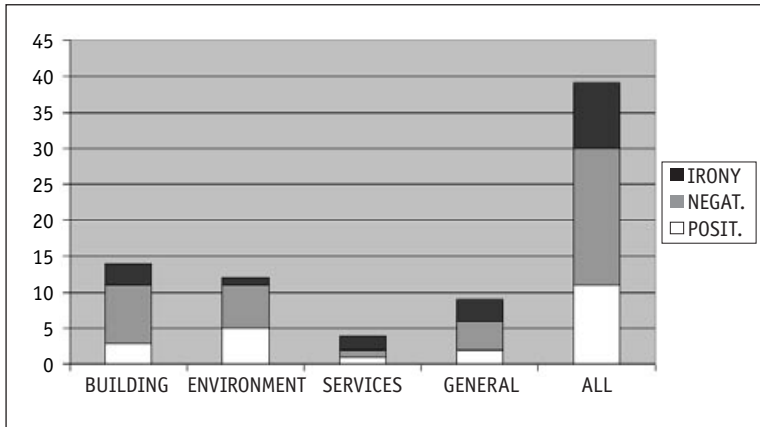
Feedback was not collected about the layout and technological implementation of the pages, but some users mentioned those having worked well and been user-friendly. From the page owner's viewpoint there were things to be improved. When the page sometimes did not work accordingly, the impatient user might press the send-button several times, and subsequently the comment came out printed as many times. Few comments were mistakenly written in the name field, and the specific comment field was left empty. Online technology caused anxiety, because a nasty visitor could have tested the system by pressing the send-button carelessly. The other worry was whether the discussion without any seeming moderation would provoke bad language. The worries proved to be redundant. The system was not tested and language was adequate enough for publishing: none of the comments needed to be eliminated because of their language.

“Kaketsu is a rough place”

This title was also the title of an article by the journalist Pasi Valtanen, published in Kaleva newspaper on the picture messages, and the title fairly well expresses the atmosphere perceived in the picture messages at the first glance.

I started by classifying the picture messages according to my purpose of interpreting their topic or import. Three quite clear categories then emerged: the buildings, the environment and the services (see the chart 1). Those messages that did not fit into these categories I classified as generally illustrative of the region. The classification is inevitably rough and subjective, but the significance of the framing function the text had related with the picture was critical, and there was a reason to see the message as a whole. A message that clearly seemed to belong to a certain category by the first sight could prove to be quite something else according to its text. For example, a picture representing the gable of a brick house did not end up to the building category. Opened to the larger size one could see the Pint Street -sign in the picture,

and the accompanying text told it to be “the route of many people at Kaukovainio, too”.



Picture messages classified by their topic or their tone (N=39).

Besides classifying messages according to the topic, I also further divided the messages either positively or negatively expressing the identity of the locality. It was difficult to clearly decide about the tone in some of the messages, so those ones I classified as ironic, representing the black humour mentioned in Kaleva newspaper, too.

Messages connected with buildings (14/39) represented the largest topic, which the local actors recognised in their feedback, too. Part of the explanation lies in that on the second photo shooting session, one group of students was given a hasty assignment of taking a picture of some building at Kaukovainio, due to the rainy weather. However, this time the messages were created as a group, so the number of extra pictures of buildings is three in maximum, which is a significant amount considering the size of the material as a whole. The messages picturing buildings were largely negative in tone. The environment was pictured almost as often (12/39), however, in considering their tone they came up

almost to the same, only slightly to the negative side. The situation was about the same with messages illustrating services or the region in general.

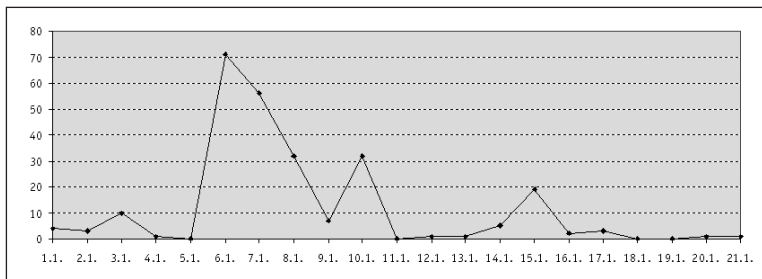
When messages are analysed according to their tone, it can be observed that almost precisely half of them defines Kaukovainio negatively. When it is probable that ironic messages, representing black humour, are seen negative among the audience, it can be concluded that Kaukovainio is represented as rather a gloomy place in the messages, and thus the prevailing image of the locality is regenerated. I came to the ironic interpretation on grounds of the experience as a researcher, although, the interpretation cannot be made that straightforward (see e.g. Reunanen 2003).

There were differences in the picture messages depending on who had taken them. Boys took more pictures of buildings than did the girls, who brought out more environmental themes, for example parks, sports grounds and recycling. The environmental themes of the boys had to do with leisure time and speed, whereas the girls' pictures of buildings were softer. Most of the clearly positive messages came from the group of young adults. Those emphasised beautiful nature, education and sports. As a whole, messages were clearly different from those pairs of pictures produced during the project called *Two pictures of my town*, in which the citizen photographers had brought out the better face of their region. Therefore, it really does matter in whose hands the means of representation are.

Just like one person who looked the pictures did mention, the pictures lack movement and activity, people ("the life") almost totally. This is worth noticing when thinking of using the pictures to record the everyday life of the people of Kaukovainio. This is probably explained by the instructions given to the youths about taking pictures of people. It was easier to picture something other than to ask for a permission to take a picture.

Identity struggle for and against

The commenting that succeeded was followed for the time of three weeks since the publishing of the picture messages. A few occasional comments appeared before the news in Kaleva newspaper, but it was only after that when the commenting had its outburst for a few days and then continued steadily. The daily accumulation of the comments is presented in the chart 2.



The number of comments given on all the picture messages during the time of first three weeks was 273.

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273 comments arrived during the three weeks, individual messages received from three to fifteen comments. It is difficult to evaluate whether the amount is big or small. Since Neighbours portal is fairly unknown, the result is quite satisfying. It should be clear that there were plenty more visitors to the page for other reasons.

The statistics compiling system was not active for technical reasons, so exact numbers cannot be given here. Something about the increased awareness and popularity of Neighbours can be concluded from the number of people participating to the flea market and the discussion forum, which multiplied from the previous. Great significance for the increase in the popularity might have had the Neighbours link banner that was added onto several pages on Kaleva's Internet paper. By examining the registered times of the comments, the conclusion can be drawn that many times it

has probably been the same person, under different pseudonyms, commenting various messages.

Both an individual picture message and the succeeding discussion have warranted comments. Sometimes it is impossible to say whether a comment has been given about the picture message, as an answer to the discussion, or for some previous commentator. In this sense, the discussion resembles the style of the Internet discussion columns, where the discussion is opened with a question or a story. For example, on Kaleva's web paper the comments are marked by a serial number, so that a new writer can make a swift reference if they desire. It would, of course, be equally possible to refer to the pseudonym, but a number is always a short and exact identifier.

All messages received comments, but some outnumbered others. These were, among others, a picture of a local bar "A popular place to spend one's weekend at Kaketsu", a scribbled bus stop "The fate of a bus stop at Kaukovainio", a lonely, rusted Lada "A Kaketsu car" and a frisbee basket "Also frisbee is possible at Kaukovainio". It might be assumed that a message which has received comments abundantly, has interested and tempted to have a look at, and thus the comments have accumulated.

Most of the comments were humorous and the humour seemed to have its roots in the reputation of Kaukovainio. In this sense, irony can sometimes be interpreted in a different light than in the messages itself. Smileys added to some comments also further emphasised its tone.

Although most comments are difficult to define in a straightforward manner, most message strings were labelled as a kind of an identity struggle for and against Kaukovainio, despite of the original topic of the message. An example of a message string is in picture 2.



- Kaketsun suosittu viikonloppuviettopaikka.

Minä tuumaili 03.11.2003 klo 9:11

- "Vanhassa" vara parempi,

MA tuumaili 03.11.2003 klo 14:39

- Mahti ördäys menossa joka aamu jo 10.00 , ammattilaisten paikka ...

'Iirvi' tuumaili 04.11.2003 klo 8:54

- valitettavaa mutta totta.

Mestis tuumaili 04.11.2003 klo 20:35

- Tämähän on kuiteskin se Kaketsun parempi kapakki, johon uskaltaa päänsä työntää kokemattomampikin hapottelija.

Suu tuumaili 05.11.2003 klo 21:44

- Tosi ikävä paikka!!

A picture message opened to its own window with its string of comments. These comments above deal with the wild atmosphere of the local pub.

According to the rough classification, there are as much praising as criticizing comments on the region. Many, probably new or older residents, have taken a clearly defensive position for “Kaketsu”:

Bus stops have been scribbled around Oulu, not just at Kaketsu (a former resident)

Kaketsu has the best trees at Oulu – let us be proud of them! (a resident)

Kaketsu is a fine place!! Having lived there for 30 years I do know! (Juhis)

On the other hand there are some residents who do not think everything is in order at Kaukovainio due to drinking:

Precisely this sort of bars should be away from Kaukovainio. There are drunkards in every corner so that I don't even bother to go to the whole shopping centre. (A man from the neighbour)

I stay clear of the services of Kaketsu. The shopping centre has been occupied by the drunkards. (A child of heaven)

The negative overall representation seemed to give stimulus to those against Kaukovainio. Even so that some of the positive messages were turned into pessimism:

Wonder when the rascals will destroy this too. (Molo)

You should see this place on Friday evenings! The local youngsters spend time here; the place is full of empty bottles. (Hähä)

This isn't like Kaketsu at all...Kaketsu sucks. (No pseudonym)

The students did not bother about the web publicness

At the end of the study, I collected e-mail feedback from the students who had sent picture messages. In the feedback, I asked them to report their feelings about the mobile technology, producing the messages, publicity on the Internet, and the comments received by the messages. What had been learned about the mobile technology, Kaukovainio, and the Internet discussions? What had been difficult or interesting in producing the messages? What were the friends' possible comments on the student's messages like? How about own thoughts on the discussion that had followed?

The comments own messages had received had clearly been examined. Half of the students mentioned that the feedback had been what they had thought it would be, and the other half thought the feedback varying. Internet publicness was taken without any ambiguity "it does not feel much anything because there have been own pictures on the web before". It is, however, worth noticing that the students stayed unknown on the Internet, since the names of those who had taken the pictures were not published.

There has come some feedback of the picture but not that much. A little publicity is always nice but I don't want to be any celebrity. (Pupil 1, a boy)

The picture I took got both positive and negative and, of course, some jerk feedback. I don't think that Internet publicity feels anything special. (Pupil 6, a girl)

Internet publicity...hmm...well, it doesn't feel anything. It was fun to read the comments the picture received and to see if people thought the same as I about the issue... and they thought 😊 (Pupil 12, a girl)

All in all, the youths' attitude towards the project was fairly neutral. Communication both with a mobile phone and on the Internet was already familiar. The picturing function of the camera phone offered some novelty attraction. Young people are usually

the first to absorb new communication technology, and there is no reason to doubt that this would not happen with multimedia technology, too, although the price of the novel communication may cause some delay.

Some of the students found it difficult to figure out something to take pictures of. This might have been a consequence from the nature of the task, when own view of Kaukovainio had to be squeezed into a single picture message. Any picture then did not do. The situation could have been quite different, if the students had been given free hands. The pictures would most probably have been rather casual and careless, considering the assumed use of the device. There were some pictures of this kind among the messages, but those were discarded from the Internet material.

The local actors in fight for Kaukovainio

The picture messages got the local actors of Kaukovainio-Hiiroinen at their back feet. On the basis of the discussions and the feedback given at the resident evening meeting and at the resident premises, the image created by the picture messages was considered to be a cliché and unnecessarily one-sided. A common position was also the urgent need to influence one way or another the image of Kaukovainio:

“There can be found a seed of truth, that may have to be admitted – it is unfortunate that the bars are the ‘top thing’ for many people at the shopping centre, and it is most visible side of Kaketsu – great deal of the good aspects of the region are left in the shadow of the outcast drunkards. However, Kaukovainio has been labelled already years ago, and a large part of the reputation seems to be past and gone, and perhaps even a legend from older times – like ‘do you remember how rough it was at Kaketsu’. So the reputation of the region is far more notorious than the truth.”

“The overall expression of the pictures is all concrete – urban, gloomy, only one picture of nature, no pictures of peo-

ple or their activities. Clearly in the search for faults in the environment, seems to bother the youths, too."

"I somewhat got the feeling that I must take up a defensive position for my own region!!!! A raise of image would be in place. What that could be, then, I cannot say all of a sudden."

On the other hand, the justification of the image that emerged from the messages was called into question. It was suspected that the ninth-grades had partly intentionally, partly with a twinkle in their eye, dragged up negative things. Ignorance of the true character of the region was also supposed to be the reason for the views. The many positive and defensive comments on Kaukovainio were positively acknowledged.

"The comments on the pictures fortunately bring out the better side of Kaketsu, too. You can see from those, from the messages, that some have been put with a little humour between."

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Among the active members of the resident association, the possibility of using the material on the region's web pages was discussed. According to the judgments, the outputs as such cannot be considered particularly suitable to represent the region, not to mention to improve its external image. The purpose is, however, to leave the page as it is. In the future, MMS-base could be used in connection with different regional themes.

"A lot of pictures of buildings??? The technical level of the pictures bad (due to the equipment), I would not use these pictures in the marketing of the region."

New prospects for local communities

What was the local image like that the messages and the discussion produced of Kaukovainio? What kind of discussion was born? Would the material that resulted be usable on the Internet page of the region?

Picture messages from Kaukovainio was a small-scale study, which outlined the potential of the camera phone for the Internet communication of a local community. In the study, the ninth- grade school children were given the opportunity to describe Kaukovainio as a neighbourhood by means of multimedia messages, with one picture and one sentence, on the Internet publicness. The students learned the technical use of the phone from a short instruction, and there did not occur any technical problems during the project. On the contrary, from the technical point of view, there does not seem to lay any great obstacles for the implementation of an analogous project. The production and sending of MMS-messages was easy, and bringing them into the Internet was not too complicated.

Most picture messages were composed of the buildings, the environment in general, and the services of the region. Over half of the messages could be defined negative, or coloured by black humour, so that most of them reproduced the negative local image of Kaukovainio. In the positive pictures beautiful nature, education, and sports were emphasised. As a whole, the messages clearly deviated from the pairs of pictures produced in *Two pictures of my town* - project, in which the photographers had brought out the better side of their region (see Seppänen in this volume). That does have significance, then, who has the means of representation.

On behalf of the local actors, the project was considered fairly successful, although the negativeness of the youth's pictures received critique. Perhaps, the negativeness follows from the age class, which searches only for the negative perspectives? Or the positive sides of the region are not known? The greatest significance of the project might lay in that it served as an opening for the conversation about Kaukovainio on the Internet, at the meetings, at the resident evenings, and even larger at the local media. The local actors also saw this as a positive matter, which induced them to speak out for their region, too. On their opinion, the identity of the region should be improved, and the potential offered by the Internet should be invested in this sense.

No obstacles are seen for not leaving the picture message project as it is on the Internet, and this way the situation could be followed in the long term. The material could also be filed later. The local actors also pondered, if the message pages and platforms could be represented by their theme in the future, and if it were possible even to carry out campaigns and competitions by means of picture messages. New themes could come up this way, and picture messages would thus serve as records of everyday life, not as openings of conversation as in this project.

For the youths, who had communicated through mobile phones, it was a novelty to get acquainted with the camera phone. The publishing of the pictures on the Internet was no extraordinary thing, because the Internet communication was already familiar. It was interesting to follow the commenting that resulted from own messages, but the Internet publicity did not enthuse everybody.

This study shows that the camera phone can be a useful appliance on the Internet communication of the local communities. The union of the picture and the text worked well here in opening the civic conversation, and the residents became enthusiastic to take their stand about the issues of the region. In an adequately well-known and established local web page, such as Manse Square, an MMS based discussion forum could become popular even in the near future, as camera phones become sufficiently common. Knowledge about an existing medium, an e-mail address, or a phone number could serve as an incentive to send a picture message, independent of the motif.



Jukka Heikkilä

COMMENT

***Experiment on local media
arrested dweller interest***

As the host of Kaukovainio-Hiironen dweller cabin, I followed the project Picture Messages from Kaukovainio, Oulu, and I consider it an interesting experiment. The older media: the telly, the radio and the newspaper, cannot reach the same immediacy of dialogue in the neighborhood environment as did the project's take-look-comment approach.

Youths' pictures of Kaukovainio raised discussion at the dweller cabin. The cabin visitors, from those of school age up to adults, who regularly use the information point PCs at the dweller cabin, gave their comments directly on the project's web page. Older visitors looked the pictures by a video projector and vividly commented on them right on the spot. For example, a group of older (70+) ladies took an active interest on some of the pictures and comments given on them.

Discussion on the project's web page was anonymous, therefore, parents may well have been commenting on pictures and texts produced by their own children,

them not knowing about each other. Sheltered by anonymity, it is easier to speak out, to discuss over generational boundaries, and equally with other Kaukovainio dwellers. I believe that the discussion generated local sense of identity among the dwellers of Kaukovainio.

On my opinion, a local media experiment such as this has the possibility to succeed and develop, provided that the camera phone becomes more general and the publication pages for the pictures are properly maintained. As long as communications media remain scarce, the discussion is liable to be, on my opinion, too one-sided and even misleading. Some publication restrictions concerning the pages need to be defined as well as clear instructions formulated specifying what will be published.

Picture Messages from Kaukovainio, Oulu proved that the novel media can be usable, maintainable, and reasonable at cost, being at the same time within the reach of everyone. However, longer time and larger user group are required in order it to be possible to determine the scale and nature of development the new media is able to reach. Perhaps it could be developed to cover pictures taken by the digital camera, text messages and possibly also longer articles written by the dwellers? This way the service could cover more users, readers and doers. I see local media as a good means to raise discussion concerning own region and living in there, and I look forward to the time when it will cover more neighborhoods.

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Janne Seppänen

Pictures of neighbourhoods online and in a mobile terminal

Photos belong to our everyday life, which can be seen in the web pages of Manse Square. There are separate picture sections for many of the local neighbourhoods. Images are also used to illustrate the text in other pages to give life to the text. When the project Two Pictures of My Town was being planned, a number of picture series could be found online in the neighbourhood pages: Maps of Pispala, Picture Galleries of Teisko church area, Kämenniemi Picture Gallery, and pictures of Värmälä.

In the History section of Viinikkala pages numerous different picture series were found where old pictures played a central role. In Petsamo pages the articles in the Events section had picture banners the purpose of which was to give the reader as much illustrative material on different events as possible. In the beginning of the project Two Pictures of My Town, Virpi Kaivonen, coordinator of the Manse Square neighbourhoods, described the situation in her e-mail as follows:

There seems to be plenty of ideas in the neighbourhoods, but the implementation is probably the more difficult thing here. The technology required for publishing images is often out of reach or not within an easy reach of residents: digital camera, scanner, image processing software. In addition, the home page projects often suffer from an acute lack of doers, which can make even the possible projects impossible.

At that time neighbourhood coordinator Virpi Kaivonen thought that the neighbourhoods would welcome different ideas of using images in the web pages, and the web page makers might be even keener to welcome makers and technology. The neighbourhood resi-



dents have been offered training in taking pictures and processing them, making home pages and other things connected to the Net. The training has been very popular among the residents.

Although images have been present in many ways in Manse Square, their meaning has not been reflected upon in research. Neither has it been discussed how people could make use of pictures to bring out issues that are important to them. This as such is not very strange since on the whole very little research has been carried out on the use of pictures in peoples' everyday life.

On this basis I thought it might be worth doing some basic research on how people in general use pictures in their everyday life and, in this case, in network environment. It would have been possible to find that out by observing the already existing online content or interviewing people. It seemed to be a more meaningful and operational idea to start a project where people would provide a completely new set of pictures that would be connected to a theme.

Two Pictures of My Town project was carried out in the spring 2002. The purpose of the project was to develop and study new possibilities of using photographs in Manse Square and on the Net in general. The web sites (<http://mansetori.uta.fi/kaksikuvaa/>) and the content for a mobile terminal were produced during the project (see Seppänen 2002a; 2002b; 2004).

In this chapter I will describe the phases of the project, discuss some problems in building applications, and present pictures of different neighbourhoods taken by neighbourhood residents. I will leave out here the analysis of the visual order of the pictures and the pictures' role in identity work, since I have already dealt with these themes in my above-mentioned articles. This chapter is a revised version of chapter one in the Two Pictures of My Town report.

A manageable project as a starting point

It was clear from the very beginning that a vast project was impossible to implement, since the economic resources were extremely limited. Keeping that in mind I tried to figure out the simplest way to produce a visual narrative and finally chose to do it with a pair of photos with short captions.

As the idea of a picture pair started to take shape I talked with Antti Korkka, project designer at Media Tampere. He told me about his company's pilot project where a software platform and content for a mobile terminal, Nokia 9210i Communicator, were produced. The application was going to be tested by the participants of an international IAEC congress in the summer in Tampere. When I told Korkka about the Two Pictures of My Town project he implied that the project could be one content element in the pilot. The idea was interesting because it offered a new platform for the pictures, in addition to the Internet. How could the same content be adapted to both a mobile terminal and the Internet? The Two pictures of my town was not merely a web project anymore but a whole new technological dimension was attached to it. In addition, the neighbourhoods were given an opportunity to present their pictures to a small international audience.

Finally, resident groups from eight neighbourhoods in Tampere produced a presentation each of their neighbourhood with two photographs and a short caption according to their own ideas. The participating neighbourhoods were Teisko, Aitolahti, Hervanta, Pispala, Viinikka, Järvensivu, Petsamo and Käpylä. The photographs of Hervanta were taken by visual art course pupils in the Upper Secondary School of Hervanta. The rest of the photographs are taken by participants in Manse Square neighbourhood communities. The pictures are available online and in the above-mentioned congress application.

The aims of the Two Pictures of My Town project can be summed up as follows:

1. to provide residents with a new forum to present their own neighbourhood,
2. to document how the same content can be adapted to suit both the Internet and a mobile terminal, and
3. to analyse what kind of visual presentations of their residential environment people construct.

A complete format for the residents

The project Locality in the Global Net, which was carried out earlier, had an approach of operational action research, which meant that applications were build together with neighbourhood residents and they were helped to enhance their technical skills to bring up their important issues on the Internet. According to Ari Heinonen the project researchers did not settle for merely observing and reporting but acted openly in the communities offering the community members opportunities to make use of new communications technology (Heinonen 2001, 20). The researchers also strived for openness and transparency. Anyone could have followed the latest changes on the Manse Square website.

When the photograph project started the neighbourhoods had already had several years' experience of web-mediated civic activity that was developing and constantly looking for new forms of activity. Many residents have learned to use the Internet, construct their own sites and use photographs on their websites. The research practices had also been linked to the ideal of operational action research as described earlier. In that situation I thought I would take a slightly more distant approach to the photograph project. Accordingly, I would not produce visuality with the residents or teach them visual expression.

First of all, I wanted to influence as little as possible on which pictures would be selected for the site. I did not attend the neighbourhood meetings. I offered to attend them once, though, but

the residents implied politely that they preferred to discuss the photograph project in their own group first. I met the neighbourhood representatives in my university office instead. I explained the project details and emphasised that the neighbourhoods are free to produce the kind of visual content they want. The content should arise from the needs of the residents. Another reason for a more distant approach are the resources of the project: I was not able to put down a lot of time and effort in the methods of operational action research.

Since I provided a complete web format I had to compromise the resident orientated way of working. Maarit Mäkinen notes in the final report of the project *Locality in the Global Net* (Mäkinen 2001, 34) that developing a resident oriented way of working with neighbourhood residents is not trouble-free:

It would be much easier to design that concept and then simply hand it over to the community. This, however, would do little to promote the objective of having a genuine community media that strengthens its sense of community, promotes its technical competencies and serves as a means of communication, information and influence within the community.

It can be said that *Two Pictures of My Town* is at least partly technology-driven in a negative sense. The form of expression, especially in the mobile terminal application, was defined by technology. It is reasonable to criticise this, but one should take account of the fact that with a complete format the residents could focus on the content instead of trying to develop a web implementation of the idea.

Division of responsibilities is also connected with this. In the *Locality in the Global Net* -project the researchers found that a precondition to a successful neighbourhood project is a clear division of duties and responsibilities from the very beginning of the project which is not always very easy. Even though the re-

searchers tried to stay in the background and give the residents a plenty of space and responsibility, it was not always possible. The researchers had the web know-how and their help was needed all the time. In the end, the division of responsibilities is one of the vital factors in making a project succeed. This was the reason why the different roles in the Two Pictures of My Town project were defined as clearly as possible.

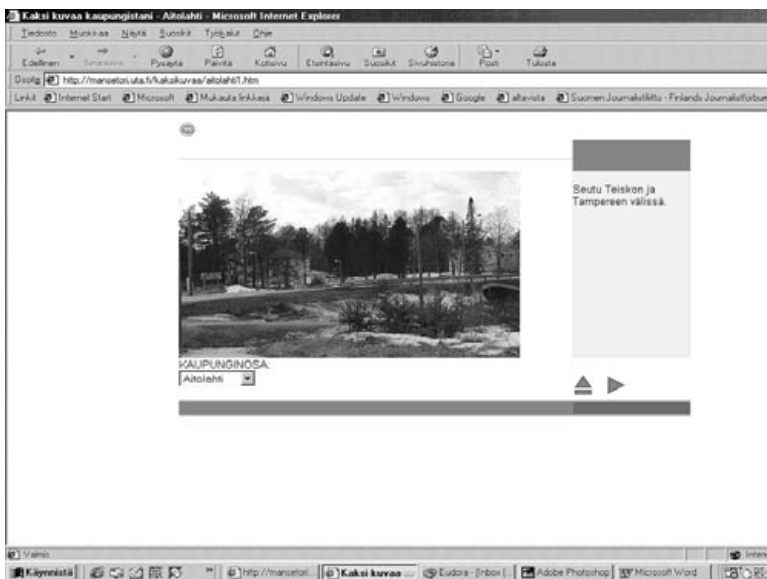
As researcher I was responsible for project coordination, delivering photographs to Media Tampere in a format suitable for the mobile application, and production of the web pages in coordination with graphic designer Jarmo Hiltunen. The contact persons of the neighbourhoods provided photos and texts. Media Tampere was responsible for building the mobile pilot and transferring image files to the mobile application.

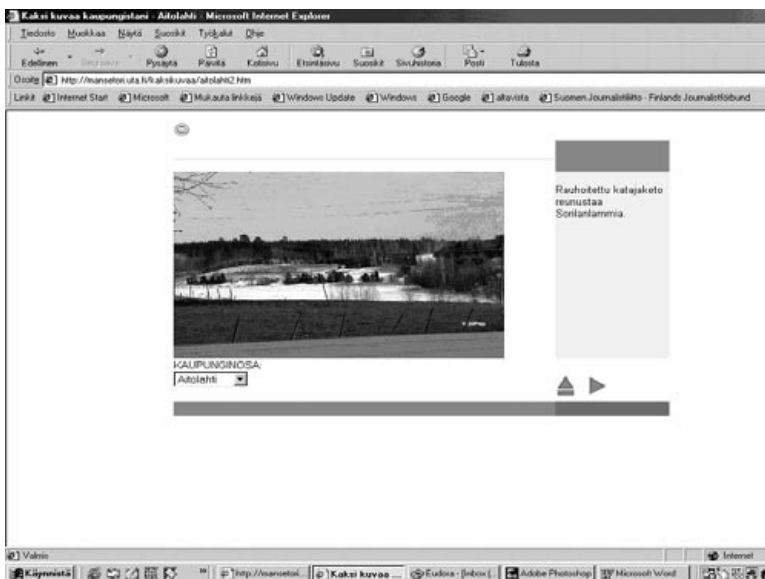


Two Pictures of My Town front page. Enter the neighbourhoods' pages by clicking on a neighbourhood.



Aitolahti pages. Move from the first picture to the second by clicking on the “play” symbol. By clicking on the “eject” symbol you get back to the start page of Two Pictures of My Town.





184 Producing pictures in the neighbourhoods

In early February 2002 I sent an e-mail to the contact persons of the neighbourhood communities asking them to produce a pair of photos with captions with the local residents. I explained that the project would give an opportunity to present the neighbourhood to an international congress audience. I emphasised this since I thought it might inspire people to take pictures. At least this was something new compared to earlier Manse Square projects.

The neighbourhoods had different ways of doing things, but almost all photos were delivered by mid-May. Sometimes I had to push the contact persons a little to send photos, but they were mostly delivered in schedule. Some neighbourhoods opted out of the project, and after a couple of attempts I stopped trying to get them to participate. The neighbourhoods were, in other words, not pressured to take photos. The photo pairs produced by the neighbourhoods are black and white. The texts are next to the photos on the web.

Aitolahti. The photos are taken by an active resident.



A district between Teisko and Tampere.



Conserved juniper field around the pond Sorilanlammi.

Hervanta. I contacted the headmaster of Hervanta Upper Secondary School to ask him if the school wanted to take part in the project. Then I met the arts teacher who told me that they had a course that would be perfectly suitable for the *Two Pictures of My Town* project. There were two groups of pupils, altogether 66. Eventually it was decided that the pupils would vote for the best pair of photos. The pupils took twenty pairs of pictures with disposable cameras and voted for winner.

The teacher describes the situation as follows:

I started by explaining the purpose of the photos. The photos had to be taken by a young person who lives or goes to school in Hervanta. According to my estimate, about half of the pupils do not live in Hervanta. [...] The atmosphere was excited which I think can be seen in the photos.



Summer is approaching – nature awakes.



We can live our lives together with nature and enjoy its peacefulness.

Järvensivu. The contact person of Järvensivu was responsible for the photos of Järvensivu and took the pictures. The project had been discussed in a meeting of the local association of house owners where the idea of representing historical change in the neighbourhood had gained support. The contact person decided which photos were going to be put on the Internet.



Järvensivu in the beginning of the 20th century.



Järvensivu in the beginning of the 1970's.

Käpylä. The pictures of Käpylä are taken by two local residents. One of them is a professional photographer. The people who built the neighbourhood website chose the photos one night over a cup of coffee.



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Children in Käpylä.



There are 114 detached houses and 350 inhabitants in Käpylä.

Petsamo. The residents' association in Petsamo opened a photo contest "My Petsamo" in their bulletin. It was an open contest, and the idea was to depict the theme with a pair of photographs and a few words (max. 50 characters). The photos could be old or new, in digital or paper form. The best pair of photos would win a book of Petsamo, and all contestants would get their photos in their own page on the Petsamo web site. The winning photos would also be published on the city website along with the other winning photos from the other neighbourhoods.

In the end, only one family participated in the contest, and they sent several proposals. The proposals were discussed at the association's board meeting. The board did not choose any of the photo pairs but picked two photos that were typical of Petsamo: house roofs in wintertime and an autumn street lined with trees. It was considered important that Petsamo could be recognised in the pictures. The board decided to crop the photos very close.



Winter. Petsamo, a village in the middle of the town.



Autumn. Seasons come and go in our neighbourhood.

Pispala. The photos of Pispala were taken by a graphic-photographer to whom the contact person had delegated the job. The photographer chose the subjects and mailed me the following message:

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It was nice that there was no hurry with the pictures. I took them with a digital camera, however, I can't get any help with the sending settings right now and the computer is also taken. The pictures take up a lot of space but compress them as much as you need to. It's ok to crop the photos, change the texts and do whatever is required. The photos STEPS and RIDGE come in the first place but I send along two pictures of the main road to Pispala (MAIN ROAD and MAIN ROAD2) that tell about constant construction work in the area. My suggestions for captions: STEPS: Pispala Steps. RIDGE: Closer to the sky - Pyykkimetsä park and lake Pyhäjärvi.



Pispala Steps.



Closer to the sky – Pyykkimetsä park and lake Pyhäjärvi.

Teisko. An active local resident, who is also a photograph enthusiast, was responsible for collecting the pictures of Teisko. The most difficult thing in finding photos was that no one in Teisko showed any interest in the project.

I interviewed the local resident on how the pictures were chosen. The interviewee names some features and difficulties that are connected with producing photos in general:

Well, it was... I must say that there weren't many photos to choose from, because I couldn't find the kind of pictures I wanted. No one seemed to be interested in the project. I mean... well I asked women in hydrobics, what sort of picture they, as women, thought would describe Teisko in the best way. Aunessilta bridge came up as a typical thing for Teisko... even the t-shirts of the church choir have a picture of Aunessilta bridge. It's also used as a logo almost every time when people want to show something typical of Teisko. And yeah, the bridge is beautiful and situated in a beautiful place, of course it's essential to show the bridge.

Then somebody suggested that we choose some beautiful photo of a lake shore. Iso-Kovero would be a good one, since it had been in a tv-series and in some film on TV2 (a state-owned tv-channel). Then someone suggested this scenery where you could see this field and the lake.

Then I realised that nobody had any suitable photos, or maybe somebody had but nobody told me about them. My own pictures were slides, at least all the good ones. And then I saw a picture of Aunessilta bridge in the pages of Kämenniemi House Owners' Association, the same picture was also in Manse Square pages. The picture was taken by this Pyry Leppänen, a nice young man who is interested in photographing. I came up with the idea to use that picture, which would be really nice because it was taken by a young man living in Teisko. I mean that's why. And it's a nice picture.

The story about choosing the second picture:

The other picture then. Well, I had some pictures myself. If I you think about the process, first I tried to get an idea of what the Village Association wanted, but nobody told me anything, really. I had to figure it out by myself and I thought if we have to put Aitolahti and Teisko together in the same area, whether... now that Aitolahti has a new church and Teisko has an old wooden church. The cantor, of course, suggested the wooden church as well as the area of the Teiskola

manor house [...] But when we got to the point where we could choose the both pictures of Teisko, it just struck me that it could be a milk platform, since we had talked about the Association of Milk Platforms at some stage. Those milk platforms have been coming up quite often lately.

And then, uh, I asked the chairman of the association for a picture of a milk platform. It was uh... Well, I got three pictures of milk platforms and chose this one. None of the pictures are technically very good.

Teisko ended up being represented by photos that had become neighbourhood icons. Since the local people did not produce many photo suggestions, it was natural to choose a pair of pictures that was public enough to be easily accepted by the residents to represent the local neighbourhood. This social aspect of choosing a representative pair of photos has naturally played a role in other neighbourhoods as well. In Teisko there were not many alternatives because the project schedule was relatively busy.

The difference between public and private use of pictures is also to be seen in the choice of pictures. An interviewee describes the difference as follows:

Well, the thing was that I had my own opinion on this and then there is another one that I think is the public opinion. I've taken account of the public opinion that is certainly accepted by all the local people I think. If I had done it all by myself, I guess I could've chosen something completely different.

What would you have chosen if you had done it all by yourself?

A curly-grained aspen, for example. The one in the Manse Square pages that I took a photo of in Teisko. I haven't seen one like that anywhere else.



Platform for milk churns – a part of Finnish countryside culture.



'Connecting people' since 1899. Aunessilta bridge in Paarlahti.

Viinikka. The photos of Viinikka-Nekala area were produced on the basis of the idea "Viinikka-Nekala as seen by children and elderly people". The neighbourhood web team discussed taking the photos. They talked about the idea to the children in the local day-care centre and the elderly living in the Viinikka home for elderly people. The children and the elderly were asked to tell

what they would show to a visitor. They were also asked to come up with a caption. A photographer who had been active in the neighbourhood activity took the pictures taking these ideas as a starting point.



"Viinikka church is unique - as the whole neighbourhood we live in", says Sirkka 75 years.

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"It is fun to live here. I can play everywhere and my pals are always around", says Sampsa (6 years).

The pictures of the neighbourhoods were chosen through very different processes. However, the choices of pictures had collectivity in common, in two different senses. Firstly, the photos were chosen genuinely together with the community, as in the case of Hervanta. Secondly, even if only one person chose the photos, this person had to keep in mind that the photos must represent the whole neighbourhood.

Pictures for congress audience and online

An international education congress IAEC 2002 was organised in Tampere in June. Some of the participants were given a mobile terminal at their disposal. The mobile terminal held an application called NaviTam where the users could search information e.g. on the schedule of the congress, the services provided by the City of Tampere, and tourist attractions. The project was coordinated by Media Tampere Oy. The user interface was Avack Mobile info channel application, one channel of which was Two Pictures of My Town – with English captions. The pictures were not transferred to the mobile terminal on-line, but they were already put into the application that ran in the Communicator. In this sense, the photos were not 'real' mobile images but images in a mobile terminal.

The mobile picture itself has raised expectations because of its genuine commercial potential that increases as the camera cell phones become more common. It is crucial here how the mobile picture takes its place in people's consumer behavior and way of life. Some user surveys have been conducted. One of them is the so called Maypole project where children in Espoo, Finland, and in Vienna were given equipment that they could send mobile picture with. The field surveys of digital image were carried out as early as in early 1990's in Finland and Austria. Compared to the modern camera cell phones the equipment was clumsy but it could still fit in a rucksack. The equipment included a camera, a terminal, and a micro computer. The pictures could be edited and stories could

be made of them. The idea was to study changes in the pictures, motives for using the equipment, situations where pictures were taken, and picture sending.

Ilpo Koskinen (et al. 2001, 27) summarises Maypole's central results:

- Pictures were mainly used for joking, showing emotions and making art. The last-mentioned means that pictures were improved and used for constructing visual stories.
- The role of the pictures changed from being memory support to expressing simultaneous action and emotion.
- Users liked editing their pictures.
- Pictures were used for communication very little, since it is difficult to communicate accurately with pictures only.
- Especially adult users avoided taking pictures because it took time to take and edit the photos.
- As a consequence of the above-mentioned the equipment should include an opportunity to write text or transfer speech.

Maypole has been in the background of a more recent project that was, in addition to Koskinen himself, accounted for by Esko Kurvinen and Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen. The use of mobile pictures was being planned in four groups in the project. Each group was given a digital camera and a mobile terminal for sending pictures. The camera and the terminal were communicating via an infrared connection. The research was carried out in Finland in the years 1999–2000 (see Koskinen et al. 2001).

Two Pictures of My Town differs from both Maypole and the project of Koskinen and co in that the providers of the pictures could not make use of a mobile terminal. Moreover, it is not a question of traditional, direct interaction between individuals or teams. The core theme of the Two Pictures of My Town is to construct a presentation of one's own neighbourhood for a rela-

tively anonymous viewer. Also, the NaviTam-pilot was directed to a very restricted public, and when it comes to the pictures, it was not interactive at all. In this sense the user research done on mobile pictures is not suitable for comparison with the Two Pictures of My Town project.

Technically the Two Pictures of My Town project was above all a question of how to construct a relatively light site on the Internet and how to adjust the contents to the application constructed by Media Tampere. It was clear from the beginning that the format of the two pictures should be more or less similarly implementable both on the Net and on the screen of a Nokia Communicator.

The problems that were faced over the project were those very common for constructing a web-application. How heavy can the application be? Will it be necessary for it to function satisfactorily with both a wired modem connection and in a broadband network? Should the user be offered a possibility to have control of switching between the pictures or should the change of pictures be automatic with a given frequency?

At the beginning we considered constructing a solution in which the pictures would slowly turn into each other. This would have created an interesting effect on the pairs of pictures. For the sake of the pictures' reciprocal dynamics it is not mundane if the picture turns into the other one suddenly or if the picture slowly grows on the first picture while that one fades away. The latter alternative would have increased the connection between the images and brought more narrative continuity to them. However, such an application would have been too heavy to function properly with the modem connection, so it was given up. Many visitors on the Manse Square website would not be patient enough to wait for the loading of the pictures. The application would probably have faced problems on the screen of a Communicator as well.

Finally we decided to try and achieve extreme simplicity and lightness in the application. The idea was that such an applica-

tion would be easy to transfer to the Communicator too. In other words we played it safe.

Before the pictures were set up on the web, an application equipped with test pictures was available for commentary on the Manse Square site. What's more, this made it possible for the providers of the pictures to truly see the format the pictures would appear in on the web. Based on the feedback that was received, some adjustment was done on the format but no radical changes were carried through.

While the application was constructed on the web, pictures of neighbourhoods slowly started coming our way. The original pictures were either in jpeg format or normal photographs, which of course had to be scanned. The size, level and quality of the pictures varied but were, however, sufficient for the web as well as the Communicator.

The size of the web pictures is 400x250 pixels, which is less than in ordinary photographs. The reason behind the selection of this picture size was that a caption was supposed to be placed in its own block next to the pictures. Moreover, the utilised size appeared to be harmonic on a regular 17" screen and it fit well with the graphic entity. Due to the flatness of the web pictures the original pictures had to be cropped some, either on the top or the bottom. The neighbourhood communities were informed about this and they were asked to take it into consideration while selecting the pictures.

The pictures were being processed as little as possible, predominantly only the colour balance was harmonised and the brightness and contrast of some pictures was slightly adjusted. At this stage all of the eight neighbourhoods' pictures were of the same size and format (psd).

Versions for the Internet and Communicator application were produced then from these pictures. The size of the web pictures

remained the same but the format was changed to jpg. The file size of the pictures was 20–42 kilobytes. There were altogether 24 pictures since a combination picture was made for each neighbourhood to function as a “start-up picture”. The combination pictures were designed from each of the neighbourhoods’ picture pairs to which a picture of a black-and-white negative was added as a graphic element.

The psd-originals of the pictures for the Communicator were reduced to the picture ratio of 320x200 pixels. The space reserved for a picture in the Communicator was 460x200 pixels, so there was still enough space left for the caption sideways. Also, Communicator versions of the neighbourhoods’ start-up pictures, that were as broad but flatter, were made. The pictures for the Communicator were saved as jpgs with the file size of 22–51 kilobytes.

200 The dissimilarity of the Communicators lcd-screen and the computer screen caused a slight problem. In order to effectuate an optimal result, the tonal scales of the pictures should have been adjusted for each screen type separately, which, however, was not possible due to a tight schedule. The pictures in the web version were easily correctable but the adjustment of the pictures in the Communicator would have demanded several stages. In principle, the Communicator would have required versions in which saturation and contrast would have been considerably greater than in the web pictures. On the computer screen the pictures look fine while on the Communicator the similarly toned pictures flag a bit. The amount of colours on the screen of a Communicator is only a fraction of that on the computer screen.

In all it can be stated that the provision of identical content for both the web and the Communicator went with a swing. Partly, of course, this was due to the lightness of and the minimalist approach to the application. The problems were mainly related with colour space management of the screens.

Technology and contents

Technically the Two Pictures of My Town project was above all about how to construct a website on the Internet and at the same time make the contents work nearly the same way in an application for a mobile terminal. This was a success even though the management of the technical qualities of the two platforms raised many questions. How heavy can the Two Pictures of My Town application be? Does it have to work both with a traditional wired modem connection and in a broadband network? Should the user be given a chance to control the changing of the pictures (by clicking) or should the pictures change automatically with a given frequency? The problems were solved by optimising the picture-file sizes and by making the graphic solutions as light as possible.

Content-wise the objective was to offer the residents a new forum where to introduce their home neighbourhood. Although good few people participated in the project, even excitedly, it can be stated, that the format itself did not offer many new possibilities. People had already taken use of pictures in several ways on the neighbourhoods' website and Two Pictures of My Town did not bring much added value. This might also have welled from the starting point of the project, when people were offered a complete format instead of letting them spontaneously provide it for themselves, for their own needs.

The awareness of the fact that the pictures were going to be viewed by foreign congress participants affected the contents. The study of literature uses the term implied reader, meaning the inbuilt assumptions of the potential reader of a written text. For instance, when a novel is characterised as a juvenile book, the assumed reader of the text is a young person. (See Tammi 1992, 116; cf. Ridell 1994, 120) Applying this, one could use the term implied viewer when it comes to the Two Pictures of My Town project, in which the contents of the pictures have been selected with a certain kind of a viewer in mind. Such a viewer could be characterised as a tourist, who comes from outside the community and is

being presented the best parts of the locality. Thus, the pictures of the project become well-known sights like the stairs of Pispala or the Aunessilta-bridge. Exception to this is the picture pair of Järvensivu that can be interpreted as a commentary to the change of building style from the shift of the century to the present day.

The neighbourhoods are constructing their identity by making illustrated presentations online. Identity is by definition a tendency towards sameness, unity. In the Two Pictures of My Town project this is shown in the insistence on general approval for the pictures. A majority of the residents must be willing to subscribe to the pictures as a presentation of their neighbourhood. Thus personal pictures and depictions of private spaces are being eliminated as well as pictures that depict an open conflict.



Päivikki Kulju

COMMENT

Only a few knew about the project

The text describes the activity truthfully. I chose the pictures myself based on my assumptions on what the general opinion might be. Even though I asked around for pictures from the people of my neighbourhood, none were found and not many suggestions either. I wrote one of the captions for Aunessilta, the other one was written by an active in the Association of Milk Platforms (Maitolaituriyhdistys). Had there been more time and had I had my current job as a reporter in the Teisko-Aitolahti newspaper, I would have been able to make my requests more widely spread. At present I have a much more ample contact network than I had at the time of the activity.

To me it meant an interesting project I was happy to take part in. I don't know what it meant to the community. Most likely only a few knew about it.

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Catalysing citizen activism in Manse Forum

Democratic practices are going through a period of change. Previously, the fulfilment of voters' wishes through voting and political representation was considered the ideal for democracy. Since the early 1990s, calls for open, rational civic discussion as prerequisites for the legitimacy and validity of democracy have increased. A political decision must therefore be only deemed acceptable when it can be convincingly rationalised to the citizens (Dryzek 2000). Lately, academics studying local exercise of power have begun to speak of a shift from centralised governance towards a type of network governance. This shift means that the scope of politics is no longer constituted by the actions of the small political, economic and media elite only, but it is shaped by local interest groups, including citizens and citizen groups (Rhodes 1996; Stoker 1998).

In Tampere, for instance, a new type of urban activism independent of political parties has emerged. Citizen groups have become more emphatic in their demands to hear the justifications behind decisions and to be given the opportunity to participate in the networks in which common issues are being discussed and decisions shaping the future of cities made. (Rättilä 2001.)



On Manse Forum (Mansefoorum), the idea of *network governance* has been approached from the point of view of citizens who wish to deliberate common issues. Our research interest has been primarily in discovering the opportunities available to active citizens to participate in public discussion on local affairs and decision-making, particularly online. In the course of the study methods to improve these opportunities have been developed. On Manse Forum the focus has been in topics covering the entire city, thus, being shared by all residents. This means that discussion has directed to issues that easily arouse strong political passions and subject political power structures to critical debate. This has obviously made the the discussion more difficult from the outset.

Manse Forum was launched with the *Locality in the Global Net* research project during which the web site was created (Ridell 2001). The project aimed at establishing network connections to emerging active local citizen groups such as the Mältinranta movement. The Internet was used as a citizen-oriented space for public debate by making material produced by active members of the community available online and inviting representatives of local government to join the debate.

The Locality in the Global Net project generated a number of important ideas which were subjected to an operative study in the follow-up project *Evolution of eCommunities*. The goals of Manse Forum in the follow-up project were as follows: (1) developing citizen-oriented applications and genres of presenting based on the strengths of the Internet, (2) generating dialogic public debate and (3) establishing citizen-oriented practices for local politics.

Supporting citizen activism

In terms of contents the Manse Forum web site is divided into four categories: articles, discussion board, civic organisation pages and Let's Participate! section. Of these, the articles and the discussion board give the users the opportunity to introduce to public debate

issues of importance to them or their group, while the civic organisation pages and the Let's Participate! section have been designed with the development of new forms of civic activism and participation services made possible by the online media. The development of the web site is based on the idea of publics, that is, social formations of citizen groups which actively and publicly participate in the making of decisions concerning them. The challenges posed by this starting point have been quite different from those facing the designer of a web site designated to serve purely as information or entertainment. An essential characteristic of Manse Forum is that the participation and dialogue encouraged by the site are not primarily directed at the site itself but instead, aim towards an interactive relationship with the surrounding society. (Ridell 2001, 58–63.)

The articles found on Manse Forum are written by individual citizens or citizen groups. Many of them deal with local city planning disputes, but pages for more general issues, such as consumption and democracy have been created as well. The Manse Forum discussion board is divided into corresponding categories, as it is hoped that the articles will serve as a basis for discussion. Since the latest system and interface overhaul, the discussion board and the articles are now even more tightly tied together, as the discussion thread on any given topic will now show on the related article page as well.

The civic organisation pages are meant to offer citizens further information on ways of participating and existing civic organisations a public space for presenting their activities. The pages have been designed in cooperation with a wide variety of local civic organisations, associations and citizen groups. Approximately 60 local civic organisations and groups have posted presentations of themselves on the site. Besides presentations, the pages contain the Organisation Guide compiling information on the founding, the by-laws and the management of the finances of an association, based on the guidelines set by the National Board of Patents and

Registration of Finland. The Guide also contains practical advice for organisations of how to formulate press releases and articles, how to manage basic meeting techniques, information about local assembly rooms and printing houses etc.

The civic organisation pages also host a discussion board and a bulletin board. These, however, have been used to a lesser extent than expected. Even as they are now, the civic organisation pages on Manse Forum serve well as a portal to the civic organisation field. In the interface overhaul carried out in autumn 2003, the civic organisation pages were moved to the Let's Participate! section and the whole section of the site was retitled the Participants' Handbook.

The Let's Participate! section contains online services that facilitate local residents' participation and attempts to influence their surroundings. Most important of these are the Participants' Handbook and the initiative system.

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The Participants' Handbook was originally devised after consulting experts from various fields on their views on citizen participation. When updating the Handbook, the principal sources used were the 2002 Government report to Parliament on the development of the possibilities of direct citizen participation and its background report (Ryynänen & Salovaara 2002). The Handbook deals with citizen participation in a very broad manner. It contains detailed information on the means of participation granted by the Local Government Act, the Environmental Protection Act and the law on the assessment of environmental effects. The Handbook also provides tips on how to make a difference through association activity or personal choices as a consumer.

Two initiative filing systems

The most extensive and challenging of the participation services developed in Manse Forum is the initiative filing system. The idea was born during the previous project, when a Manse Forum

related interest group filed a residents' initiative concerning the planning process of a water-front area nearby the city centre (Ranta-Tampella). The progress of the initiative in the local government machinery was being monitored on the pages of Manse Forum. The monitoring was conducted by a group of volunteers who, at regular intervals, contacted the city officials and made a note of the current situation on the Forum web site.

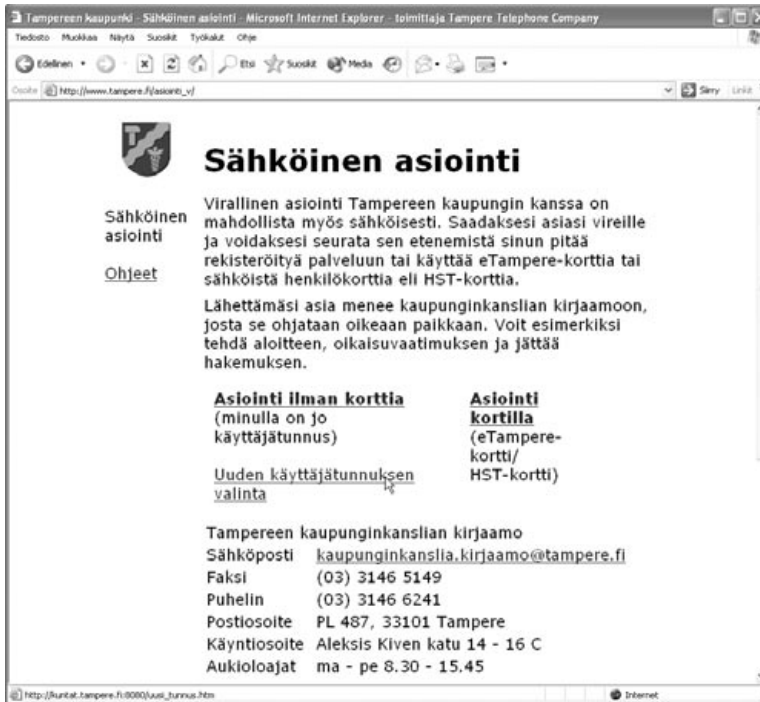
The monitoring of the process proved to be very difficult. This realisation gave rise to the idea of an online initiative filing system which would facilitate the monitoring of the initiative's progress and provide tools for formulating initiatives by means of public online debate. The development of a nascent citizen-oriented web genre into an online service was then begun.

The online initiative filing system was first being constructed on Manse Forum, later also on the web site of the City of Tampere. Even before this, the Local Initiatives page on Manse Forum contained varied information on filing initiatives. In addition to the mostly text-based content, a system was planned which would help refine any ideas local citizens might have into full-fledged civic initiatives and then communicate the initiative to the City of Tampere in electronic form. During the year 2002, a situation emerged in which the local citizens had two initiative filing systems at their disposal: the Manse Forum system without a direct connection to the city web site, and the service maintained by the city of Tampere which required an electronic card and a reasonably expensive card reader. Public libraries had these readers, but very few homes did. In this case, new online services did little to make it easier for citizens to participate; the old paper system now existed alongside a new, even more complicated online version.

The starting points of the Manse Forum project and that of the city of Tampere were somewhat different. On Manse Forum, filing an initiative is understood as participation, and the aim was to make the initiative filing system as citizen-oriented as possible. In the system designed by the city, on the other hand, the emphasis

was on granting the initiatives with official status. This required that the person filing the initiative needs to be identified by name. From the page, a message intended as an initiative will be sent directly to a branch of local government responsible of the matter. Within the government city officials will decide whether the message is to be considered a civic initiative or treated as a matter of a different type. Thus, to be able to use the city's online services, a citizen must have a clear idea of what she or he is about to do. Due to its poor information value, the web site does not help the citizen along in case the problem is of a more undefined nature. This is illustrated by Image 1.

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Front page of the online services section of the City of Tampere web site.

Unlike in the service maintained by the city, in Manse Forum the residents interested in filing an initiative will be provided a

context for their agency. The pages contain instructions on how to file and formulate an initiative and how to send it to the local government. In addition, persons preparing initiatives can post their ideas on the discussion board where it can be discussed and developed until it is ready to be passed along. In the future, the link on the initiative page through which the users can edit their initiatives will be linked to the city of Tampere web site.



Front page of the Manse Forum initiative system.

The advantages of these two rather poorly functioning initiative filing systems, namely the user-friendliness of Manse Forum, facilitating participation, and the efficiency of the online services system on the city web site, can be combined in the future. At the time of writing this, in June 2004, electronic identification on the city web site is no longer required; the user now only needs a password to be able to log on to the system and follow the progress of the initiative. Thus, it seems that in the future, people looking to file civic initiatives will be free to use their preferred channel to formulate their initiatives.

One of the challenging aspects of developing a web site concerned with civic activism is the low number of residents using these services. It appears that the web still does not seem to be a natural medium of participation for middle-aged and older people. Thus, citizen groups tend to act independently through their own channels rather than to use online services designed for participation. It is possible, however, that as it becomes more commonplace to use the Internet, Manse Forum will also gain wider acceptance as a tool for influencing public opinion and searching for information.

Establishing citizen-oriented web genres

One of the key goals of the Evolution of eCommunities project is to support the development of citizen-oriented genres and applications based on the strengths of the Internet. In order to do this, researchers have provided the publishers with technical assistance when necessary and occasionally participated in brainstorming for ideas for stories. As the project has advanced, the researchers have tried to reduce their contribution to the development of the genres, more and more leaving it to citizens themselves. The present study has investigated which of the embryonic web genres developed during the previous project would establish themselves as modes of presentation characteristic of citizen-oriented publicness.

According to Juha Herkman (2001, 108-114), genre defines the production, content, form and distribution channels of mediated presentations. Genre also defines the audience. The recipients of a media product should recognise its genre by its content and form, which would make the presentation easier to interpret. By choosing to use certain distribution channels, the presentation can be aimed at a given audience. Producers and production companies, particularly in the field of popular culture, wield great power when it comes to redefining and revising a genre, however this power is often curtailed by the need to follow the predilections of the audience consuming media products.

The concept of citizen-oriented web genre differs slightly from what is usually understood by genre. A citizen-oriented web genre is citizen-originated in nature: citizens are not an audience for a presentation but public actors who themselves as citizens create public presentations concerning issues of importance to them. These presentations address other people as citizens in particular, as they are designed to encourage others to voice their opinions and to participate in societal decision-making. Inherent in the concept of citizen-oriented web genre is the idea that genres can be created and established by citizens and citizen groups as well as institutions of (mass) media (Ridell 2001, 84.)

In the Locality in the Global Net project seven embryonic citizen-oriented web genres were envisioned. In the Evolution of eCommunities project attempts were made to develop further these genres:

- 1. Questions to decision-makers:** Engaging the silent power-holding parties in public dialogue.
- 2. Monitoring citizens' initiatives:** Monitoring and reporting on the handling of citizen initiatives in the local government.
- 3. Monitoring citizens' participation:** Persons having participated in the planning of a city project posting report on the progress of the planning process on Manse Forum.
- 4. Citizens' evaluations:** Citizens assessing their surroundings and planning processes from their own individual perspective.
- 5. Civic visualisations:** A grassroots view of the city and an alternative way to represent the city challenging the bird's-eye view used in urban planning.
- 6. Citizens' advice:** Providing information on opportunities for citizen participation and agency.
- 7. Arenas for public interaction:** Decision-makers and resi-

dents meet to discuss issues as equal partners. Local decision-makers in Tampere are invited to allow the debate and the citizen participation influence the planning process and the decision-making itself. (Ridell 2001, 80-86; Ridell 2003.)

Citizens ask, question and report

The one web genre that people have most readily adopted is questions to decision-makers. In April and August 2001, the Mältinranta movement conducted and published two surveys aimed to investigate the views of the city technical committee members on the planned bridge over Tammerkoski Rapids. Furthermore, in spring 2004, the Tampere Forum planning group were preparing an online survey on sustainable development among the candidates running for city council. In March 2003, a citizen group calling themselves *Parties Concerned for Local and National Heritage* made a so-called heritage political survey. In the survey, the candidates running for Parliament were asked to give their detailed views on four ongoing building protection disputes in Tampere.

Common to the surveys conducted on Manse Forum is that decision-makers are asked about their views on urban planning disputes. The focus was particularly in the disputes where the citizens means to influence the decisions made in the municipal level have been partially or fully depleted. Asking the decision-makers about their personal views and making these views public, along with the arguments behind them, has made the decision-makers accountable for the decisions and reduced the facelessness often associated with decision-making processes. Groups have introduced to public debate issues which, according to traditional journalistic practice, have already moved into the sphere of the objective, representative decision-making apparatus, and which warrant no more news coverage except for the announcement of the final result. Contrary to this the repeated surveys made by the Mältinranta movement have disclosed the changes in the decision-makers' views and by doing that, created a sort of civic memory bank

on Manse Forum that serves as a basis for continuing with public discussion. The entire history of the case is still available for browsing on the pages of Manse Forum.

In the heritage survey, local issues were elevated to a national level by asking candidates running for the Parliament to comment on them. The group behind the survey justified the questions by stating that, in their view, decisions made in Tampere reflect the general notion of building protection prevailing in the country. The group has also pointed out that the local disputes are often dealt with on a national level due to appeals directed to the courts of justice. Thus, the survey helps revealing the artificiality of the distinction between a municipality and the state as it appears to a citizen looking to effect change.

On Manse Forum, the questions to the decision-makers also began a variation of sorts, as a questionnaire on citizens' readiness to participate in social services, formulated by a student at the Pirkanmaa Polytechnic, was posted on the site. Being published in Manse Forum, the survey has, for its part, challenged citizens to talk about their views on city policies and discuss their roles as citizens. As it happens, most of the respondents have put forward new ideas for forms of participation through which they could be involved in the development of social services.

Unlike in the previous project reports from members of urban planning project cooperation groups have no longer been posted on the site. Instead, several local planning disputes have been monitored by citizens as they have evolved in the local government and courts. The public, chronological and commentarial monitoring has disclosed the planning processes as they appear to interested residents often responsible of appeals to the courts. Their view differs from the coverage of local papers, who often treat appeals to the courts as unnecessary and costly complications to the planning processes.

Monitoring the decisions has also involved a good deal of assessing and evaluating the urban environment as it is now and as it would be once the changes brought about by the decisions have taken place. Citizens' evaluations of their living environment have also been posted on the web site under the section titled: "A resident evaluates". This section was designed to provide the first-hand experience of the residents. The moderators of the section have sought to include articles particularly from planning projects that have proven controversial, such as the dilapidated but historically valuable wooden house complex on Annikinkatu. In spite of the praise heaped on the section, no more articles have been sent in since the research project moved into its second year.

High bar for joining online debate

All the material produced by citizens aimed to stir up online discussion and to prepare citizens for encountering each other and people in power in any public forums as equal partners. At the end of the day, few topics, most of them related to urban planning, have stirred up debate. Even on the discussion boards related to democracy or consumption, the discussion has slipped to urban planning projects even though boards devoted to planning issues exist separately. Again, this reinforces the view that local residents are keen to participate in the planning processes shaping the future of their city and living environment to a greater degree than made possible by the interpretation of the new Land Use and Building Act and the policies of the City of Tampere.

Between autumn 2002 and early 2003, Manse Square experienced some technical problems which dispelled most of the discussers. However, keeping the discussion alive did require great activity of the moderator even before that. For instance, city officials and councillors often participated in the discussion only after having been requested to do so. The scarcity of interest shown by the local government to participate in online discussion is probably due to the fact that as city officials, they feel that they are legally respon-

sible for any statements they give. In the officials' view, including online discussions as part of the drafting and making of decisions is impossible, as online debate has no role in the drafting of decisions as defined by the law. (Harju 2001, 45-58.)

Citizens apparently still find debating on the Internet a technically challenging and strange method of participation, or they do not believe in its potential as a tool of citizen activism (cf. Ridell 2001, 79). On the other hand, the bar for participating in online debate is reasonably high simply because of the topics being discussed such as the local democracy, consumption and social services are highly demanding ones. In this respect, the role offered to the citizen on Manse Forum is that of an educated and rational participant – indeed, the role of the ideal citizen. The willingness to join the debate may have been dampened by the high expectations inherent in the role offered. In the meantime the discussion on some of the boards on Manse Communities related to the need of cash machine or the appropriate location for a washing house have generated much more postings.

On Manse Forum, most discussers have posted using their real names and hardly any censoring has been necessary to keep the discussion in line. If, for example, one is to compare the debate on Manse Forum with that on the popular local discussion board Polemiikki.net [<http://www.polemiikki.net>], one notices that the postings on Polemiikki abound with personal attacks, speculations about the identities behind people's aliases and questioning the motives of other posters. If the Manse Forum board has been dominated by the role of the public spirited and responsible citizen, Polemiikki exists under the sway of what might be called a sceptical troublemaker citizen. Even though it is a valid question whether this role might not also fulfil the criteria of a public, it is hard to believe that the debates on Polemiikki could lead to a constructive dialogue and the discovery of solutions on local problems. The debates on Manse Forum have, at times, actually been more successful in this, despite the lower number of postings.

To some extent most of the embryonic citizen-oriented web genres have become established on Manse Forum. The genres of monitoring citizens' initiatives and visualisations have been the only ones to wither away without the active participation of researchers. Only one visualisation has been produced during the Evolution of eCommunities project. This visualisation, an addition to the series of visualisations portraying various models of the bridge planned across the rapids, has remained the last of its kind. The postponing of the bridge decision has slowed down the citizen activism surrounding the bridge dispute, which has also been apparent on Manse Forum.

Common to all the material published by the Net Team and other actors has been the chosen point of view, that of a local resident/citizen, although some of the texts were written from a local resident/client's perspective. The texts often convey a sense of personal experience and preferences which are naturally tied in with the discussion at hand. Knowledge borne of experience is rightfully brought forward as an important information reservoir. Worth noting is that when the author is a university student or a person with journalistic experience, the texts very rarely contain personal opinions.

The web genre of questions to decision-makers encapsulate the above-mentioned characteristics. These questions expose the very core of political decision-making by making the personal and detailed views of every decision-maker public knowledge in an easily comparable form. The phrasing of the questions does not aim to remain neutral; often the questioner's attitude is clear from the outset. As certain cases are followed through surveys over a long period, the shifts in the opinions of the people in power and the justifications offered for them become easy to discern. The popularity of the surveys demonstrate that citizens find municipal decision-making in particular a closed and secretive process and almost impossible to influence through traditional means of local democracy, in other words, voting and appeals.

Based on the experiences of the research project, it is fair to say that a need for citizen-oriented publicness and new modes of presenting clearly exists, while the partial unfamiliarity of the Internet and the demands posed by the role of citizen mean that the expansion of citizen-oriented web-mediated publicness still faces great challenges.

Bridging offline and online debates

In Manse Forum new discussers were encouraged to join the debate by organising traditional public meetings and mediating them through the Internet and when possible through radio and newspapers. The idea has been not only to take advantage of these different public spaces, but also to give depth to the debate by dealing one topic from various perspectives over the course of several months. Two series of debates were organised on Manse Forum, one of which dealt with the possibilities for citizen participation available to the local residents and the other with the nature of globalisation¹.

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The first debate series called *City Maintained through Cooperation* was organised by the planning group including researchers of Manse Forum, members of the Tampere Forum and Manse Media staff. This debate series held three goals. Firstly, the aim was to test forms of public debate in which the participants themselves were able to express their views in the same space with others. Secondly, the aim was to combine various media in order to draw wider public attention to the discussion. Thirdly, debate series was utilised as a common project to enhance cooperation within the Manse Square web site. Furthermore, the scarcity of online debate gave rise to the idea of collecting data on what type of possibilities for participation local residents in Tampere feel they lack.

¹ Prior to the debate series, several isolated debate sessions, so called “meetings”, were held. In these sessions, the various parties to a certain issue were invited to sit down at one table and discuss with each other. Memos of these meetings were posted on Manse Forum.

In the debate series the planning group was responsible of selecting the topics for discussion. The group also runned the debates and assessed the success of each event together with the researchers. By trying out various forms of workshopping and public discussion, the group attempted to create a public assembly model which most efficiently encourages open discussion.



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Workshopping was one of the means used to collect ideas on new forms of participation during the City Maintained by Cooperation debate series.

The topics of the debates ranged from presenting various models of resident participation to certain problems of participation such as the lack of public assembly rooms and the planning of the Mältinranta area. Speakers were mostly experts in resident participation, active local citizens, as well as city officials. In the workshops, the audience and the speakers were asked to devise new forms of citizen and resident participation, think of possible meeting places, discuss and invent solutions to the problems of resident activity, and describe the characteristics of a good citizen and a good local government official.

In the second debate series, the scope of topics was extended from

purely local themes to include the links between the local and global. The planning of *the World and Tampere* debate series began in spring 2002. On this project, the initial organisers were joined by several environmental organisations and the Adult Education Centre of Tampere.

The motivation shared by all of the organisers stemmed for the common experience that globalisation is often represented as complex and large bundles of problems which are very hard to come to grips with. Therefore, the aim of the debate series was to illustrate the complicated questions related to globalisation with local examples, and to demonstrate that globalisation as phenomenon brings people together rather than dividing them. Besides attempting to get a grip of the phenomenon itself another question discussed was how manifestations of globalisation may be influenced at the local level.

Two principal questions were chosen for the debate series: What is globalisation about and how is it manifested in the lives of local residents in Tampere? These questions were then evaluated from various aspects, including publicness, market economy, security and freedom, and culture. All of these aspects were linked to locality.

The debate series were linked to web-mediated publicness in three ways: (1) a discussion board was set up on the web site in conjunction with both debate series, (2) accounts of the meetings were brought to online publicness on Manse Forum and (3) a separate article section was created on Manse Media specifically for the second debate series.

During the World and Tampere debate series, hardly any debate took place on the online discussion board. Therefore, a more determined effort was made in conjunction with the City Maintained through Cooperation debate series to arouse debate. To create a basis for discussion, a Manse Forum coordinator requested a number of city officials and representatives of organisations to comment

on questions posted on the discussion board. The requests met with variable success. Some of the comments received were very long and detailed response, which is more likely to thwart debate than to enliven it (cf. Dahlberg 2001). Consequently, 14 messages were posted in reference to the debate series.

Extensive, illustrated web memos on the meetings of both debate series were published on Manse Forum, providing such a detailed account of the meetings that people who did not attend the debates could also gain a well-rounded idea of the proceedings. The memos also served as a database for the follow-up debates.

To coincide with the City Maintained through Cooperation debate series, a separate section was created on Manse Media to provide background information on the topic and to feature interviews with future speakers, as well as citizens attending to the debates. The individual debates were taped and edited into radio programmes which were downloadable from the web site and broadcast on Radio Moreeni, the university radio station, one week after each meeting. During the entire debate series, Manse Media disseminated background information and reports on the debates.

The specific idea was to organise a series of debates, so that ideas brought up in the meetings could be developed further and compared to each other as the process advanced. The results of the debates can be summarised into four propositions:

1. Neighbourhood committees. Committees would be elected at neighbourhood meetings or by vote, and they would be allocated funds and given power in decisions concerning the neighbourhood.

2. Neighbourhood houses and a citizens' hall. Neighbourhood houses to serve as meeting places and activity centres should be founded. Rooms available for evening use, a centralised space reservation system run by the city, active promotion of the rooms and a multicultural user makeup were specifically

hoped for. Besides neighbourhood houses, a larger citizens' hall in the city centre with a higher standard of rooms and equipment should be opened.

3. Neighbourhood tutors. A responsible tutor should exist in all neighbourhoods, acting as the representative of the neighbourhood and a mediator between the residents and the city administration. The tutor should be someone residents could turn to with problems or ideas. The city should also appoint official tutors, knowledgeable about the affairs of the neighbourhood beyond the scope of a single sector of local government. These officials would act as advisors and tutors and be readily available to all the actors in the neighbourhood.

4. Improved flow of information. Citizens hoped to be informed of plans well in advance, so that the plans could be commented on while still at preliminary stages. The residents hoped to see information booths or an information market, spaces which would gather information on everything concerning the residents, including procedures for dealing with the city offices. It was also suggested that neighbourhood-specific key participant groups be assembled which could then be specifically targeted when disseminating information. City officials should more often descend from their offices to meet and exchange information with the citizens. Citizens also wanted to see neighbourhood-specific surveys on the residents' needs, as well as a system of feedback to find out how civic opinion has influenced administrative decisions.

In the last meeting of the City Maintained through Cooperation debate series, representatives of the five parties with the largest representation in the city council commented on the propositions. The idea of neighbourhood committees received a reserved response from political parties as well as residents attending the meeting, while the suggestion of establishing a citizens' hall or neighbourhood houses was supported by residents and the largest political parties.

The third proposition, neighbourhood tutors, did not receive widespread support from the party group representatives. The representatives noted that, should problems arise, citizens should contact them directly, and saw themselves as advocates acting on behalf of citizens in the local government. One of the party group representatives thought, however, that it would be preferable if official tutors attended to smaller matters with the citizens. According to said representative, politicians mostly only deal with large policy issues and are therefore unable to help residents with smaller matters such as issues concerning a particular neighbourhood.

Even if the atmosphere in City Maintained through Cooperation debate series was dialogic, pluralist and egalitarian, the attempts to extend the civic discussion to other spaces of publicness were not as successful as expected. Advance articles and reports on the debates were occasionally published in local newspapers, but the World and Tampere debate series received little publicity beyond the globalisation pages on Manse Forum. Online discussion remained also slower than expected.

Establishing citizen-oriented practices

Civic oriented practices are always put together by one or more people. They do not become established without a background effort. In order to make the establishment of citizen oriented genres and practices a common project with residents Manse Forum researchers have had dealings with several citizen groups. As examples of the many, we have chosen to introduce the *Net Team* and the *Tampere Forum* planning group. We shall also be discussing the role of the researchers.

Net Teams

The Net Team is made up of local residents who have wanted to participate in shaping the development of local affairs and bring questions or views to the local public agenda. The writers have

been given considerably free reign when developing the content of the pages. The writers/moderators of the Net Team have managed their assigned topics to the best of their abilities, and the team has not wished to question anyone's contribution or independence.

Voluntary writers and moderators have been recruited on the pages of Manse Forum, at various presentations and on mailing lists. Journalism students at the university have also been offered the opportunity to complete some of their free choice modules by writing articles for Manse Forum. Despite these efforts the activity has been impeded by the small number of active citizens and the high turnover of staff. This problem owes to resources of time, access to the Internet tools, and rather high requirements of technical as well as communicative skills.

The Net Team has mostly comprised students who have eventually graduated, found a job and given up the activity. Besides students, pensioners and unemployed persons have been some of the most active participants. In other words, active participants are often people with spare time. People with families or jobs rarely have the time or the inclination to participate in citizen activism on the Internet; that is, unless there is something in their lives or adopted values to provide them with the motivation.

A practical problem for Manse Forum has been the Net Team's access to updating tools. The technical difficulties have arisen mostly from the prices of software and hardware, as well as the lack of skills to use them. Even if people have found contributing to Manse Square important, they may not have been prepared to spend the money on expensive software packages and the Internet access necessary for creating and updating web pages. Many unemployed persons, students and pensioners have not even been able to afford a computer, let alone open up an Internet account. Of course, Manse Square has provided the opportunity to use the facilities at the project room to work on the web site. Having to buy expensive software will also no longer be an issue thanks to the web browser based publishing system used by Manse Square.



Manse Forum writers have been able to use the computers at Manse Square project room to work on the web site.

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Contributing to Manse Forum by writing articles and updating the pages has been relatively demanding on local residents. The contributors have had to have an interest in current local affairs and a fair amount of experience of the Internet and computers. Despite the fact that those with no prior experience have learnt to make web pages on courses held by Manse Square getting familiar with and adopting the technology has been considerably slower in cases when the person has not really used a computer before.

Besides technical skills, writing articles has required interactive skills for instance in interview situations. For instance, the surveys with decision-makers published on Manse Forum have required the courage to approach officials and politicians. Also, the jargon often used by officials is one of the pitfalls of participation preventing citizens and officials from seeing eye to eye.

These manifold demands posed on Manse Forum contributors may have seemed too heavy to some citizens and dampened their enthusiasm for participation. Recurring disappointments experienced in one's personal dealings with the local government may

have added to their motivation to participate, but it may also have prompted to reduce their willingness to act publicly.

Despite problems the moderators on Manse Forum have, for their part, contributed to the public debate by bringing up new topics and redefining old ones. The Net Team has worked particularly for gathering and recording civic memory about controversial local topics.² For the most part, the whole idea underpinning Manse Forum, to create citizen-oriented web-mediated publicness, has been shouldered by the members of the Net Team. As the project has advanced, the role of the project staff has diminished as more and more responsibility has been handed over to the residents themselves.

Tampere Forum

Tampere Forum is a loose organisation attempting to provide spaces of public debate in order to facilitate the constructive exchange between the decision-makers and the residents. The first event arranged by the Tampere Forum was held in 1996, and ever since, a number of seminars and discussion panels have been organised every year. The Tampere Forum planning group consists primarily of active individuals, but also includes representatives of the city administration and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tampere. These cooperation partners have also provided financial support towards running costs such as newspaper advertisements and assembly room rent.

While the goals of Tampere Forum largely converge with those of the Manse Forum research project, one researcher has participated in Tampere Forum, initially as a member of the group. Later she has also chaired the group meetings. During the project, the Tampere Forum planning group collaborated with the project researchers to organise the City Maintained through Cooperation

² Civic memory refers to recording the various stages of events, debates and disputes and making this information available to all.

debate series and, based on an earlier debate, to conduct a survey with the councillors on the participation opportunities available to local residents.

The group has focused on organising the meetings, but it has not shown particular interest in mediating debates online. Some of its members have not even fully familiarised themselves with the Manse Forum web site. Therefore, the relationship between the planning group and the research project has been based on the rigid division of work rather than seamless cooperation.

The involvement in the City Maintained through Cooperation debate series constituted a new challenge for Tampere Forum group. Before the debate series the group only organised two or three public meetings a year. As a contrast, the debate series meetings took place monthly and before each meeting, the group usually had to meet a couple of times to draw up plans.

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During the years 2001-2003, no more than 7 to 15 people were active in the group. New members were recruited chiefly at public debates and through personal contacts. Some members withdrew from the group in the course of the debate series, mainly for personal reasons. Some members of the group have found the habitual meeting times inconvenient, being as they are during the working hours. Frustration and exhaustion caused by the sometimes low turnouts and heavy meeting schedule also became evident during the preparation for the debate series.

What proved problematic for the research project was that, as the debate series advanced, more and more of the practical arrangements had to be shouldered by the researchers and staff. Furthermore, when the planning group members found themselves disagreeing over the topics or arrangements, the researcher was expected to make the choice. Based on the experiences gained in the course of this collaboration, discussion on the role of academics in creating and maintaining civic debate and participation is called for.

Researchers as activists

Participatory action research is the method of research used in nearly all of the sectors of the Evolution of eCommunities project. On Manse Forum, this has meant challenging the local residents to assume the role of active citizens, as the researcher has collaborated with existing citizen groups, supported to activity of voluntary web journalists and actively recruited new contributors. The researcher has also conceived, planned and organised offline discussion meetings in order to raise the profile of Manse Forum and to attract new users to the web site.

The first year of activity, in particular, was devoted to organising and maintaining the practical forms of activity, as Manse Forum was not yet included in the field of research of the Evolution of eCommunities project. The development of Manse Forum continued, however, on the basis of the experiences and results gained during the earlier research project. The Manse Forum researcher-coordinator aimed to extend the cooperation network to civic organisations in particular, but also to include the local government and the media. He also acted as a publicist and a mediator between the above parties. This work bore results, including a new, still active cooperation organ comprising representatives of the Friends of the Earth, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Adult Education Centre of the City of Tampere. The planning of the initiative system was also done in close cooperation with the city administration.

The coordinator actively participated in the activities of Tampere Forum and the Mältinranta movement by posting on Manse Forum material on the activities of these groups and assisting with the meeting arrangements. The coordinator also acted as one of the Net Team writers and moderators of a topical section. The cooperation between the citizen actors and Manse Forum can be described as very close, which gave the project participants a very clear picture of the realities of grassroots civic activism.

At the beginning of 2002, Manse Forum was made part of the Evolution of eCommunities research project. The researcher-coordinator was coincidentally assigned new tasks. From spring 2002 until the autumn of the same year, there was no researcher in charge of Manse Forum; the web site was maintained part time by a staff coordinator who also coordinated the work of the Net Team, produced material for the web site and updated the pages. A new researcher began work in the autumn but soon the whole Manse Square web site was beset by technical problems preventing the posting of new material on the site. Abrupt changes and interruptions in the activity proved disturbing to the participatory action research project. Considering the processual and cyclical nature of voluntary civic activism, it was to be expected that a part of the users and moderators would grow tired of waiting for Manse Forum to resume activity.

In 2003, the second year of activity, the focus was still on building a dialogue between the parties and extending the cooperation network to civic organisations in particular. A project was embarked on to reorganise the content and discussion on the web site, undergoing a slight process of disintegration at the time, under thematic entities. Of these, the City Maintained through Cooperation debate series was the most extensive and required the greatest effort. For this reason, the role of the researcher within the Tampere Forum planning group inadvertently changed from that of a member into that of a chairperson in the course of the debate series.

This is a good example of how the researchers have to redefine their roles constantly, altering it according to the operational dynamic of the citizen groups. Unlike more traditional research methods, the current method has not granted the researchers full autonomy in their actions, as collaborating with others has required flexibility on the part of the researchers, too.

In the autumn of the same year, yet another researcher in charge, the third in succession, begun work on Manse Forum. Extend-

ing the cooperation network and raising the profile of the web site have remained the central goals of the project. The focus of activity, however, has gradually shifted back online from the organisation of public meetings. This has been a natural development, if only for the reason that the interface of the web site underwent a renovation in autumn 2003 in order to make it more usable and simple along the lines of Manse Media.

Another reason for focussing on the online medium has been to ensure favourable conditions for the future of the web site once the research project has come to an end. At the time of this writing, the results of earlier efforts to extend the cooperation network and to raise the profile of the web site can be seen: preparations with a number of cooperation partners for several projects involving Manse Forum are currently underway.

On the conditions of citizen-oriented publicness on the web

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Manse Forum has aimed to develop the modes of local public debate and dialogue. Basically, the conditions for this seem promising, as citizen participation is generally understood to be a good thing (Harju 2002). As voter turnouts plummet and the ranks of political parties grow geriatric, citizen participation and interaction are considered important to the general acceptability of decision-making.

In practice, however, the interaction is not working smoothly. The surveys conducted in Manse Forum attest to the fact that in practice, citizens often have no idea what the views of local politicians are. Likewise, the views of the citizens do not necessarily reach the politicians. On the other hand, the eagerness to conduct surveys and brainstorming for new ideas may indicate that the citizens lack a public debate forum where they could naturally discuss and voice their opinions on topical issues with each other or together with the decision-makers.

Even though interactiveness comes more naturally on the Net than it does with traditional media or representative government, experiences with Manse Forum show that online activity is largely governed by the same set of conditions as all other social activity is. The level of belief in the potential of online activism is linked to citizens' view of the potential of civic activism in general. If local discussion is surging lively and impressively in public meetings, the press or the city council, it is very likely to be doing so on the Internet as well. If interactiveness is not understood to be an opportunity to support public scrutiny, or if people do not know how to use it, the Internet as a channel of interactive communication is of no use.

The experiences gained from the Evolution of eCommunities research project indicate that the strengthening and expansion of citizen-oriented web-mediated publicness requires multiple measures, summarised below into five theses.

232 **Ground rules must be established for citizens' involvement.** Civic debate and participation taking place on the Internet or elsewhere is hampered by the ambiguous relationship between citizen participation and the practices of representative democracy. Willingness to make use of the Internet as a citizen forum exists amongst both the local residents and the decision-makers, but if the discussion cannot or will not be allowed to influence the decisions, there is no point to it. Of course, no conclusive ground rules resolving the problems of representativeness and participation can be set down, but it is possible and sensible to devise case-specific rules and models of operation so as to make fruitful interplay possible.

The Net must be developed along with other tools. Online debate does not spring up by itself. The conditions of online debate are dependent on the prevailing culture of public discussion. If this culture is characterised by monologue and a proclivity to conflict, one cannot expect more from online debate, even if the medium supports interactiveness. Citizen-oriented web-medi-

ated publicness would support public discussion and other means of participation.

Cooperation is the way forward. Local government, universities and civic organisations form an institutional network, the existence of which is not fully understood. The synergy created by this network should be used to benefit online public discussion and participation better than it is now. The research shows that citizen participation and two-way communication on the Internet do not happen by themselves. To exist, they need sensible channels which have to be actively created (see Hale, Musso & Weare 1999). In this task, local authorities need to find partners, who can approach the issue from the citizens', not the local government's, point of view.

Citizen-oriented web-mediated publicness takes work. The technical difficulties posed by the Internet as a tool of participation mean that a part of the population will inevitably be excluded. For this reason, education, as well as the maintaining and the development of other channels of exchange, must continue. On the other hand, the project has demonstrated that citizen activism in itself needs positive attention and support. As they become established, the citizen-oriented web genres and participation services developed in the project will facilitate citizen participation for their part.

The Internet should make activism easier, not more difficult. The online citizen participation services will not gain in popularity if they are difficult to use. The earlier stages of the online initiative filing systems developed in Tampere provide good examples of this. The civic information society will need practical citizen-oriented projects focussed on usability. Applying technological innovations to make tools for the citizens will remain the challenge of tomorrow.

Public civic debate and deliberation, as well as a local government sensitive to the sentiments of various population segments is cur-

rently searching for a way forward. Naturally, there are also local and cultural conditions to public discussion. In Tampere the public discussions has for years been dominated by a notion that “either you are with us, or you are against us” (see Laine & Peltonen 2003) which led to the stakeholders easily assuming the familiar hostile positions. In the previous project (Locality in the Global Net) attempts were made to challenge this notion. In the Evolution of eCommunities the emphasis was not so much in the challenge, but in constructive dialogue. Together these projects and the activity on Manse Forum have put the local political culture through an acid test. It has consisted of two demanding elements: the role of the citizen, understood to be more active than before, and the aim to use the Internet as a tool of participation.

These elements do not fully agree with the current practices of local government. We often treat somewhat surprisingly political representation and participation through voting (accompanied by the role of an audience as observer maintained by the news media) threatened by participatory agency and citizen oriented publicness. Because of that, it has been difficult to conceive new practices for local politics and engaging to them. The activities in Manse Forum demonstrate that residents are prepared to engage in constructive public discussion when and if they are given the chance to do so.



Saija Tornainen

COMMENT

Technology and time: The greatest challenges

I have been active with Manse Forum since spring 2002. As members of the *Net Team*, my partner and I have updated the pages related to urban planning in the Local Issues section of *Manse Forum*. During these two years, I have experienced many moments of accomplishment as well as disappointment.

In the article the technical problems besetting the web site were named as one of the problems affecting the entire *Manse Square*. My partner and I have found this to be the most serious source of discouragement to our activeness. Sometimes it has been impossible to update the site, the server has often been down for long periods of time. The all too frequent overhauls on the design of the web site have resulted in page moderators having to upload the same updates several times over. This has dampened our enthusiasm to maintain the web site.

The article also names the lack of equipment, as well as the price thereof, as challenges to the activity. My

partner and I are in the fortunate position to have the necessary technological equipment in our possession. As we are both experienced computer and Internet users, mastering the technical aspect of web site moderating has not presented us with major problems. Thinking up ideas for stories, on the other hand, has been quite a challenge, and the support of a larger team would have been welcome here. Working as a pair has been very productive but sometimes good ideas require more than two heads to come about. Granted, the *Net Team* meetings were held for this exact purpose, but because of the small number of participants (2 to 5 people), hardly any ideas for stories presented themselves.

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According to the researchers, one of the aims of *Manse Forum* has been to respect the individual contribution and independence of every page moderator. In our opinion, this has been a commendable aim and one that has been realised, as far as our working pair is concerned at least. To have been able to update the pages in peace and according to our vision has made all the difference to our motivation.

The initial reason why I got involved in *Manse Forum* was my interest in city planning. I have studied the field, so I was convinced I had something to offer *Manse Forum*. I have also participated in other projects aiming to promote citizen participation.

Through *Manse Forum*, I have made new friends and found a meaningful counterbalance to my day job. It has been important to be part of a project in which I believe myself. My computer skills have improved, both on courses offered by *Manse Square* and while actually updating the web site. Particularly challenging to me has been to think up ideas

for stories and design the pages in such a way as to inspire as many of the people browsing the web site as possible to participate in the discussion on city planning.

My personal motivation has been hampered by the changes in the project and the continual turnover in the personnel responsible for the project and its technical management. I would also have liked to see a closer collaboration with the other areas of *Manse Square* take place; the operations of the *Tampere Forum* planning group, for instance, remain unclear to me to this day. Meetings with the entire group might have amended this situation.

Limited time has been the most significant factor obstructing my participation. Updating the pages is surprisingly time-consuming, writing stories likewise. As someone with a full-time job, I find that sometimes there simply is not enough time for everything. In spite of this, I strongly believe that web-mediated citizen participation will increase in the years to come. This is precisely the reason why I want to continue to give my modest contribution to *Manse Forum*.



Raimo Kanerva

Public discussion has progressed

To the practical citizen participant, the article is an interesting and useful review of the *Manse Forum* research projects. Personally, reading the article made me see the idea and sense of these projects considerably clearer than before. Despite the introduction once given to me by the researchers, I did miss having a glossary of terms used in the study and a figure portraying the various sections in relation to each other at the beginning of the article. For example, the concept “citizen-oriented web-mediated genre” makes for a useful tool when discussing the forms of participation. I was left wondering, however, if the term could not be substituted with another one more compatible with everyday language?

These thoughts also reflect the fact that, despite their dedication and activeness, the average Forum members may have been involved in the work quite a while without ever getting the feeling that they are also contributing to a lengthy research project.

Owing to the *Manse Forum* projects and my private research project¹, *Tampere Forum* got stuck on an acade-

mic track, as it were, and gradually became more and more dependent on initiatives coming from the research team. The researchers took turns in convening the *Tampere Forum* planning group, which was often understood as assuming the responsibilities of chairing the meetings, too. As someone who has been involved in the activity for long and could use the time for other things, I personally found that a great relief.

As demonstrated by the research report and verified by other observations, there has been progress in local public discussion. This is indicated by the officially confirmed status of citizen participation in the city's strategy and the creation of the local democracy officer's post. No one can say what might have happened if a different course of action had been chosen.

The *Net Team* remains distant to some of the Forum members; its idea and existence never registered properly. This may be partially due to difficulties grasping the concept and the organisational structure of the research projects, as well as unfamiliarity with the Internet. The problem with updating the pages mentioned in the article remains vague to me, too. Is this something that could have affected the average participant?

Judging by the article, neighbourhood activity seems like a possible target area to be jointly developed by the administration and citizens. The idea of neighbourhood tutors has so far not been enthusiastically received by the people in power; true, its implementation might prove a test to the established power structure in the local government. These people could be encouraged, however. Even though neighbourhood tutors should not be agents of any political party, their existence could also boost citizens' inter-

est in politics and serve as positive feedback to their increasing participatory efforts.

During the past couple of years, the need for and possible forms of neighbourhood activity have been discussed by citizens and decision-makers at least in the *Tampere Forum* model meeting and *Manse Forum* meetings. *Tampere Forum* planning group considers the issue of neighbourhood activity as one of the promising target areas. The growing activeness of the neighbourhood associations – online, as advocated by *Manse Forum*, and otherwise – is a step forward towards a more encompassing form of participation.

I find that *Manse Forum* research projects have provided a sense of continuity at times when it has been necessary to carry on with the debate on major questions testing the limits of citizen participation. This has given a welcome breather to the small group of activists still carrying on with the struggle for the citizens' right to participate.

¹ The idea of initiating research on citizen participation was once discussed amongst the *Tampere Forum* members. As a result of this discussion, Seppo Kjellberg and Raimo Kanerva undertook an independent study on attitudes towards environmental ethics and citizen participation which appear to be linked in a way. They had also been the first to initiate a *Tampere Forum* style public debate on local affairs. Because of their research duties, Kjellberg and Kanerva decided to reduce their involvement in other activities to a certain degree. The study titled as *Luonteva kaupunki arvojen valossa* was published in 2004 by Tampere University Press.

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Heikki Heikkilä, Pauliina Lehtonen

Social navigation: A tool for citizenship

Residents formulating ideas
for participatory online services

The appeal of the new information and communications technology (ICT) is based on a promise of being applicable in almost any context. Productivity in business and efficiency in administration can be increased by applying the internet. It can be utilised in creating completely new markets or novel tools for communication between citizens and political institutions. Furthermore, the ICT promises its users opportunities of enhancing their own cultural identities and lifestyles or logging in completely new kinds of symbolic or virtual communities locally as well as globally.

In similar to other profounding social and political projects it has been emphasized that the introduction of the information society should be a democratic process. At the level of policies nearly all current information society strategies emphasise the importance of providing *everyone* with the tools and skills needed in an information society and the improvement of conditions for democracy is frequently mentioned alongside, for example, the aim of developing competitiveness at markets as an important goal for information society (cf. eEurope 2005). Outside policy texts a considerable amount of optimism in the democratic nature of ICTs is voiced by miscellaneous visionaries, who put their trust in users' capacities to invent new futures in the internet presupposing that the 'over-controlling state' or the 'ever-spreading markets and their own logic



of consumption' will not be allowed to keep internet users from moulding the cyberspace to suit their own purposes (Dyson et al. 1994; Rheingold 1998; Schuler 1996).

It comes as no surprise, however, that thus far the concept of a democratically designed internet has proved to be problematic. Although the scheme of wiring the nations has not remained merely on the level of talk, it has become obvious that servers, online connections, or services and contents are not evenly distributed. What is more, it has been feared that the networking process either strengthens prior inequalities or produces new ones with regard to civic participation opportunities, or according to the worst case scenario, both at the same time (Warschauer 2003). Simultaneously, it has been pointed out that an absolute majority of the websites are of commercial nature, therefore not placing democracy at the top of their agenda (cf. Dahlgren 2001: 74). Finally, even if citizen and community-initiated agency does exist in the Web, it finds itself threatened either by inadequate resources or the fact that the markets want to commercialise springing civic action (cf. Harrison et al 2002; Francissen & Brants 1999).

In Finland, municipalities and the state are central developers of web-mediated services, which fact has guaranteed that at least an attempt at maintaining equality as a democratic value of information society. Practically all Finnish municipalities offer web-mediated information on municipal administration practices, publishing for example their agendas and minutes of meetings in the internet. The majority of municipal websites provide their visitors with the opportunity to give feedback either by e-mail or in web-mediated feedback forms, or via message boards. The biggest cities have also progressed significantly in developing online services as alternative routes for taking care of administrative transactions.

These new services have usually been offered to the citizens as completed products. In other words, the citizens' role in developing web-mediated services is usually limited to evaluating the *usability* of applications that have been designed in collaboration by

institutions and technologists. Citizens have rarely had a chance to give their opinion on how the web-mediated services should be developed outside relatively few projects aimed at creating information society bottom up rather than top down.¹

This article will describe how a team of residents (known as a citizen jury) from a district of city of Tampere collaborated with researchers in exploring possible applications of new information and communications technology. The residents involved in the designing process had previously shown interest in developing the conditions of their residential area. Therefore, the designing process focused on applications that would increase their opportunities as citizens to participate in local public discussion as well as in the process of preparing issues for decision-making. In addition to presenting and explicating the significance of the residents' ideas on developing online services for local government, the present chapter will introduce the feedback received from the public servants responsible for developing web-mediated services to local government (city of Tampere) and of two non-involved experts of the uses of ICT in urban planning.²

The citizen jury in Tesoma

The Journalism Research and Development Centre (JRDC), at the University of Tampere, carried out a participatory action re-

1 As examples of noteworthy citizen-initiated network projects in Finland, the following sites can be mentioned: OSKU - learning regions [in Finnish 'Oppivat seutukunnat'] at <<http://www.oskut.net/suomi.html>>; Vaikuttamo, at <<http://www.hameenlinna.fi/vaikuttamo>>; and Manse Square, the site in focus of the present article, at <<http://mansetori.uta.fi>>.

2 The representatives of the city of Tampere included the head of information department, architect and a Internet designer. As experts on geographic information, the proposals designed by the team of residents were assessed by professor of geography at the university of Oulu and research fellow of urban planning and design at the Tampere University of Technology.

search project in the western Tampere district of Tesoma during years 2002 - 2003. The purpose of the research was to collaborate with a team of local residents in testing local means of participation, utilising new communications technology alongside with traditional media as tools for citizen-initiated political participation. Another case study was conducted in the neighbourhood of Lehtomäki in the town of Kouvola; however, the present article focuses on the Tesoma project only.

Initially a total number of 2650 households in Tesoma were sent a resident survey in autumn 2001, when volunteers were searched for the citizen jury. 290 respondents reacted upon the survey, out of which approximately thirty residents volunteered to join the jury. Consequently, only twelve of them actually showed up two months later when the jury began to assemble.

The citizen jury was assigned to draw up suggestions for developing the area of Tesoma during spring 2002 as a part of a general preliminary planning proposal. The jury continued to meet in autumn 2002, when they assessed the advancement of the plans as well as explicating the means by which the resident-initiated proposals could be put in practice. In the beginning of 2003, the jury began to ponder upon possible means of establishing the practices of local participation in Tesoma. The jury members were actively involved in founding a neighbourhood association in the area in April 2003, and a year later it has about two hundred members.

Since spring 2003 the association has organised various activities in the area; for example, several gatherings allowing public debate on local issues have been organised, and connections have been established between local organisations, apartment owners and tenants. The association has taken responsibility for maintaining the residential district website at the local community portal, Manse Square³, which is administered by the JRDC and funded by the city of Tampere.

3 <http://mansetori.uta.fi>



The members of the citizen jury assess local traffic problems on the spot. Henna Blåfield (third from right) from The District development office writes down jury's observations.

In 2002–2003, during a period of nearly eighteen months, the activities of the citizen jury were based on regular discussion sessions that were held two or three times in a month. The discussion focused on issues that were of significance to the Tesoma area; in the meetings local problems were defined, and possible reasons for these problems were explicated with the goal of producing resident-initiated means of solving them. The suggestions drawn up by the jury were sent to the planning officers and the local government. In order to make their concerns public, the jury publicised its action on their website at Manse Square⁴ and contested for access to local news media and non-technological public spaces such as local fairs and meetings. The terms of access set by different media and their capacities in initiating public dialogue sometimes put the jury between a rock and a hard place, but all attempts to make themselves heard in public were considered important ele-

⁴ The pages are archived at:
<http://mansetori.uta.fi/aiheita-vanha/tesomanraati/>

ments in jury's agency and their learning process as citizens (Heikkilä & Lehtonen 2003).

Before and while speaking in public the jury placed central significance to acquiring information and to assessing it thoroughly. Based on their discussions, participants themselves defined which matters that required a more detailed clarification. New communications technology was applied in gathering the necessary information: The jury had the opportunity to receive detailed graphic information on current statistics and urban planning via *Geographic Information Systems* (GIS). Geographic information data is digitalised information on specified locations or positions which are illustrated on a map (Laurini 2001).

In relation to GIS and citizens the project constituted an exceptional situation since normally citizens do not have access to geographic information data. For laymen, obstacles to the use of such data are numerous. Firstly, they lack of opportunities for obtaining necessary software licences for analysing the acquired information, and they lack of expertise essential to the use of the applications. More obstacles for accessing to GIS are presented by the fact that all relevant information related to local environment and circumstances is not available to be analysed with GIS tools. Also, a set of legal problems remain, whether what sort of information can be made available for the general public.

The jury solved these problems by presenting their requests on geographic information analysis to an employee of the local district development office (cf. Haklay & Tobón 2003: 583–585).⁵ A practical approach was applied in situations where the geographic information data was lacking; information that was not found

⁵ A person employed by the District development office attended the meetings of the team of residents regularly during spring 2002, supplying the residents with information on issues that were brought forward. After receiving ideas from the jury the District development office showed no interest in jury's work or their suggestions.

within the databases was sought for by other means. The legal rights concern was met by applying a policy of strictly withholding from asking or sending any information that would entail a risk at violating individuals' privacy.

As the geographical information programmes are becoming internet-based, there will be fewer hindrances to their use in the future. Both professional designers and programme manufacturers have expressed their will to introduce tools for internet-based urban planning to all internet users (cf. Craig et al 2002). Experts believe that if the websites of institutions responsible for city planning included *Public Participation GIS* (PPGIS) applications, the 'know-how gap' between professional planning experts and residents would diminish, as the citizens would have access to same information with the experts. The democratisation of information through Public Participation GIS would remain politically insignificant, however, if it were not systematically adopted to real planning processes.

Even if the technology in itself cannot make planning processes more democratic, it has turned out that the mere technical basis for creating better conditions for democratic planning is difficult. Designing applications of the Public Participation GIS as well as ensuring their usability of them has proved to be a technically demanding task in the open environment of the internet (cf. Haklay & Tobón 2003). Thus far, as little immediate commercial potential is attached to the services provided free of charge, the Public Participation GIS has mainly been developed in individual research projects conducted particularly in the United States and Great Britain.⁶

⁶ For institutions that carry out the developing of Public Participation GIS: The Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies in the United States <http://www.upa.pdx.edu/IMS/currentprojects/comgeo.html> and the University of Leeds, School of Geography in the Great Britain <http://www.ccg.leeds.ac.uk/democracy>.

Based on their own information queries and inspiration drawn from international examples introduced to the jury, participants took a period of approximately two months to work on their own ideas on civic web-mediated services. Assisted by the researchers, the jury formulated a detailed list of standards, suggesting some changes for improving the citizens' possibilities to acquire information, including clearing hindrances from the way of keeping abreast of governmental processes and decision-making. Moreover, the list included propositions concerning the development of geographic information technology into a tool for *social navigation* and for the production of qualitative information based on residents' expertise.

Facilitating information search

Constitutions place equal weight on expression and information as elements of citizenship and democracy. For instance, the Constitution of Finland declares that '[e]veryone has the freedom of expression. Freedom of expression entails the right to express, disseminate and receive information, opinions and other communications without prior prevention by anyone'⁷. The freedom of speech in a modern representative democracy is mainly applied so that primarily the politicians, officials, experts and celebrities publish their opinions and information. The citizen usually plays the role of the recipient, thus taking on the task – or even duty – of keeping up with what is happening at present. Thus, information is regarded as the most important prerequisite for the rational opinion-formation of a citizen.

Despite the growing concern for the legitimacy of representative democracy the importance of information as a necessary prerequisite for citizenship is maintained by the governments that tend to produce more and more information to citizens through the internet. Thus web users have been given the opportunity to seek

7 <http://www.finlex.fi/pdf/saadkaan/E9990731.PDF>

information independently, even on matters that the local media have ignored. Information in itself has been regarded to extend the transparency of governments, which fact in turn is hoped to invigorate citizens' interest in social and political issues. As the level of interest increases, it can be assumed that interaction between governments and citizens will consequently be multiplied, which may result in flattening hierarchies in political dialogue. Even if, in practice matters take a more complicated route, some claim that the new communications technology would enhance the function of democracy either directly or indirectly (cf. Hacker 2004).

It has been noticed by information providers and users alike that the growing amount of information complicates the process of tracking down a particular fact. On their part, members of the jury in Tesoma report of their personal experiences on making a supposedly relevant query on a search engine and ending up with either a too large number of documents or no "hits" at all. Moreover, the users criticise the local government website for falling short of links to information regarded necessary by the residents, ie, for example to drafts made during political processes and to sketches or images of the urban planning targets.

The city of Tampere has attempted to solve this problem by improving the function of the search engines in its websites and by aligning the instructions of recording information about local governance. However, compiling a unified and unambiguous set of operations models has proved to be difficult owing to the complex structure of the local government and the inconsistency of the terminology and vocabularies used in different parts of the organisation.

While acknowledging problems mentioned above the citizen jury in Tesoma argues that there are more profound problems in information search than merely semantic differences between entries. The jury thinks that the angles applied by bureaucracy and citizens often differ significantly: whereas the administrators perceive matters based on their sectors and division of duties, the residents

seek information that match their lived experience in their own residential area.

Proposal 1: Regional accountability

In order to formulate a more tangible approach to the architecture of online information search the jury coined a notion of *regional accountability*. This would entail the local government creating on its website an unambiguous presentation of how its responsibilities are carried out in the various districts of the city; ie, the tasks performed in each district ought to be clarified for the visitor of the site, as well as listing the persons responsible for these tasks and presenting their contact information.

The idea of regional accountability is at its most tangible as a resident reporting a broken street light or a run-down traffic sign by directly contacting the persons responsible for replacing the lamp or repairing the traffic sign. The jury members think that arranging information according to city districts would decrease the number of unnecessary contacts by the residents, often felt as disturbances by the government officials. Thus, the improvement of regional information query would not only improve residents' information needs but also benefit the efficiency of the government offices as well.

The jury regards a digital mapping system the most appealing choice for information search, as this would allow pointing out the place to which the question or matter is connected. Furthermore, ideally the service would provide all the necessary contact information of units and officials managing local matters. Regional accountability need not to be confined to governmental information and services only. According to the jury, the online map service could also include the contact information of other local establishments and organisations and thus representing not only the public sector, but also the so called third sector.

The jury carry their ideas on regional responsibility even further,

involving elected officials in bearing the responsibility alongside with the lower administrative levels that prepare and execute the decisions. Thus, the jury consciously questioned the basic rules of modern representative democracy according to which elected officials are accountable to voters through political parties they represent, but not directly to the areas of residences politicians and voters inhabit.

To some this suggestion would corroborate the fact that citizens are ignorant about how democracy really works. From another perspective jury's suggestion seems to be based on explicit criticism towards the politics as usual. Firstly, the jury members think that the neighbourhoods outside the city centre are continuously under-represented in the elected organs and thus voters need to have more means to call for accountability. Secondly, the jury implies that the topics significant to residents do not necessarily divide parties from another, but that relevant differences may lie within the parties. In order to take advantage of their opportunities to act politically, residents need possibilities to discuss potential divisions and draw them into public discussion. Having said this, it should be noted that jury's own ideas about political participation did not go this far.

The suggestions about regional accountability and the new architecture of information finds support in the local government in Tampere. The city has for some time been developing the geographic information system to the direction that all of the information included in the local government's field of activities could be found on the computerised street map. The city officials regard the idea of regional accountability introduced by the jury as a sign of accentuated local identity, which corresponds to political awareness very much appreciated by the local government. In this framework it is understood that the jury challenges the local government to not only better organise the information presented in the internet, but also to re-evaluate their offline practices. From this point the commentators in the local government emphasised

that the internet or calls for new modes of accountability do not make the strengths of the representative system and the necessity for division of duties within the government obsolete. Thus, new practices – either in offline or online environment – should be seen as supplementary means only.

Proposal 2: Vigilant announcement system

In addition to emphasising the availability of information, the citizen jury focused on the fact that the residents ought to be provided with up-to-date information about their issues of interest. According to the residents, the processes in local government often proceed quite slowly, and yet the important decisions may come as a surprise for the residents. In practical terms attempting to follow political processes is rather burdensome for the residents, and the most significant information may eventually reach too late even to those keeping a close eye on the process. These problems may be one cause of the ‘*not in my backyard*’ (*Nimby*) phenomenon noted in connection to urban planning.

The *Nimby* phenomenon is often regarded as an explanation to the inability or reluctance of ordinary citizens to explore complex issues from the angle professional designers have intended, thus failing to take into consideration other interests than their own. Following the course of thought of the jury, the problem may not derive so much from lack of interest or inability to perceive complexities, but simply from difficulty of following the formal stages of the process.

The jury in Tesoma wanted to set a challenge for the designers of local government’s web-mediated services: An online system should be created that will allow information to be published as quickly as possible so as to reach the resident forthwith, and present the information in such an appearance that will enable the site-users combine the new information as a part of their previous understanding of the issue. For this purpose the jury suggested the creation of a *vigilant announcement system* that could be operated

via e-mail. The system would operate so that each time a particular issue would be discussed in the local government, the databases would automatically send an informative e-mail message to the residents. The message would include a link to the agenda, to the minutes of meeting, or to a bulletin shedding more light to the matter.

Citizens joining the system, maintained by the local government, would be registered according to the specific issues and topics they take interest into. The jury emphasise that the residents should be allowed to choose their particular field of interest by themselves, whether it be general issues concerning local government or specific decisions relating to their own residential area. Based on their own experiences, the jury assume that the registered users need carefully consider the number of matters they have the time and the interest for. However, if the residents would overestimate their own resources, registered users ought to be able to later change their profile for participation.

An obvious shortcoming in the jury's suggestion is the fact that a registered user would receive the information in private; in other words, when reading a 'vigilant announcement' message, they would not be notified of the persons having received the same document nor of their views on the matter. In order for the information provided in the messages to have a public significance, the system ought to allow citizens interested in common affairs to discuss the meaning of the newly-acquired information with each other and possibly also planning their further actions. For this kind of dialogue, e-mail lists or discussion groups could be linked to the system, thus providing a common terrain for residents to debate over a particular topic of interest in the light of various interests.

In order to carry out a deliberative process – that is, a serious discussion attempting to work through the problems in common in a rational and reasonable manner (Wilhelm 1999: 159–162) – it would be advisable to limit the participants to those who had ex-

pressed their interest in the given topic while registering to the system. This would mean that discussion would be participants having a stake in the given issue and attempting to deal with their viewpoints and disagreements rationally and critically. This public (in the Deweyan sense) would be allowed to carefully consider shared matters of interest before deciding upon the ways in which the discussion will be made more public and how other parties or stakeholders would be drawn into the dialogue (cf. Aikens 1999, 190–193).

A vigilant announcement system such as the one formulated by the jury does not thus far exist in Finland. However, other attempts have been made by the city of Tampere to utilise the opportunities provided by the Web in creating more transparency to early phases of political processes within the local government. As an example of this, the city has created an online consultation forum (*Valma*⁸), which aims at presenting issues to the public scrutiny in their preparatory stages. The forum provides Web users with the opportunity to explore the background of issues under preparation, sending feedback either straight to the civil servants preparing the matter and elected officials or joining a web-mediated discussion on the topic. Both the feedback received from residents and the higher-level decisions eventually made are publicised in the forum.

Paradoxically enough in the *Valma* online forum large amount of extra preparation is needed before preparatory-level issues can be subjected to public consultation. The first step of these, taken within the local government, is to agree on which topics will be publicised on the forum. After this the PR officers need to compile the material to be published in the Web. Due to the amount of work required by each case being lifted to the public agenda, merely one matter at a time has been introduced to the forum, which is obviously a problem with regard to the goal of openness

8 See, <http://www.tampere.fi/osallistu/valma/index.htm>

in local government. The proposition of vigilant announcement system operated via e-mail would provide an improvement to this problem, since it is based on an automatic system that will manage the message sending procedures, thus freeing the administrative staff from extra preparatory work. What is more, putting the jury's idea into practice would put an end to the pre-selection of publicised issues in terms of both their number and content.

As an idea, the officials in the local government consider the vigilant announcement system as the next logical step in improving the residents' possibilities of following current matters of their city. Presently, lack of administrative resources rather than technical obstacles is seen as the major obstacle to designing and implementing the system. However, it is obvious that not only lack of resources but also priorities concerning their use is a question influencing the implementation.

Information through online maps

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Nearly a hundred years ago, the American social critic and journalist Walter Lippmann pointed out that a citizens' chances to act as full members of society are not limited by lack of information. Rather, the active involvement of citizens is bounded by the unreasonable demands placed on them by the modern society. In Lippmann's (1925: 23–24) words, '[m]an must have the appetite of an encyclopaedist and infinite ahead of him [...] while he is earning a living, rearing children and enjoying his life'.

However elitist these views may appear today, undoubtedly Lippmann had perceived the process of increasing complexity within societies quite poignantly. He must have based his views on the fact that the ever-growing flood of information will make it increasingly difficult to distinguish more or less industrially created *information* from *knowledge* anchored in experience that can be utilised by individuals and institutions. Following his own train of thought, Lippmann emphasised that the complexity of society can only be managed with the help of scientific knowledge, and

that experts disregarding their personal interests are the key to that knowledge. His view was that the citizens' responsibility for analysing information and making decisions ought to be limited.

Today's discussion on democracy takes place on quite a different kind of territory; however, ongoing practices of government still owe a great deal to Lippmann's analysis. Information on common and shared issues continues to be produced primarily by bureaucrats in their offices and experts in their institutions, neither of which, though, exist without personal interests. Correspondingly, the information is communicated to citizens via mass media which show varied degrees of interest in distributing it. Information flowing top-down constantly needs to struggle for citizens' attention, who quite often do not have time dwell on the information or simply prefer tuning out.

The change brought to existence by the new ICT can best be seen in the fact that there is even more information available for people and that their opportunities to search information in their own initiative have been enhanced, at least for those who have access to the internet (cf. Ridell 2001). Yet, the question remains, how the information should be organised and made useful for interested citizens.

The citizen jury in Tesoma based their work on challenging the hierarchical structures in information distribution as well as on increasing the independence of the residents both in acquiring information and evaluating it. What is more, the jury regarded the residents as experts of their own environment, possessing the most versatile experience of various aspects concerning living in the area. The significance of the knowledge stemming from personal experiences is emphasized by the fact that it relates to the relevant context; residents of a neighbourhood or suburb are familiar with its history and the local culture, including the vocabulary applied within it, therefore being reasonably competent at exploring the matters with a view to 'the big picture'. The problem lies in the fact that the empirical knowledge is not necessarily easily put into

words, and, therefore, crystallising the street-wise insights into knowledge or arguments usually requires deliberation and careful pondering over matters, with the goal of making different points of view fit each other (cf. Barber 1984: 197).

Proposal 3: Social navigation

Although the citizen jury in Tesoma managed to recognise their own 'everyday life expertise', the jury continuously faced situations in which the participants wanted extra information. The required information was connected, for example, to the population structure and its development in the area, the location of various services and plans concerning land use and building in the area. Information on these matters was applied by the jury for checking, updating and completing their personal knowledge. What is more, combining information from various sources enabled the jury to challenge certain views on local conditions that were presented as facts, whether these be originated by the residents themselves, the news media or local government.

Guided by the gaps in their own knowledge and inspired by presentations given by researchers on Web applications utilising geographic information systems, the jury suggested that the municipal online services ought to be devised to offer tools for *social navigation*. The core of the concept is that residents familiar with their own district would be able to combine information of different sources and analyse it in their own computers. In turn, familiarising with information on local conditions would create better opportunities for the residents to follow and evaluate the legitimacy of the decision-making in local government.

Databases that could be entered via the city website would serve as a starting point for the information search, and the acquired information could be processed on a digital map. Tools for the search and the analysis ought to be easy to use, yet simultaneously supporting the independence of the social navigators. Goals such as this have been introduced also into the discussion carried out by

experts of urban planning and geography on the Public Participation GIS; these have focused on the digital map as a central tool in *democratisation of information* (Obermeyer 1998: 65–66).

Examples of realising ideas such as the one made by the citizen jury in Tesoma are non-existent or under construction at best. However, quite dissimilar examples of sophisticated digital mapping utilising location-based information exist in plenty. Most Finnish municipalities have included an online map on their website to help the web users in locating specified targets on the map based on a simple address search. Moreover, location-based services can be applied in planning car routes, finding the sights of the city or searching for apartments to buy or rent. These services are connected to each other by the aim of helping the *personal navigation* of web users. The applications have been designed especially for tourists finding their way in areas previously unknown to them. This means that for persons familiar with the area personal navigation services are rarely useful at all.

The emphasis on personal rather than social uses of navigation services owes to the commercial interests appreciating the reliefs produced for private individuals in their daily business over the political interests of public-minded citizens. This assumption is not only supported by market actors, but for instance, by the state, which has financed the research and development of personal navigation services.⁹ The development of Geographic information technology in itself is, of course, open to both personal and social uses. Thus, the choice made by institutions and market actors is a political one.

Representatives of the city of Tampere as well as experts on geographic information regarded the proposal of the citizen jury useful. According to the experts, the proposal is technically applicable and practically conceivable, if it will be connected to the develop-

⁹ See, <http://www.vt.fi/virtual/navi/1.htm>

ment projects on geographic information systems currently carried out in several municipalities. At the moment, such projects are framed by objectives set by the local governments themselves aiming at improving the cost-efficiency of administrative processes. The experts on geographic information systems as well as the representatives of city of Tampere both admit that since no such initiatives have taken place before, ideas for developing digital maps as tools for participation have not been discussed amongst them.

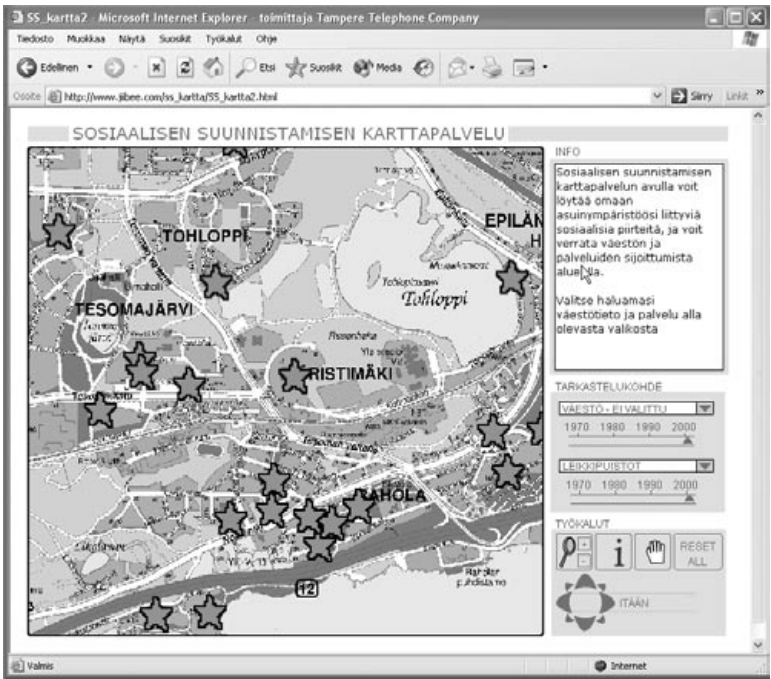
Proposal 4: The online service for social navigation

During the research project in spring 2003, a simple demo was compiled in order to illustrate the jury's ideas on social navigation. The demo, created within a very tight schedule, was not meant to be a finished product to be utilised by municipalities. Instead, the goal was to produce an example based on which the idea of social navigation could be evaluated with regard to the practices of democracy, the resources of local governments and the possibilities of the technology.

The demo is compiled around an address map describing the district of Tesoma and the nearby areas. The service is based on a concise geographic information database that includes information on, for example, the population and the basic demographics of each district of western Tampere seen on the map. The borderlines between the districts are defined as the cursor is moved on the map, and simultaneously the information concerning the area specified by the cursor is displayed in an information box on the right-hand side of the map.

In addition to the information on population, the demo includes information on the services of the area, displaying these on the map simultaneously. At the time of compiling the demo, the researchers had access to information on only some of the services provided in the area, for example playgrounds and parks. The citizen jury considered it important that the map service would include

as much information as there is available. On the other hand, the jury would exclude certain population-related information from public display, for example information concerning ethnic background or the amount of income. Furthermore, in addition to information on statistical data and city planning, the jury regarded that the databases ought to include also qualitative information collected among the residents of the area; for example, the residents' observations concerning nature or specified areas regarded either important or dangerous could be published.



The demo illustrating jury's ideas about the social navigation online service.

The opportunity of making temporal comparisons is essential to social navigation, as these would illustrate the development trends of the area, providing answers to questions such as 'is the population increasing or decreasing in the area' or 'what kinds of structural changes have occurred in the community'. Thus, the residents could make their conclusions on the different kinds of interests

concerning the development of the area not only at present situation, but also in relation to possible challenges facing them in the years ahead.

Since understanding matters concerning the social structure of a community automatically adds depth to a residents' conception of their living area and probably strengthens their local identity, the access to such information can be regarded as valuable in itself. What is more, analysing information on social structures provides ground for the residents to formulate more deeply informed and more challenging questions concerning the conditions of their living area, which in turn may stimulate a far-reaching and responsible term of individual resident participation. Simply, put social navigation could promote the residents' capabilities as citizens.

The interviewed experts consider the demo as a good illustration of the benefits of combining a map and geographic information with regard to participatory citizens. According to them, the information sources, or themes, selected to be included in the demo are central to residents, planners and decision-makers alike, because every planning project will always base on information concerning population structure, infrastructure and existing services. Moreover, the experts find the temporal comparability of information as essential element in the system. However, at least in the case of city of Tampere, the geographic information is at the moment history-blind. In other words, the system is designed to provide up-to-date information only. This means that, the historical depth in the analysis of GIS data presents a fundamental challenge for the system designers.

The experts point out that the technically rather primitively conceived demo for social navigation displays the usefulness of geographic information to the residents perhaps even too vaguely. In their view the available information could be presented much more accurately and graphically than in the illustrating example. For instance, introducing the proportions of different age groups in connection to information on age structures would be of central

importance. Furthermore, the experts stated that the borderlines between the areas, as derived from local government's statistical areas, proved to be too vague, therefore allowing incorrect interpretations. Moreover, it is probable that the borderlines based on government's interests fail to meet the residents' perceptions on borderlines between city areas. One of the experts suggests that these problems could be solved by dividing the maps into squares of equal size, for example half a kilometre per side.

Citizens producing information

In the city of Tampere the ICT provides the residents with a number of means to approach the local government. Residents can send e-mail to city officials or delegates, they can fill in a feedback form designed by the city administration specifically for this purpose, or a web-mediated questionnaire formulated with regard to varying issues and situations. Residents can participate in the discussion carried out on web-mediated message boards or publicise their questions on discussion boards such as the Citizens' kiosk¹⁰. Finally, in case the time and technical skills permits, the residents can establish homepages for their community and participating in the maintenance of these websites with the financial support by the city of Tampere.

Despite the number opportunities for online interaction the actual practices for web-mediated communication present inconsistent results. For instance, the e-mail interaction between residents and the local government often remains limited by the fact that government officials do not always respond to messages sent by private individuals. In cases when a response is given or even dialogue is initiated, the communication remains one-on-one, not enabling others to be involved in the dialogue or assessing the residents' questions and the officials' responses.

10 See, <http://inter2.tampere.fi/osallistu/kansalaiskioski>

In the uses of web-mediated questionnaires and feedback forms the online budget forum organised by the city of Tampere has proven to be most popular and successful. Since year 1998 the residents have had the opportunity to voice their opinions about their priorities for city budget at the early stage of the political process. In 2003 some 1500 residents expressed their views out of whom 82 per cent filed their response through the internet. Even if the rate of respondents dropped down to 657 in 2004 the online forum has enhanced transparency and public dialogue in the political process that is among the most crucial ones for local governance and which has traditionally been discussed behind closed doors by prominent political leaders and civil servants.

From the viewpoint of citizen jury in Tesoma the first problem experienced with online questionnaires is that they often take the form of preformulated multiple choice questions, thus failing to allow the citizens to express their arguments freely at full length. On the other hand, granting the freedom of expression by publishing a blank form for opinions is found problematic as well, because it often results in vague or ambiguous comments, which are often misinterpreted in the local government. According to the jury, comments concerning physical environment in particular could be assisted by providing the citizens with visual tools such as a map, a red marker and other visual symbols. Such tools could be applied by web users when, for example, reporting the Parks Department of the location of a tree that has fallen down on a jogging track, or when giving their opinions on the location of a new motorway.

Proposal 5: Gathering qualitative information

Various applications have been designed with regard to combining a map, visual symbols and written comments in the web-mediated feedback form, but no such service was available in Tampere while the jury worked on the idea. Thus, the jury caught inspiration from an online service designed in the suburb of Maunula in

Helsinki¹¹. This planning game aims at collecting local residents' experiences on their own living environment. It is promised that the information acquired via the application will in future be utilised when carrying out projects on city and traffic planning in the district.



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The Maunula planning game helps locating users' comments about the pleasant, unpleasant and hazardous places in their neighbourhood.

The application is based on an aerial photograph of the district of Maunula, featuring well-known locations and streets for the benefit of local residents. The users of the application can signify

11 See, <http://www.kaupunginosat.net/maunula/kartta.html>. This service was conceived by Heli Rantanen, Katriina Nyman and Jussi Apajalahti, each of whom is a researcher at the Helsinki University of Technology.

particular places on the map by marking them with symbols that represent for them pleasant, unpleasant, unsafe or traffic-wise spots in the area, in addition to which the residents can attach a written explanation to the feedback. Subsequently, the marked picture as well as the written comments can be sent to the researchers and the information will also be recorded in the database utilised by the application.

About hundred comments were posted until the results were published in the Web. When inspecting the results, the users can analyse the presented views by reorganising them according to certain themes. Thus, it is possible to classify the comments according to the age, gender or the place of residence (ie, inside or outside Maunula area) of the persons that have given the feedback. Thus, the social navigators, can begin to recognise different interests concerned with the area and ponder upon their own relation to these.

The experts exploring the application point out that the Maunula example distinguishes itself from the practices usually applied in planning projects by the facts that the users' feedback is published in complete and that it can also be subjected to users' own analysis. According to the experts, a technical disadvantage to the application is that it displays visual and verbal feedback separately, not allowing them to be connected to each other. This technical shortcoming was recognised by designers and users, too, and attempts have been made to elaborate the system.

In cases like Maunula it is likely that the comments accumulate slowly and eventually the number of respondents remains relatively limited. This is why the designers of the planning game chose to publish the results no earlier than six months after the service was established. This relates closely to the the distinction between anonymous and public participation; a topic, which was keenly discussed in the citizen jury. The jury members are vigorously in favour of a policy of complete openness which would enable the users of the application to assess all feedback. Thus, the people

not yet having presented their own comments could explore the content of previous messages prior to formulating their own opinion. At this point the jury is faced with the classic debate on the theory of public opinion, in which the jury's views come close to republican views that are currently overshadowed by the modern theories of public opinion (cf. Salmon & Glasser 1998).

According to the prevailing train of thought, opinion formation is a private process of an individual. From this follows that being aware of the thoughts of others is not necessary in the opinion formation but instead, at the worst, increases the hazard of manipulation. In other words, consulting previous commentators is not seen to enhance the formulation of a deliberate opinion but instead it runs at risk to lead towards conforming to pressure from outside and changing one's original opinion. As opposed to this, the jury regards opinion formation as a social process in which an informed opinion is formed in the awareness of opinions of others.

This to a great extent corresponds to how the jury members had rehearsed themselves in their own participation process through exchanging their views and assessing information thoroughly. For them evaluating web-mediated opinions of others would present a virtual surrogate to face-to-face conversations in which participants listen to others and, when necessary, get involved in debates. These situations are, of course, not appreciated by all those citizens, who take an interest in political issues, let alone those, who remain indifferent about local politics.

One of the interviewed experts, as well as the representatives of city administration, emphasize the risks involved with publicising unfinished feedback. These risks are related to the experiences gained by local government and and planning professionals according to which all sorts of distortions are connected to forms and contents of citizen participation. Consequently, the city officials and experts will prefer protecting themselves by keeping the incomplete stages of planning processes in secret.

Another expert concedes that providing the possibility for a public evaluation of citizens' consultations may increase the risk of distortions, but simultaneously it would create a basis for the formulation of a more deliberate and, in terms of quality, more enduring resident opinion. This idea may be connected to faith in the fact that while discussing in public citizen action and arguments tend to become more responsible and more reasonable in comparison to private arenas of expression. Even if there is no reason to take this assumption at face value, there is some empirical evidence to support such optimism. For instance, in many public journalism projects the media attention directed to citizens' discussions has been found useful in catalysing serious, but constructive public discourse (Heikkilä 2001: 249–252). On the other hand, it is noted that the unconstructive and sometimes uncivil postings to online message boards stem from the anonymity of those who participate in these discussions (cf. Jankowski & van Selm 2000).

As a further justification for the public feedback process, it can be pointed out that it provides experts on the subject with the opportunity of assessing the presented opinions based on other criteria than quantity. Rather than relying on proportions of majority and minorities decision-makers would be better equip with analysing the substance of citizens' feedback. What is more, if these assessments are also made in public, the residents may accept more easily proposals or decisions deviating from their own suggestions, or the views of the majority.

On the track of civic innovation

The citizen jury's claim for participatory online services offers one empirical example of how significant and interesting ideas concerning information society can arise from citizens' participation in large-scale social projects. Noting this is important in connection to formulating two meanings for democracy in information society: ie, it does not refer merely to providing information society *services for everyone or anyone*, but also to the fact that *the process*

of designing information society ought to be in essence democratic, allowing the participation of various actors according to their level of interest and capability.

The present article has discussed ideas originated in the citizens' jury in a neighbourhood of a city in Finland. No attempt is made, however, to suggest that no similar ideas would have been introduced and put into practice elsewhere. What is important is that jury's capabilities of and interest in developing web-mediated tools for democracy are a result of being offered the chance to participate in such teamwork. Having said that it is worth pointing out that jury did not work alone, but that jury's ideas have been formulated with the help of researchers and (to a lesser extent) in interaction with those responsible of designing online services.

Even if the jury's ideas constitute a well-organised blueprint for participatory online services, the implementation and elaboration of these ideas fall in the responsibility of online service producers. The presently discussed ideas have been presented to the local government, representatives of ministries and business actors in Finland. Most of them proposals have responded positively, albeit actual signs of commitment to the ideas have yet to emerge. Scarce resources are the most common reason given for non-commitment.

The suggestions presented by the citizen jury as described above, were divided into the following three areas: firstly, facilitating the search for information as well as keeping up-to-date with the latest information available; secondly, social navigation as a tool of analysis and a notion for citizenship; and thirdly, designing an interactive feedback mechanism utilising digital maps. The proposals enable service producers to select the most suitable area for the purposes and resources of their organisation. The primary goal of the jury's claim is to integrate applications that support different types of participatory practices and agency. For the Web becoming a realm of *citizens* capable of action and interested in participation, an intergrated online system needs to be conceived: A sys-

tem of information search that realises regional accountability; a vigilant announcement system that supports noticing significant matters and consulting the information with others; an analytical tool that enables users to evaluate the structural circumstances of their living are in depth; and, finally, a truly public and interactive feedback system.

With regard to the teamwork and the research surrounding it, one more aspect is worth pointing out in connection to the aim of being reasonable; ie, the idea of a web-mediated application for citizen participation does not presuppose that web users are ‘full-time citizens’ prepared to participate in every matter all the time. The jury stresses that citizenship is but one of the roles persons assume in their lives, and that the time used in public participation has to be limited. Exactly for this reason particular practices, forums and tools of acting as a citizen are needed, and these elements should be available online even when they are not in use.

In a more general level the experiences gained from the action of the citizen jury can be regarded as manifestations of a phenomenon that has been named as *civic innovation* by Carmen Sirianni and Lewis Friedland (2001). By civic innovation they refer to a process that people go through when facing problems, trying different models in solving them, or during a process of networking and finding channels for affecting their living conditions. Some of these changing processes are difficult to identify, or at least it is challenging to specify particular innovations within them. A closer inspection would, however, show that independent actors may have adopted similar forms of action, whether consciously or unaware of each other. According to Sirianni and Friedland, such innovations have since the 1960s taken place in the United States in public healthcare, environmental issues and journalism resulting in a more profound social movement called as civic renewal.

Following this thought it is only logical to suppose that civic innovations have been born elsewhere, and that they will continue to emerge in the future. Since the number of ICT users contin-

ues to grow and the practices of operating in the internet are still finding their form, it is probable that the new information and communications technology is a potential area for civic innovation. Nevertheless, as suggested by critical researchers, it is equally possible that utilising these technologies will be limited in making the presently existing practices more effective, in which case the internet would not bring about fundamental changes (Goldring 2000, 171). On the other hand, it is not claimed in the critical research that the course of the prevailing trend of development could not be redirected; the core of the matter lies in designing and implementing the ideas skilfully.

According to the experiences derived from a number of experiments with online democracy, it seems apparent that civic innovations do not develop by themselves but they require the support or cooperation of institutions. This applies particularly to the field of ICT, which, despite appearing to be virtual, is tightly connected to the established social structures embedded in economic, cultural and political relationships. Producing applications and creating practices is primarily dependent on how these relationships can be organised in actual development projects. The innovation of the developing work and the usefulness of its results depend mainly on both the theoretical and practical degree of openness of these development projects.



Juha Kivistö
Leo Mäkelä

COMMENT

*The jury was
an instructive experience*

For us as residents of Tesoma and participants in the citizen jury the project was a versatile experience. Thanks to the teamwork, we have begun to notice our environment in greater detail than before. As the teamwork proceeded, we also began to think more about how and where decisions are made and who really stand behind the decisions.

We find it obvious that citizens ought to be provided with a much easier channel than presently to communicate with the local government . This should start from clarifying the areas of responsibility of each decision-maker, because at the moment merely trying to find the right contact person in the midst of the jungle of bureaucracy can prove laborious. Moreover, during the teamwork we often noticed that residents and city officials in many cases view matters from completely different perspectives: when residents suggest constructing pavements where they are lacking, the officials see the matter only as a bit of a street. For the residents the problem is one that they will be faced with every day, as one must change to the oth-

er side of the street or walk in the middle of cars on the roadway.

One of the tasks of the team was to ponder upon the web applications supporting citizens' agency. We consider the 'vigilant announcement system', the idea of which we formulated in the jury, very significant: for example, as regards city planning issues, it repeatedly happens that people wake up to reality only at the point where decisions have already been made. The announcement system would enable informing on the projects on time, thus allowing a pause for commenting on them while it is still possible to affect the decision. Technically, the system is easily implemented, and its realisation would be a practical solution to finding a channel for quick information delivery, as we hope.

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The 'Valma' consultation forum maintained by the city of Tampere is a step in the right direction. However, we would appreciate an active system that would require only one registration, after which the system would manage contacting the users automatically. The Valma system is still a passive one, requiring the connection being initiated by the residents. Unless the users remember to visit the Valma system regularly, they can well fail to notice some of the issues. We think that the lacking facility of the officials preparing issues for the city organisation stands in the way of implementing the necessary changes. For these changes to take place, a change in attitudes is needed, alongside with training and time.

We disagree on one aspect with the experts commenting on the social navigation map service. That is, the suggestion of dividing the map into squares with sides of 0,5 kilometres seems not to be a good idea, because the resi-

dents perceive the areas as if being bordered by, for example, streets, parks or lakes. Therefore, flexible area division would be more functional - it might be a good idea to avoid too stiff formalism.

Besides envisioning participatory online services the project was an attempt to create discussion between the jury, the local government and other residents by arranging meetings and getting publicity for the jury's action both in the Web and in the traditional media. This goal was not entirely reached, partly perhaps owing to the fact that the website of the jury was not broadly known, which in turn resulted from the lack of marketing the pages. Exchange of views with other residents did not take place in the Net, but most comments were voices in face-to-face situations.

As the teamwork project began to reach its end, and particularly after the work had been completed, the jury members could not help becoming frustrated, as the planners did not for a long time inform us on the reactions to our suggestions. The message conveyed to us during the final meeting of the planning process in in January 2004 appeared to be dispiriting. Residents were told not to hope for too much and be happy if something would possibly happen in five or ten years of time.

For a jury to function well, not only the residents need to be active, but also expert guidance and help in getting publicity is needed. The jury experiment taught us a lot. If we now had to choose whether or not to participate in the project, we would not hesitate to join the action.

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Civic web as a learning community

The results of the Evolution of e-Communities research project can be summed up as civic innovativeness, represented by new forms of supporting civic participation and narration provided by information network and mobile technology, as well as the development of neighbourhood journalism and user-friendly software. National and international organisations have participated in the multidisciplinary, three-year research project as creators or benefactors, but the Journalism Research and Development Centre of Tampere University has had the main responsibility for the project¹. In order to fulfil my personal research objective – the evaluation of the development work – I have had interviews with the participants, made observations of the actions taken and familiarised myself with various documents.

In the interview material I have gathered, learning has been mentioned as a central factor of the process. This is the case even though learning was not originally on the list of the project's goals. However, the researchers state, pointing at the collected material, that there has been learning in the publishing communities of web-media and amongst the executors of the project. The most significant positive and negative experiences and constraints associated with learning have been referred to as information technology -based.

The successful grassroots outline of the problems with the emergence of information society was done

¹ The research project Evolution of e-Communities has been supported by Alma Media, Sanomalehti Kaleva [Newspaper Kaleva], Media Tampere, MIT Media Lab, Oulun Seudun Puhelin [Telephone company in Oulu], The Academy of Finland, The City of Tampere, National Technology Agency of Finland TEKES.



in cooperation with the citizens of Tampere and Oulu. This outline can also be considered a central goal for the project. As providers of a resident community's perspective or the standpoints of other communities, Manse Square (<http://mansetori.uta.fi>) and Neighbours (<http://www.kaleva.fi/naapurit>) have stabilised a special status as local civic web-media around which the publishing communities have been networked. In this chapter, I will evaluate the functions of the research project as sociocultural animation and as Learning Communities, from the media pedagogic vantage point. In addition, I will pull together the results of the project.

The residents and communities on the Net

Both Manse Square and Neighbours function as a) local network medium and b) fields for multidisciplinary research on the Net. Manse Square (Mansetori) of Tampere is more diversified and ampler website than Neighbours (Naapurit.net) of Oulu. Several sub-studies have been implemented with Manse Square in the course of the project. While the amount of Manse Communities (Manse Square) was 22 in the beginning of year 2004, the amount of Neighbourhood Communities (Neighbours) was five. The websites also differ in terms of software environment. Manse Square is maintained by the University of Tampere and the website's publication system has been developed on open source software. Neighbours on the other hand is located on the newspaper Kaleva's server. This media house, being the largest in Northern Finland, is also in charge of the software development.

I will designate the websites as civic web or civic web-media, although the terms community web and community web-media could also be suitable. While the endeavour is to by mainly voluntary means bring alternative civic perspective to local publicness, the activity as a whole is in many ways comparable to community radio or television. Together, these publishing communities form a network on the Net and in physical meetings (cf. Jankowski, van Selm & Hollander 2000).

The ideological roots of the activity lie also in public journalism, due to the residents' central role in local publicness in the sub-studies. In this volume however, Ari Martikainen makes a distinction between neighbourhood reporting and public journalism in which professional journalists ultimately work as providers, and guard the access to publicness. He considers the activity rather as people's journalism or as citizens' media in which the small stories by individuals' are prioritised over big common issues, also allowing the citizens to function as both providers and gatekeepers to publicness (Kurki 2000; Rodriguez 2001).

Particularly the establishment of publishing communities and the evolution of participants towards publishing citizens have been encouraged in the sub-studies of the project of The Evolution of e-Communities. For example, the Net Teams of Manse Communities are such publishing communities which represent their basic neighbourhood communities. Communal activity in the Net Teams and their basic communities has been physically and geographically confined to cities or districts. Paul Dennis and Ian Harris (1989, 7-10) define the development of communities as a common umbrella concept for all the principles, based on which communities can, by means of common activities, improve their living conditions and everyday life.

An objective in the research project has been to try and achieve development towards active citizenship and communities that are not only critical media-consumers, easily adapting to the emergence of information society, but who also are prepared to act in their own alternative terms in order to make reforms. Seija Ridell has defined such an active contributor in media publicness as potential public (Finnish: *julkiso*) (see e.g. Ridell 1999). In this context, criticality and awareness do not necessarily denote resistance to current situations or merely reflective thinking. The terms also refer to seizing common local matters and changing them with network technology and web publicness.

Even critical media pedagogics strives after a daring, participatory

media-consumer and citizen (see e.g. Kotilainen 2001). This objective rises also from Brazilian Paulo Freire's (1921-1997) theorisation, which states that an aware citizen acts with change in sight and also goes through personal changes over the process. In other words, he/she does not merely survive and adapt to, say, information society, but also seeks to influence its evolution (Freire 1973; 2001). A similar change in communities and among citizens has, to a large extent, been the objective of the research project.

In mass communication theory, the approach falls into the theory of democratic and participatory normative mass communication research. (Action) research on such an active public has in most parts been categorised as pro-active or radical (see MQuail 1994; Murdock 2002). In this project the role of the public of the media has not been restricted to consumers and users, but citizens have begun to provide and publish their own stories as well as their own media, on the Net.

Mediapedagogic activity

As an educationalist I interpret the activities of the research project as mediapedagogics, which in short, is a study of media by the means of media. The communities have been provided with development support in the area of web-media. The residents have been offered training in the craft of web-production and possibilities in taking part in the handling of common matters on and with the Net. The activity falls easily in the sociopedagogic category of mediapedagogics together with everything that takes place beyond the boundaries of proper institutions of education. Media workshops that have been followed through as a part of youth and cultural work are examples of this (cf. Kotilainen 2001, 49).

From this perspective, the fundamental condition of understanding the activity as collaborative learning is highlighted in the evolution of civic web. A community is seen as a set of relationships between individuals, which carry the participants' common un-

derstanding of the community's function and objectives. The compatibility of each actor's personal objectives and the community's common goals, as well as the dialogue between individuals that strives for understanding and consideration, are also crucial. The presumption is, that in communal activity, the individual and the community go through a parallel learning process. Learning can be defined as a change in an individual's level of knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviour, and it can even occur sporadically in various situations. In this project, systematic training and support have been taking turns and represent a part of the communal activity of the sub-studies of the research (see Kurki 2000, 130–132; 2002, 50–51).

The Evolution of e-Communities project as a whole has functioned as a developer community that has brought support to activities like networking in Net Teams and other participant communities. The researchers of the sub-studies have in most parts done participatory action research, in addition to which researchers' interpretations on websites, theme interviews by outsiders, as well as statistics have been taken use of. Seija Ridell (1999; 2002), who worked as an action researcher at the time of the launch of the project, has pondered the role of research in the development process. My own role as a researcher is primarily that of an outsider because I was not involved with the project until its final stages and because I have only taken part in the early stages of the picture message project in Oulu (see Kumara in this volume).

The research project as a sociocultural animator

The movement of sociocultural animation has evolved in the range of socialpedagogics, particularly in Latin America, France and Belgium. The movement materialises in the form various development and research projects. The objective is to prevent marginalisation and to support the development of individuals and communities towards conscious construction of life and nationality. According to the main theory that lies behind, Paulo Freire's pedagogy of lib-

eration, an individual does not really require teaching, but learns in the process of communal participation. Essential in this process are the animators of various kinds and the community itself. Authorities, associations or other organisations are usually involved with sociocultural animation in some shape or form, functioning as public enablers (Gillet 2004; Kurki 2000, 42-43; Freire 1973; 2001). I see the Evolution of e-Communities research project as such an enabler, the sub-studies as actions of animation and the researchers and other actors in the project as animators, who support collaborative learning.

Next I will compare different sub-studies and the research project as a whole to the pillars of sociocultural animation defined by Leena Kurki and Jean-Claude Gillet: (1) the nature and organisation of the realised action, (2) the stage of activity from the participants' side, (3) the time spent on the project, (4) the structure of the background institution, (5) the commitment with the activity, (6) the quality of communal relationships, (7) the strategy for action in the sub-studies and (8) the philosophy behind the activity are the objects of observation. Communal projects can be reflected to these pillars, either with the objective on techno-practical or conscience change. All the sub-studies set down mainly between the two objectives in the comparison (cf. Kurki 2000; Gillet 2004).

The publishing communities have mainly been based on voluntariness and the goals of web activity have been pondered on from the perspective of the community's own interests. The goals of the research project are in harmony with the goals of the community because the community's activity as a channel of publicness on the Net has been meaningful right from the beginning. In addition, the Net has become a cultural archive for local communities, also in the form of multimedia. The research project had the purpose of promoting interaction in communities, within a community and with the surrounding society, using the Net. Even this purpose has been fulfilled in the sub-studies at least to some extent.

The Net Team members of Viinikkala, Marke Härkönen and Terhi Mäkelä speak for the increase of interaction based on their own experience as follows:

The relationships tied through the project, visits to the kindergarten and the old people's home of Iideshovi, have increased the familiarity with the district and created a feeling of communality.

The increase of interaction along with web publishing can be considered a condition for communal media in establishing its place in the community (compare Teer-Tomaselli and Mjwacu 2003).

Maarit Mäkinen reports on the sub-studies of gypsies and foreigners. The main purpose of the studies has been digital empowerment, meaning learning which may have resulted in significant variation in the communities' and individuals' interaction with the surrounding society. The purpose has been achieved with the gypsies especially on the individual level, but within the gypsy community as a whole, the process of empowerment is still in progress. The communities' needs for web-media and web communication skills turned out to be essential for the launch and progress of the empowerment process. The interviewed gypsies felt that there had been changes concerning the essential points. They also experienced an increase of confidence in their own capabilities and growth of their networks.

The sub-studies are based on the construction of long-term activities. "Two Pictures of My Town" project by Janne Seppänen has been the only short-term experiment. The report of the project can be found in this volume. The social relationships in the web activities within a publishing community and particularly between interacting publishing communities, are brought out in the form of active acting rather than as adaptation to the activity. Such socialisation presents itself in the willingness of converse and in participation in the handling of common matters in physical meetings. Giving and receiving encouraging commentary on the

stories to or from other neighbourhood reporters is another sign of socialisation.

The conflict between civic perspective and the evolution of information society along with the concept of consensus, represent the strategy for action in the study. Consensus, or the mutual understanding with information society's general politics of promotion, lays the foundation for all the sub-studies as an orientation towards the promotion of civic web skills. In Manse Forum, the conflict becomes perceptible when the civic and administrative perspectives contradict. Again, in the picture message project of Oulu, the conflict appears in the shape of the district's inner battle of identity against its public image. Also, some of the office-holders have experienced the web-discussion with the citizens as something new and peculiar because the practice has not yet responded to expectations well enough. Furthermore, the Net now offers office-holders a direct channel of dialogue with the residents and communities, while they are still unprepared for the new practices in terms of time resources and attitudes.

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Particularly in Manse Forum, new forms of civic participation and narration have been developed. The boundary between public and producer has been blurring, as a result of which the residents have been able to produce material in the web publicness, instead of simply settling for the role of a media consuming public. The Participant's Manual and the suggestion system, both of which support the citizens' easier access to public interaction with local authorities, exemplify civic genres as a new form of narration and software (see Hokka in this volume; cf. Ridell 1999). Neighbourhood reporting and the resident council of Tesoma represent new means of acting in the web publicness, and can also be classified as civic innovativeness (see Heikkilä & Lehtonen in this volume; cf. Sirianni & Friedland 2000).

The role of the research project as a background organisation has been evolving in the course of the activity, which is shown as launches of new sub-projects in all stages of the project. The

fresh perspectives of the researchers who have come along with the project, have partly changed the vantage point for the sub-projects. Action research -based approach is the philosophical reference frame for nearly all the sub-projects. The approach is founded on the concept of evolution and learning rather as a spiral-like praxis than a techno-practical implementation of web projects. According to Paulo Freire (1973; 2001) the action that leads to the evolution of a community should be realised through the triad of awareness, action and theory (awakening – action – reflection).

The awakening of individuals and communities to understanding web publicness and specifying their personal needs, has been building on the motivational acts of the sub-project researchers during the planning stage, and over the actual web activity, as the actors have gained better technical skills and understanding of web publicness. Also, peer critique and reflection with the researchers after the activity, have been crucial in some of the sub-projects. The reflection of learned skills and experiences, generates new viewpoints. Thus, the needs and practices of a web community, web-democracy of a city or even that of the whole information society, can be seen in a new light. Consequently, redirection of activities can be implemented (cf. Kurki 2000, 134-137; 2002, 57; Freire 1973, 84-87, 123-126).

In this volume, Maarit Mäkinen for one, describes the progress of the gypsies' web project, following the above depicted model of learning through dialogue:

The community's own interests and needs were identified to find out where information technology could be useful.... The community was encouraged to active information provision....Projects at the community's own responsibility were launched....

Heikki Heikkilä and Pauliina Lehtonen give a description of a similar process in the activity of the resident council of Tesoma. In addition, the residents have been able to carry on the act of re-

lection during each event or procedure, also with the local authorities. Ari Martikainen depicts neighbourhood reporting also as inter-reflection between peer learners. An example of inter-reflection is the art of making commentary on stories, where the researcher's task is to mainly just summarise. However, not all the sub-projects apply the act of reflection.

This learning model underlies sociocultural animation, but the vantage point of experiential learning is also a similar life cycle moving from concrete action to an observing and reflecting discussion in developing communities (Gillet 2004; cf. Denise & Harris 1989, 7–10). A similar spiral of alternating action and theoretical reflection is at best materialised in participatory action research (see e.g. Kemmis and Wilkinson 1998, 22).

Researchers as participatory agents

I interviewed researchers, web designers, civic actives of Net teams and representatives of cooperating partners in media houses. Their opinions can be divided in the reference frame of sociocultural animation into either techno-practical or conscious change orientation according to how these orientations occur in their speech on the significance of a research project and their own goals in the project (cf. Gillet 2004; Kurki 2000):

Techno-practical	Conscious change
"to sell band for new needs"	"to help the skills of marginal groups too"
"to provide new multimedia services"	"...that people would understand the significance of web publicity"
"to learn web technology and skills"	"to support active citizens to become active producers in the information society"

The techno-practical orientation occurs in every interview, but the conscious change approach is found mainly only in project researchers and a couple of web designers. They also feel that university research is a natural part of such societal development project, whereas those representing a more practical view regard the university as a separate institution from the rest of society. In addition, actives in some Net teams feel that the role of the researcher is more that of an outsider than what the researchers themselves think.

The workers in the research project have together with residents created and supported public web space and other requirements for civic participation. Researchers and web designers have worked as teachers and consults in the process in addition to doing their basic tasks, research and development of web tools. In the interviews they name their own roles as follows: technical resource, producer, consult, trainer, preacher or inspirer. The central thing is that they feel that they were also mostly learners with other actors in the research process.

At the early stage of the sub-projects the researchers designed and produced the communities' first web sites with the citizens in the Net teams. After that the role of the researchers has been gradually diminished. In 2004, at the time of writing this, the role of the research project in Tampere is to offer communities server space, lend technical equipment, provide help desk services and training in web publishing. The project also organises monthly network meetings for all the Net teams.

The aim of sociocultural animation is usually that the communities would grow independent and build their own norms of activity. The neighbourhood reporter project is at the stage where the experienced reporters have started to reflect upon the norms in their activity with a relation to normal journalism:

...the "old stagers" thought what the conditions for newcom-

ers should be, and what kind of rights they could be given at first. When the skills develop, people are willing to even take on the role of a gatekeeper that goes along with being a journalist. (see Ari Martikainen in this volume)

The activity of the resident council of Tesoma has also become official resident association activity in the process. According to Paulo Freire a number of pedagogical situations has failed when they have been carried out without taking account of the views of the participants in the communal program (Freire 1973, 83). In the resident council of Tesoma and the neighbourhood reporter project, the participants have been involved all the time, and they have been able to direct the course of the project from their own and the communities' goals. This may be the reason why these projects have almost reached an independent action model.

290 A distinction can be made between active and less active citizen actors in every sub-project. The most active citizens are engaged in the Net teams on a regular basis despite the fact that the work is volunteer based. In Tampere, for instance, the most active persons in the citizen communities are also engaged in the activities of Manse Forum and Manse Media. These actives take more interest than the others in working with information technology and in web publicness as writers, initiators, or community organisers. They clearly have the courage to meet and handle new unpredictable situations and the ability to cope continuously with unfinished work. These challenges have been presented in technology when the software for a certain purpose has not been finished in time or when the equipment has not worked as planned. In addition, the staff of the project has kept changing, which has slowed down and even interrupted the information flow and especially web functions.

All the project participants I interviewed mentioned that they had learned something, especially about information technology, even those interviewees whose previous education had involved

information technology. The learning experiences have been both positive and negative but important to such an extent that they are even mentioned as primary learning experiences. Techno-practically oriented interviewees mention a number of themes of local democracy and civic participation in collective matters which they have learned to understand. It can be said that techno-practical and conscious change have got closer to each other among the participants of the research project.

The Web – publishing channel and a tool to influence

Manse Square has gained an established position as a web medium in local publicness in Tampere and as a new form of communication for citizens. A characteristic example is that the number of the citizens' home pages grows regularly by itself. Also, the City of Tampere has located the project as a part of eTampere - project and supports coordination of the communities. In Oulu the citizen community activity is appreciated too. These research platforms have provided an opportunity to outline a picture of the problematic construction of the information society. Finally, I sum up this picture in a few words by trying to answer first to the original main questions and then reflect upon the project as a community of learning.

The sub-studies supported the construction of publishing communities and at the same time the participants' development into publishing citizens. Such publishing communities are the Net teams in Manse Forum and in the neighbourhoods on Manse Square. Instead of web conversation more emphasis has been on publishing. It is better to talk about publishing communities or Net teams and the basic communities than e-communities.

In the research project of Evolution of e-Communities one aim was to investigate what kind of new narrative forms, practices, and genres communities can create.

The web has become a publishing channel and a tool of influence through the activity of the home pages of neighbourhoods and interest groups, neighbourhood reporters, Manse Media, and Manse Square. The established position is mainly made possible by the total time of two research projects 1998–2004 (see more specifically Sirkkunen in this volume). Civic genres, which are alternative to the mainstream media, and other new participatory forms have been tested and built up during the research project in Tampere and Oulu. Software and narrative forms have been created to serve as civic genres to support citizens' public interaction with local authorities.

At the final stage of the project a genre sketch was created in Oulu for the purpose of connecting local picture message and web discussion in order to develop a neighbourhood and promote public discussion. Some of the new practices are neighbourhood reporter activity and resident council activity. The model of dialogic learning process in the sub-studies of which have been presented in this chapter can be considered a type of development activity, which can be used to support construction and activity of civic web.

How do such “traditional” knowledge resources as administration, the mass media and e-communities relate to one another?

Not all residents have a need for web activity and publicity such as this, but they seem to be happy with the role of an onlooker. A part of the citizens in Manse Forum prefers discussion in real life to web discussion. However, they can not be off-hand categorised as passive audience, activity and agency can have different degrees and tones. Neither have civil servants taken advantage of the opportunity of constructing discussion with citizens on the web. Busyness naturally presents an obstacle, but the possibility of increased dialogue provided by this tool has probably not reached the majority of civil servants even at the level of attitude.

The relationship between other local media and these civic web

projects is investigated more closely in an ongoing statistical study and will specify this picture (Lehtonen 2004). The interest from other media shows in local media houses' supporting the research project. Especially in Oulu a local newspaper Kaleva has played a significant role in Kaukovainio suburb's picture message project by providing local publicness and so activating web discussion. In Tampere other local media has probably if nothing else followed Manse Media and other Manse Square events, but the sub-projects have not reached any wider publicity.

And what are the benefits of community cooperation and sharing experiences?

It was discovered in all sub-studies that civic web projects within this research project have promoted not only the participants' own local issues and influence on local democracy but also outgoingness of individuals and communities. This has happened through networking at research project gatherings with other e-publishing communities and persons. In addition, networking has happened in many projects with local schools or certain administrative officials. Networking has obviously supported this kind of citizens' web activity, encouraged citizens to publish and participate on the web.

What about local communities' long term social effects on neighbourhoods, their activity, and life?

As results of the whole project the following changes can be listed:

- A publishing channel for web publicness
- Civic genres and other new participatory forms
- Influence on local issues
- Networking

Skills have been learned in all the above mentioned areas. In addition to web skills, influencing skills and networking skills have

also accumulated. It is significant that all the results can be attributed to both individuals and communities, and it will probably be most difficult to distinguish individual development from community development. This is supported by comments by those residents in this publication who have been involved in the web projects. For individuals the project has provided increased control of their lives and new choices, even new career prospects, i.e. (digital) empowerment. Communities have gained digital publishing and skill resources through their residents.

A community has different developmental phases which have been observed in Net teams during this project. For instance, the initial enthusiasm has often died down when the web skills have proved insufficient or a number of volunteers have quit. Some communities have started to look for help quite soon, some a bit later. The interaction between an individual and the community is also complex, and it is not possible to present a simple model of how to attach the skills and the enthusiasm of Net actives to the whole community. The question can also be asked, why should everybody be web experts?

Social effects are connected with restrictive factors which are the problems with this kind of web activity. This research project has had such problems as:

- the functionality and high costs of digital technology
- interaction between web experts and web users
- unfamiliarity of web activity and absence of skills
- problems concerning the volunteer work

Web technology has been in the centre of all activity, and it has an important role also at personal and community level of learning experiences. The functionality of web technology can not be trusted every day, and interaction between web experts and users does not always work. The activity has been restricted by differ-

ent practical problems, low level of technical competence, unfamiliarity and high costs of the technology which is true especially for digital cameras.

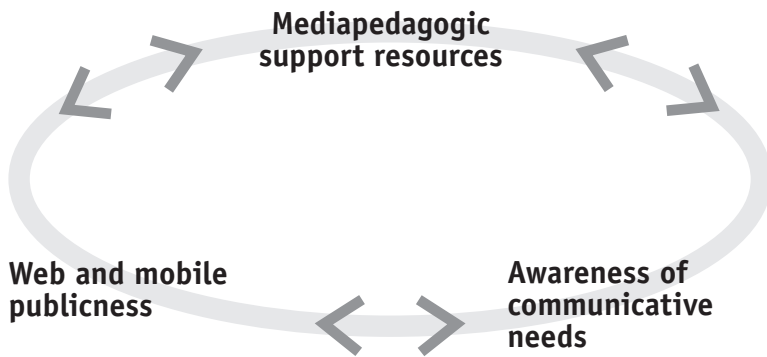
Unfamiliarity of web activity and low level of skills is also mentioned as a problem. Even though training has been organised on Manse Square on a regular basis, the participants' skills have not always been beneficiary for a community web project. In Manse communities, however, almost half the residents with basic web publishing skills have reported to have instructed others in making neighbourhood home pages.

In addition, the communities have experienced problems with voluntary work: there has not been enough volunteers to update the web pages or lead discussions. The first reason, especially for families, has been noticed to be the lack of time to take up new hobbies. This observation also shows who has the time and the interest for such a demanding citizenship: those with no job or family. For instance, in Tesoma resident council the most active persons were pensioners. The problems of voluntary work are well known from community work and community media in general.

The development project – a community of learning

In this research project information network has been the subject of the study, a tool, and a public environment for community development and research. The material show the result that web media alone does not build change which has also been noticed in mediapedagogic studies attached to education (e.g. Kotilainen 2001). Various kinds of support is needed in order to create civic and community digital empowerment and promote participation in web publicness which this research project has been able to provide continuously over a number of years.

The principles of civic web construction are put together in the following figure based on the experiences in this research project:



The foundation pillars of civic web publishing

Manse Square and Neighbours web sites share similar preconditions for civic participation in web publicness, which has been suggested by e.g. Marja-Liisa Viherä (1999) in her dissertation. These preconditions are possibly easy Net access, online communications skills, and participatory needs i.e. awareness of communications needs of the whole community. In case there is a desire to produce independent web media as in this research project the requirements are, in addition to Net access, also accessible and easily operated different web tools and software, and civic genres, as well as information about them.

Maarit Mäkinen in this volume has an emphasis also on competence construction at different stages and participatory networks which can provide support. In this research project the emphasis has been on the process of action and development which call for attention in other similar projects. In this project the Net teams and other web actives, the training and guidance organised by the research project as well as the consulting attitude of the researchers have served as mediapedagogic support resources in the development process.

The whole research project Evolution of e-Communities has functioned as a public developer community which has supported networking and other activity between the Net teams and other participatory communities. The meaning of the project has been

to function as sociocultural animator in several ways in the process which has probably been new and open to citizens and communities. The results show that the process is at its initial stage, especially at attitude level, in this kind of civic web activity when interaction on the web is experienced as strange, and web discussions do not really get going.

Similar projects are constructed in varying contexts i.e. situations that are under continuous change in relation to finance and volunteers. At the project launch in particular it is worthwhile to invest in planning and reflection on aim-setting together with everybody involved. The only way to start building up a committed, even active participation and change in the whole community is to make the community and the people involved realise their own needs. There should be an opportunity for dialogue and constructive friction – also between citizens and decision-makers.

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Appendix

A selection of (other) relevant articles in English

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Seminars and workshops organised in connection to the EeC -project

eCommunities workshop 11 June 2001 in Dublin, Ireland, in cooperation with MIT Media Lab Europe.

Photos and Publicness workshop 25 – 26 June 2003 in Tampere, in cooperation with MIT Media Lab Europe.

Empowerment and Social Learning in eCommunities seminar 26 March 2004 in Tampere, in cooperation with MIT Media Lab Boston and MIT Media Lab Europe.

Rewards

The *Manse Square* project was rewarded by The Finnish Society of Housing and Planning (YSS) 12.03.2002 for exemplary work in Finnish community planning.

New Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) provide both communities and individuals with a range of novel possibilities from new skills and career opportunities to improved sources of information and tools for communication and public participation. However, the fruits of technological progression are unevenly distributed. What is more, the aspired goal of technology furthering democracy remains yet to be reached.

The Evolution of eCommunities project attempts to answer the following questions among others:

- What are the influences of local net communities on the life of corresponding geographical districts and on the degree of participation of their residents?
- What kinds of new forms, practices and types of narration can net communities create?

The report presents several examples of citizen innovativeness: voluntary correspondents developing reality-based and life-like journalism concerning their own residential district, the gypsies describing their history and answering questions concerning their culture and active citizens brainstorming and creating new tools for discussion and civic participation on the net. The report also shows how a mobile camera phone can prove to be useful for local communities in their web-mediated communication.

The Evolution of eCommunities project is built on the collaboration of citizens and researchers. The project, applying the action research approach, bases its analyses on the concepts of digital empowerment, sociocultural animation, deliberative democracy theory and media pedagogy.