

ARSNET - From local network to European market

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I will present these aspects concerning cultural professionals and economy and networking in a cultural history context and then a Finnish point of view about getting more out of web-services.

My background in this context is to be one of the developers and designers of one of the biggest public cultural web-services in Finland, called Arsnet-service in the address: www.arsnet.net

Arsnet is a local service, based on two 3 years ESF-pilot projects, which uses the latest information technology in promoting the cultural know-how of the region of the South-West Finland. It facilitates the access to culture by presenting the various cultural professionals and groups (over 2000 persons all together) in Turku and Proper Finland regional area in one address.

Arsnet's main goal is to improve employment among cultural professionals, help them to make profit with their work and to develop the operational prerequisites of the field. On the other hand, Arsnet makes it easier to find the supply of cultural services. Using Arsnet is free of charge for both cultural professionals and buyers. Arsnet is one of the basic tools for the European Capital of Culture year, which Turku is heading for in 2011.

I will raise some thoughts, which I think are part of that positive diversity, which we shouldn't waste in our common Europe and which we Finns could bring in this conversation. Of course there are many explanations and deeper analysis than this, but may I tighten things a little bit.

There are some special cultural, social, geographical and historical aspects if we look things from the Finnish point of view. We Finns feel, that we have some things which maintain the European diversity in personal and unique way. First of all, it is only 5,2 million of us, that means it is about same population than in one bigger central European city. This fact is good to remember when we speak about cultural markets, marketing and promotion in Finland.

Because of our small domestic markets, it is very difficult to product cultural happenings or mass events without public support. Our social skills are "different", so to say, that is partly because we have lot of space to be alone with our family, we are not so interested in any kind of "public living rooms" and Finland is agricultural by its history, we don't have crowded alleys in our towns and villages. People like to live wide apart their neighbours instead of getting close to other families. Our average social role is much more to be a "silent observer" or "lonely thinker", than lively debater or social virtuoso. And the language then - nobody else understands it in the entire world, and the language is totally different than any other, except the Estonian.

Partly for these reasons, I would claim, that these cultural and geological circumstances made us to be innovators of all kind of communication systems, which we think are good, as long they are non-verbal. It is not a lucky chance that mobile phone, text message etc. are Finnish innovations. We have very good infrastructure and technical equipment, we are open minded to any kind of new innovations, we have high standards for learning foreign languages, lot of needs of advanced systems, device, gadgets, services etc. These kind of things maintain us for living in arctic conditions in sparsely populated country in restricted language area.

Finnish artists have a long tradition of getting their impulses, knowledge and influence from Europe and other Scandinavian countries, particularly from Germany, France, Italy and Sweden. I think creating networks in that area, among artists could be one of our specialities, it has been even compulsory for artists from romantic era to nowadays. Internet will be more and more important tool to maintain this kind of process.

I will now present shortly an example of one professional concept, which I think could even be a standard or could help us create European qualifications particularly when designing public web-services. It is called: *Quality Criteria for Public Web Services*, a concept which the Ministry of Finance in Finland carried out 2004. The key idea is impediment, or liberty, unchallenged access to web-services. The philosophical background of this is the idea of *Information Society*, were we all live, do we like it or not. As any other democratic society, the idea is that nobody should separate from it. Public organisations should be first in line to take care of this matter.

What do we mean with “unchallenged access” then? There are many aspects which we must think over while designing web services.

FOR DIFFERENT KIND OF GROUPS

handicapped, young, old, poor

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

device, application programs, displays, browsers, mobile device, resolutions, mouse, keyboards

CONTENT ASPECTS

Language, pictures, signs, symbols, meanings

There are some European standards, concepts and terms which we should know, like:

eEurope 2002

The Council of Europe recognized the eEurope 2002 plan of action In June 2002 – securing equal conditions to all European citizens, for using all opportunities of information society, is one part of it.

5A Principals

accessibility, affordability, availability, appropriateness, awareness.

DfA

Design-for-all –thinking

W3C - World Wide Web Consortium (non-profit) - standards, engineering, recommendations, HTML de facto standard for EU.

WAI - Web Access Initiative – accessibility recommendations

WCAG 1.0 (Web content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0)

We have not time to go deeper in these terms at the moment, but for example any search engine will give more information. I just wanted to tell that people really work with this issue and try to develop and understand these functions.

Problems and defects which are still unsolved are for example that there are *no clear leader in the field, lot of competing visions, politics and practical projects have a weak connection, lack of co-operation and co-ordination.*

Example Finland

I will now give you one answer or solution, which we developed in Finland.

Ministry of Finance in Finland organized an competition for public web-services in order to make these standards known and to collect public web-services together and make a qualification and to give detailed personal evaluation for each other. I would really recommend this for other countries too.

As a representative for Arsnet web-service I felt it extremely useful and important. The Internet is still very new tool for us and these kind of first steps in standardisation web-services are most important. Arsnet-web service for cultural professionals and markets was awarded 2002 with the *Europrix Quality Seal* and we got very high points in the ministry competition, mentioned above. On this basis and because of these kind of outer evaluation, I may characterize Arsnet as one example of good practise and useful tool when we search for European qualifications and measures and develop markets and networks for any micro units in the cultural field with a help of the Internet.