Media Culture Research Programme
EVALUATION REPORT

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ACADEMY OF FINLAND

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Foreword

The Academy of Finland organised during 1999-2002 the Media Culture research programme. The overall goal of the programme, as expressed in the Programme Memorandum (1998), was to bring out and develop a relatively new and very topical field of research. The general idea was to look at how communication in modern society is framed, on the one hand, by major structural factors; and how, on the other hand, the cultural meaning of media is also shaped and influenced by everyday uses of media. In the programme description it was emphasised that although media culture in western (post)industrial society is in many ways the outcome of global trends in development, in order to reach a deeper understanding of Finnish media culture, one needs to do concrete research and experimentation in this particular cultural context. The programme particularly focused on four themes as follows: *Media culture and the individual's competencies* addresses key questions of media culture from the individual's point of view. *The media industry and markets* introduces the economic perspective into the programme. *Media contents, forms and meanings* focuses on the role of communications products, both old and new, in media culture. Finally, *The media, power and community* raises challenges of a more social and societal nature. It was not expected that projects would choose a particular theme from the list, but rather tackle and interpret the themes in relation to the questions and concepts that are most relevant to the discipline and approach concerned.

Upon the completion of the research programme, the Academy of Finland invited three scholars to evaluate the research programme: Professor Kirsten Drotner from the University of Southern Denmark, Denmark; Dr. Maria Heller-Soignet from Eötvös Lorand University, Hungary; and Professor Pertti Alasuutari from the University of Tampere, Finland. Professor Alasuutari chaired the panel. The panel was assisted by Saila Poutiainen from the University of Art and Design Helsinki, Finland.

In the request for research programme evaluation, the Academy defined the primary task of the evaluation team to assess the programme as a whole and reflect, as applicable, on the following issues:

1. Academic and scientific quality of Media Culture research programme
   – Academic and scientific quality and innovativeness of the research
   – Academic and scientific competence of the projects
   – Contribution to the development of media research

2. Success of the implementation of the programme goals and objectives
   – Concordance with the objectives of the research programme
   – Functioning of the programme
   – Added value of the programme
   – Contribution to enhancing inter- and multidisciplinarity in research
   – Scientific and administrative co-ordination

3. Contribution to researcher and expert training

4. Collaboration and networking
    – Collaboration within the programme
    – Collaboration with other Finnish groups
    – International co-operation
    – Collaboration with the 'end users'

5. Relevance and applicability of research results
    – Academic and scientific relevance
    – Societal relevance
    – National and international impact of the programme

6. Recommendations for the future (including the arguments for the recommendations)

This publication includes the report of the evaluation group. The individual research projects have given their final reports to the Academy for the evaluation, and the research results have also been presented in the volume *Media Culture*, edited by Päivi Hovi-Wasastjerna (Publication series of the University of Art and Design Helsinki A 38, 2003).

On behalf of the steering group of the Media Culture research programme I wish to thank the evaluation team for their valuable work and hope that the results of the evaluation will be used by both the Academy of Finland in the planning of future research programmes and the academic community at large.

Liisi Huhtala
Professor
Research Council for Culture and Society
Chair of the Steering Group of the Media Culture research programme

1 Introduction

The Media Culture research programme is the first one in Finland that is targeted to media and cultural studies. This makes it understandable that the topic and themes of the programme are left quite open. Although there is an established Finnish tradition of mass communication research, the programme was defined in such a way that it enabled many other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities to take part in the programme, thus ideally forming a meeting point and establishing interdisciplinary exchange of theories and ideas about the place and significance of media in society and in people's everyday life.

The reason why this programme is the very first one on media and cultural studies in the history of the Academy of Finland is probably that, apart from well-established mass-communication research, we are only now beginning to see a self-defined community of media studies. That is surprising considering that Finland is one of the most advanced countries in the development of information society. Overall, this strategy of loosely defining the title and the theme has proven useful. The projects funded represent a wide variety of approaches to – and conceptions of – media culture. The publications produced within the programme will certainly enrich and cross-fertilise the national field of media and cultural studies. But although some links and forms of co-operation were established between the projects, it is not quite clear how much such exchange of ideas took place already during the programme.

A single programme targeted in this vast, highly interesting and increasingly important area of research is of course not enough in the long run. This first programme made a big contribution in provisionally mapping out the area. It is obvious that the next programmes will probably be more strictly defined to tackle particular phenomena and problems related to media, in whatever way that is defined in a particular case.

Assessing a programme drawn with such broad brush strokes has been challenging in an interesting way. The projects accepted into the programme reflect the same breadth in that they cover an area that is larger than one would expect to find in a standard media and cultural studies research programme. This means that as a whole the programme opens new paths, which are welcome considering particularly how much new, increasingly mobile communication technology is changing both the notion and uses of the media. On the other hand, the breadth necessarily means patchy coverage, and links or shared interests between separate projects may remain scarce, which means that assessing the outcome as one research programme is not easy.

The evaluation is based on the following documents provided by the Academy of Finland and Programme Director Päivi Hovi-Wasastjerna:

1. Research report from each project
2. Programme evaluation form from each project

3. Co-ordinator's report; and
4. Päivi Hovi-Wasastjerna (ed.), Media Culture (Publications series of the University of Arts and Design Helsinki, 2003)

In order to compare doctoral dissertations produced in the projects with what was expected, we also asked the Academy of Finland to provide us the original applications of each project.

In assessing the programme we have quite closely followed the instructions given to us by the Academy. Judging by the materials on which the evaluation is based, we concentrate on evaluating the academic and scientific quality; the success of the implementation of the programme goals and objectives; the contribution to researcher and expert training; collaboration and networking; and the relevance and applicability of research results. Finally, after concluding our assessment, in the final section we present our recommendations for the future.

2 Academic and scientific quality of the Media Culture research programme

As said above, the memorandum of the programme is very wide. Unsurprisingly, this considerable diversity in the themes covered by the programme hindered coherent co-operation between individual projects. One reason for this is that the Academy of Finland has not been quite successful in balancing a definition of the breadth in the goal and aims of the programme with the size of funding which is available in the end. This creates a rather difficult position for the project leaders applying for funding and co-ordinating the funded programmes.

As a general assessment of the overall programme it can be stated that two thirds of the projects have an internally coherent structure and have a fair or clear project leadership or project co-ordination. Where the project coordinator has been more committed and/or where the coordinator has been freed from at least part of his or her other obligations the project has been most coherent and best been able to meet the goals set out for finalising PhD projects within the programme.

The scientific contribution of individual projects to media research can be of different kinds – empirical, theoretical, or methodological. Most projects in this programme have made a contribution in the empirical sense. A few have focused on theoretical and/or conceptual development while we see little explicit reflection on methodological advancement. In terms of innovation, the research projects represent a great variety. Some projects have been very pioneering and broken new ground theoretically and/or empirically while others have focused on building up data-bases or survey data with little time left for analysis.

In the research programme there is also variety among the research projects in their means and intensity of relating to existing discourses of media and cultural studies. It seems that the international dialogue was not fully accomplished – most of the research projects used and referred to the international literature but did not equally contribute to it. The contribution to media research was made mainly in relation to the national media community. Some research projects did take part for example in the scientific series found within the international scientific community within the chosen field of study. Individual project leaders in general could have been more concerned with and attuned to international publication of their project results, thus furthering the dialogue between international media research community and Finnish researchers.

Finally, a few notes on the research theme. It is understandable that the programme text (memorandum) was created within the Finnish media culture research environment, and considering the few possibilities for funding such research programmes it has been necessary to leave the theme and title of the research programme rather loose. Each research project was left to refer to its own definition of Media Culture. As the broad definition of the goals of the research programme did not offer any clear-cut questions to be answered, the programme

did not have a clear problem-oriented focus. Focus of that kind would have ensured the programme more focused projects and facilitated a closer co-operation between individual projects both theoretically and empirically.

3 Success of the implementation of the programme goals and objectives

From the material available for the evaluation, it was not clear what was considered to be the primary goal of the Media Culture research programme. Either the goal was to offer possibilities to conduct research in general, or the goal was to facilitate PhD training. In most projects there seemed to be an emphasis on PhD training. In the evaluation of the success of the PhD training, the evaluation panel compared the stated promises in the submitted applications and the amount of the actually defended dissertations by the end of the research programme period. There is an obvious and big discrepancy between the promises and actual outcome. However, although not all the PhD projects were finished it is also obvious that the programme enhanced them.

From our point of view, the two main reasons for not meeting the PhD training goals are under-funding and lack of time. As discussed earlier, the Academy was not necessarily able to balance between broad goals and the available funding. In terms of the time, three years is hardly enough to complete a dissertation, in particular if the dissertation research has not been started prior to the research programme.

It should be noted here that the names of the persons who finalised doctoral degrees within the research programme did not always match the persons who got funding from the research programme, or with the ones who were listed as authors of publications.

From the material available we have a clear impression that some of the conducted research is important and interesting in the field of Finnish media research. In terms of the content and quality of the research results there seems to be variety within the projects, although in some cases that cannot be fully evaluated since the majority of the articles published are written in Finnish.

The programme has created a valuable forum for developing theoretical and conceptual ideas within a self-defined community of Finnish media research. Particularly the joint seminars organised by the programme director facilitated this. According to the programme director, different projects participated in the bi-annual seminars to different degrees. All in all, the programme coordinator did an admirable job in creating an infrastructure of scientific exchange and co-ordination. In addition to this, she has been instrumental in securing the visibility of the programme results for the general public.

The entire research programme was invited to join the following seminars and activities:

The opening seminar in Helsinki, September 1999
    Invited speaker: Professor Johan Fornäs

Viestintä, viisaus ja vastuu (Communication, Wisdom and Responsibility) in Helsinki, February 2000
    Keynote presenters: Professor Noshir Contractor (Department of Speech Communication and Psychology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA) and Professor Roza   Tsagarousianou (University of Westminster, UK)

Representation of Media Culture research programme at Tieto 2000 (Information 2000) fair event, in Helsinki, February 2000

A 'countryside' seminar in Kauniainen, September 2000
    Invited lecturer: Professor Roger Silverstone (London School of Economics and Political Science, UK)

Joint seminar with Information (Tieto) research programme in Helsinki, February 2001
    Invited lecturer: Professor Jean Claude Burgelman (Freie Universitet, Belgium)

Joint seminar with the National Technology Agency of Finland, (Tekes) in Helsinki, August 2001

Seminar in Kirkkonummi, May 2002
    Invited speaker: Ilkka Tuomi PhD (Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, EU/Sevilla, Spain)
    Guest: Professor Knut Lundby (University of Oslo/InterMedia, Norway)

Final seminar in Helsinki, November 2002

The role of the project leaders has been crucial for the success of the individual research projects as well as the whole programme. It seems as if there has been little incentive for the individual project co-ordinators to take on a role of scientific leadership. In terms of the scientific and administrative co-ordination, the project leaders' effort and success varied to a great degree.

The research programme has been able to enhance the visibility of media and cultural studies and research as such. The enhancement of the inter- and multidisciplinary research has mainly been done in the individual projects, and in one case, between two projects. Multidisciplinarity as a goal can be difficult to achieve, and in this research programme too, more could have been accomplished. However, the programme clearly facilitated networking among young scholars, and it is not unreasonable to anticipate deeper and more genuine inter- or multidisciplinary research projects or results in the future in the field of media and cultural studies.
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4 Contribution to researcher and expert training

As a result of the Media Culture research programme, there are a total of 15 doctoral dissertations already finished and published or at the moment in the assessment process. The figure is impressive but only about half of what was expected in the original applications.

The evaluation panel was interested to know in what ways and how well the research programme was integrated with doctoral training provided by the national dgraduate schools. Unfortunately, from the material available for evaluation this cannot be evaluated.

The main concern for doctoral training in a programme like this is the programme period – three years is simply not enough to finish the PhD degree. It was clear from the research reports provided by the research projects that the dissertations that were completed within the programme period were already started earlier. Thus the programme funding mainly made it possible to finalise the dissertations.

5 Collaboration and networking

When evaluating the collaboration and networking in the context of the research programme, we can distinguish the following four dimensions of collaboration:
– internal collaboration within the projects
– internal collaboration within the programme
– collaboration and networking with other media scholars in Finland
– international collaboration.

Individual projects have met the goals of networking and collaboration to different degrees. The variety is due to the differences and traditions in research as well as differences in project organisations. The projects have had rather different profiles in terms of the ways in which and the extent to which the individual projects communicated to the 'outside world.'. In some cases both scientific publications and visibility to the larger public have been considerable.

Based on the evaluation reports written by the project leaders it is clear that several project leaders have not recognised their instrumental role in the research programme. The project leaders have been (or should have been) instigators of ideas, knowledge and collaboration within the programme as a whole. It seems that the project leaders and even less the individual researchers have not been aware of the research programme as a whole or the joint functions or possibilities for it.

6 Relevance and applicability of research results

The relevance of the research in this research programme has been in contributing to building theoretical and conceptual frames in the field of media and cultural studies. The programme has concentrated on the everyday practices as the main concept or viewpoint, and that has offered an important conceptual framework. The framework has been most significant for the more practical research to test and suggest new ways of using information and communication technology. All in all, further research can be built upon these results.

Some of the individual projects had an important societal relevance and the researchers were able to communicate their research results to a larger audience.

All in all, within the given conditions, the media culture research programme succeeded quite well in strengthening the position of media and cultural studies in Finland and in broadening its scope as an inter-disciplinary field of research. In the future, the field will inevitably benefit from the new perspectives. Correspondingly, disciplines that have been marginal to the field will gain new insights about how to approach the media from the international community of media and cultural studies. However, by the end of the first media culture research programme it is not quite clear how well such cross-fertilisation will work, because due to the broad scope and loosely defined aims of the programme networks of communication or co-operation between and even within the projects left room for improvement.

7 Recommendations for the future

We believe that the model for these kinds of research programmes is taken directly from the natural and technical sciences, which operate with continuous research groups that receive funding from a variety of sources. Only rarely does research in the social sciences and humanities take place in groups, projects or programmes and thus, the social sciences and the humanities would deserve their own research and funding structure that is different from the natural sciences. If the principle or the sense of working in a community or in groups is going to be used, then the roles and the links within the community and group (project, programme) should be carefully planned and thought out. Funding through a programme like this, in our mind, is best used when the research groups have been established beforehand or they have a continuous existence.

Research in the natural and technical sciences easily produces articles in international fora that are neatly integrated as part of a dissertation – quite often the dissertations are collections of published articles written by individuals or research groups. In the social sciences and humanities, the individual articles and dissertation work are regarded as different kind of processes. If the Academy of Finland considers the internationally published articles (as part of dissertation research or not) as the way to measure the productivity, it is recommended that the Academy clarifies this in its instructions for the individual project applicants.

Given that this is the first large research programme in media and cultural studies, it signals that there has been and continues to be a clear need for a programme of this kind. The next programme within the field of media culture needs not to cover all the possible areas or approaches of study. Instead, it is recommended that for example as a continuation of this programme, a more narrowly focused programme would do justice and have a decisive importance.

Programmes like this should last at least four years as is the case for equivalent programmes for example in Norway and Denmark. Doctoral students who are chosen for the research projects within the research programme should get full-time funding for the entire programme period (suggested four years). If a student begins his or her dissertation research with the programme funding, three years may barely be enough to finish the actual project, let alone to complete the evaluation process.

The Academy of Finland seems to apply the policy that when the financial resources available to distribute are less than expected (as in this programme, where the funding originally proposed by the Research Council to the Board of the Academy was cut by half), the council yet tends to accept several projects and each project is simply granted less funding. In this case, as compared with the applications, the funding of the projects was cut by thirty per cent on average. The recommendation is that in the future, if there is less funding to be shared, the number of projects should olso be fewer or, alternatively, it should be somehow secured that the chosen projects can be carried through with less funding. There is

a great risk that the quality of the individual projects suffers when the funding is severely cut. For the PhD students in particular this means that they cannot complete their dissertation before having to start looking for more funding, perhaps only available in a project with different problematics and objectives. It is recommended that the projects would be guaranteed such minimum funding which entitles each project to the participation of three full-time researchers instead of several researchers who each spend a few months in the project.

It seems that the best projects are the ones where the project leader has been closely involved in the research project and PhD training. It is also recommended that the research programme structure is to be developed to consider the measures to choose committed individual project leaders. The ways to do this are for example:

1) The project leaders are evaluated based on their actual activity. This includes the evaluation of the ways in which they have in their leadership activity shown an effort in being part of and developing the programme. The reported actions could be compared with the statements in the application process, which, as suggested here, could entail a section where the project leaders state the general principles or the possible ways in which they are going to contribute to the whole programme (in terms of their own research), to the general collaboration between different projects, and to the collaboration within their own project.

2) Project leaders state in the application how much the project is estimated to require their time. Half of this requirement should be provided (funded) by the Academy of Finland and half by the project leader's university. The ways in which the time has been used can be assessed after the project time is up.

3) The project leaders could be appointed to and constitute an executive programme board to support the programme director.

4) The project leaders could form a board that functions on a rotating system where each year one of the project leaders acts as a general director for the research programme, and simultaneously has the opportunity to concentrate on his or her own research within his or her research project.

The importance of and the requirement for international relations, application of international standards, as well as international publishing should be stated in the original requirements for the acceptance of a research project, and not only to be assumed implicitly. It is recommended that the Academy of Finland should require more internationally published articles in refereed journals or quality monographs. The ways to get more internationally published works are e.g. 1) the preference of the so-called article dissertations, or 2) the insurance for the PhD students to get full funding, or 3) co-publishing.

It is suggested that in order to enhance the quality of the research projects as well as the commitment to ensure high research quality, a certain part of the funding

available would be reserved for additional reward grants, which would be available by the end of the research programme for the best project or for the three best, or for the project which was best able to meet the goals stated in the application. This would also facilitate the continuation of good research work. The evaluation panel could decide on which project gets the prize. The quality of the projects would be evaluated based on the selection of 3-5 articles of the most important findings of the project or based on the individual reports/statements of the main results (by each researcher who took part in the project). These articles and/or statements would be included with the research reports.

As it has been evident in the material available for evaluation, the projects that have been most coherent are the ones where the students are from the same department as the project leader. The students have been the project leader's own students, and the project leader has had a personal interest in furthering the PhD students' projects. This however should not diminish the importance or the role of inter-departmentality. To further the quality of doctoral training and the efficient use of resources, it is recommended that there would be closer co-ordination between the research programme and the national graduate schools.

APPENDIX

**Research projects, their leaders, and the share of funding within the
Media Culture research programme were**

Citizens, Health and the Changing Media Culture
    Project leader: Professor Mariam Ginman, Åbo Akademi University
    Share of funding: 2.4 million Finnish marks

Information Technology, Media and Cultural Interpretations
    Project leader: Professor Seppo Knuuttila, University of Joensuu
    Share of funding: 1.7 million Finnish marks

(E)merging Finnish Media Culture: Encounters between Authors, Text and Youth
at the Millennium
    Project leader: Professor Minna-Riitta Luukka, University of Jyväskylä
    Share of funding: 1.05 million Finnish marks

Teleidea: Learning and Media Meet in Cyperspace
    Project leader: Professor Kari E. Nurmi, University of Lapland
    Share of funding: 0.8 million Finnish marks

Sound of Fury – Media Culture and Everyday Life in Finland of the 1960s
    Project leader: Professor Matti Peltonen, University of Helsinki
    Share of funding: 0.8 million Finnish marks

Media Economics, Content and Diversity
    Project leader: Professor Robert G. Picard, Turku School of Economics and
Business Administration
    Share of funding: 2 million Finnish marks

A Common National Culture – A Mission Impossible? Information and
Entertainment in the History of Finnish Radio and Television Programmes 1945 –
2000
    Project leader: Professor Raimo Salokangas, University of Jyväskylä
    Share of funding: 1.9 million Finnish marks

Media Usage and the Transformations of Everyday Experience
    Project leader: Professor Jukka Sihvonen, University of Turku
    Share of funding: 1.4 million Finnish marks

The Power of the Gene
    Project leader: Professor Esa Väliverronen, University of Helsinki
    Share of funding: 1.5 million Finnish marks

The Media Culture Research Programme, funded by the Academy of Finland during 1999-2002, was established to develop a new field of research. The aim of the programme was to look at how communication in modern society is framed by major structural factors, and how the cultural meaning of media is shaped and influenced by everyday uses of media. The programme particularly focused on four themes: media culture and the individual's competencies, the media industry and markets, media contents, forms and meanings, and the media, power and community.

The report of an international evaluation panel addresses the result of the Media Culture Research Programme, especially the programme-level added value and lessons learnt from the implementation of the programme, making recommendations for the future of this field of research and for research programmes as a funding instrument.