



Design Forum Finland Helsinki, Finland

Kristina Noor

First of all I'd like to thank Ingrid for inviting me. I'm here to tell you about design support and promotion in Finland. My presentation is in 3 parts: I'll tell you about Design Forum Finland, our activities and the current position of Finnish design, then I'll tell you about two projects in the field of design support and give you two examples of projects to develop creative industry companies.

As a promotional organisation for Finnish design our mission is to promote Finnish competitiveness and welfare, promote the widespread utilisation of design in both the economy and society. The Finnish Society for Crafts and Design, which maintains Design Forum Finland, was created in 1875, so we have 130 year history behind us doing design promotion.

We aim to serve a whole different range of design actors, from art-oriented craftsmen and designers to manufacturers of design products and design consultancies, as well as the more innovation and technology oriented industrial companies using design as a strategic tool.

(Here are) our most important target groups, (this) shows the level of design integration as we move along the scale. Also the commercialisation and international potential for different design actors grows as we move from the left to the right and then also the effect on GDP and the whole Finnish economy. The reason why we don't want to limit ourselves to a particular target group is that for example among the individual designers we might spot some new design talent or innovative new thinking which has real commercial and growth potential and we don't want to miss those opportunities or stop these designers and they can then move upwards on the scale. And in addition to these target groups we also have services for the media and the general public.

This image on the upper left shows how we regard design disciplines from a broad view. Traditionally we have concentrated on promoting actors and activities of industrial and product design, but in our new strategy we are also targeting marketing firms such as advertising firms, digital design firms operating in the gaming industry – a growing industry in Finland at the moment – also the brand design companies which have been forming lately from the advertising companies and other companies working with other design disciplines would be added to this, this is just an overview.

We believe that most probably in the future some of these companies will merge and cooperate and may offer the same services. And this will make it easier also for the client companies that are marked here in the middle, the euro mark, to acquire all the design services that is required for its production process from only one actor who can offer all the services from within one company or have the cooperation network.

Last year we carried out a research where we saw the current position of Finnish design both on a national and international level. We found out that Finnish design is still mostly known for its individual designers, design objects and design firms – for its history and glorious past and heritage. Names such as Alvo Alvaar, companies such a Nokia are well known in Finland but also outside as well. According to our benchmark study, the same thing applies for Italy and Denmark at the moment whereas the UK, South Korea and Japan are known to promote design as part of the innovation system and as an innovation driver.

This is also the direction Finland's design promotion should move in the future, the growth potential and where the new markets are.

Finland is already known to be strong in design education and research and of course we have a strong base of technology and innovation oriented companies which forms a strong base for design innovation but somehow this is not yet transferred into the design promotion being done.

This illustrates what this means in terms of the level of design integration as we move from enterprises, design as a cultural hero, so to say, towards emphasising design as an innovation driver. The integration of design into business and industry deepens as we move along the scale. First from design being form and function to a product, to design integrated to mass production, all the way to design being integrated into a company's entire business process and strategy – in R&D, in production, in driving, etc.

So the other aim is to have a holistic approach to design and to increase the integration of design as an innovation tool in all aspects of industry.

In our research about the promotion of Finnish design we also regarded the entire field of Finnish design quite critically. The activities done for promoting Finnish design, the actors operating in the Finnish design field and the support functions for increasing the use of design in business and industry. The blue spots indicate the areas where Finland is already regarded to be quite strong and the white spots indicate where we still need to develop ourselves. Many of the developing areas involve functions of integrating design more effectively into businesses and developing the business know-how of designers. We also need to do more networking of producers, designers and other organisations.

So how do we go about improving these issues? First I'm going to tell you briefly about what Design Forum Finland does. Our more traditional forms of design promotion include the arranging of design competitions, awarding prizes and arranging exhibitions. The Fennia prize which takes place every two years, is awarded to companies for the successful use of design. The annual Kaj Franck design prize goes to an established designer or team of designers with a sum of professional achievement and a long history of doing design in Finland and abroad. The Young Designer of the Year award is given to a promising young designer or designers. In association with the competition and prizes we always have an exhibition and arrange seminars and discussions presenting the views of leading design professionals and other actors in the design field.

The Young Forum exhibition is organised every 4 years, a review of young design presenting new names and fresh ideas from Finland. In addition to our own exhibitions, Design Forum provides design organisations and schools the opportunity to arrange their own exhibitions in our spaces. Our exhibitions are not only held in Helsinki but also regionally and internationally. In addition to the awards and exhibitions, we offer PR and communication services to the media and individual designers and design firms.

Our promotion activities include marketing campaigns and events such as the Designer of the Month campaign. We also offer further consulting, for arranging design competitions, this being one way of getting companies acquainted with design.

JV: Could you repeat that?

KN: We consult with companies in arranging their own design competitions, so if they want to have a design actor to design their product. This is a good example of a company called Oiyallus. They had a chain of stores selling all kinds of stuff that was quite cheap and with the competition they wanted to raise their image about being also a design company and to promote Finnish designers. All the winning products are currently in mass-production and the designers are getting their royalties.

We also coordinate an association called the Design District Helsinki which has about 150 members at the moment and has been operating for two years. It is an area full of creative actors, design shops, fashion stores, art galleries. The design museum is located in the area, of course we are also there and the aim is to market the area together with the actors to tourists and to the media and it has received lots of attention among international tourists and the media. We also have two design shops, one in the city centre and one at the airport (run by Design Forum Finland).

We are also engaged in several big international projects. We prepared an export strategy for Finnish design last year together with several other cultural areas. We were asked to do this by the Ministry of Education which is running a Cultural Exports Unit and it's a unit where different ministries are involved. The ministry of education, foreign affairs, trade and industry and also the financial ministry – it's quite a historical unit because it's the first time 4 ministries are working in such close cooperation.

The purpose of our international projects is to bring Finnish design actors together and coordinate design related international activities in order to increase their effectiveness and we aim to create platforms from which individual product designers and design firms can act. We also seek to develop innovative methods to promote Finnish design abroad.

The objectives of our international projects are to make Finnish design known internationally and increase the export of Finnish designers, design products and services. Also to find firms and designers, new producers, possible buyers and distribution channels and also open collaborations between Finnish designers and local actors. We also try to influence the political and corporate decision makers in issues related to design and increase Finnish design's media visibility and also reach the general public.

In our international projects we engage in activities on three levels. The first one is the expert and opinion leader level where we bring together influential politicians, business leaders, design actors and researchers to discuss design issues. This is organised in the form of a top level meeting. On the second level we organise promotional activities for designers and design firms. Many times we gather companies operating in a particular discipline – for example fashion or furniture. The means for this depend on the type of firms, could be international fairs, fashion shows, etc.

IV: If you organise this do you (get funding from the ministry)?

KN: It depends on the size of the company. If it's an SME – of course the companies have to pay for participating, we don't pay for the activities – we coordinate and arrange a platform and network for them to be able to cooperate more easily abroad. The ministry for trade and industry usually covers about 40-50% of the costs.

JV: This includes fashion?

KN: Finnish fashion is on the rise at the moment. We are going to Paris next year!

IV: ??

KN: It's the ministry who do that. In international projects we try to get big and small companies working together. So forest industry might be a wood processing company, a big company which maybe has a new innovation for processing wood which furniture companies could utilise. So we not only do matchmaking between Finnish and international actors but also between Finnish companies, for them to find new forms of cooperation. We still have some forests left in Finland!

And the third level is to reach the general public and the media. It might be that we arrange exhibitions or take part in cultural festivals and in forthcoming years we are going to have big international projects, we're going to Paris in 2008 and are planning to go to New York and Russia in a few years time.

IV: In 2008 in Paris? Special location?

KN: It depends, in different kinds of locations. We are probably going with the fashion designers to Paris Fashion Week and then we're going to have an exhibition at the Musee des Art Decoratif and then probably an architectural exhibition at the ?? which has just opened in Paris. Other events are planned.

IV: How long for?

KN: 3 months. It's a whole cultural season which presents Finnish music, dancing, art, so we get support from other cultural activities as well, it's a huge marketing campaign.

I want to tell you about a design project and a design programme aimed at increasing the use of design in firms and the DesignforBusiness.fi internet service which we are coordinating. The background for creating this service is that SMEs do not use and understand the advantages of design as (much) as they could and they lack the knowledge of how to buy design services and engage with design. There has also been a lack of central coordination and communication of design related issues in Finland, a common coordinating body has been missing, so we decided to take that role in this project. In our benchmark studies we found out that other promotional organisations in other countries had created similar kinds of web services.

The web service was set up by Design Forum Finland and these are our most important partners. The key centre, the Employment and Economic Development centre working under the Finnish Ministry of trade and industry has been our major financier in this project. The main objective of the website has been to gather, provide and transfer design related information and in general increase design know-how in SMEs. Also the aim is to lower a firm's threshold of becoming users of design and buyers of design services as well as to connect SMEs and design consultancies together. For many SMEs this web service might be the first step to getting acquainted with design related issues. The site is also a support tool for designers and design consultancies to market their own services.

The case study section is one of the most popular – you probably have the same experience that telling about the experience gets other companies not yet using design more motivated about the issue. The design and design consultancy databank is maintained by the designers

associations and the designers can be searched by different criteria: design discipline, field of specialisation, region or company size. There are many individual designers on the databank as well.

IV: You put everyone on? You don't have selection?

KN: The designers association has already done the selection of who can be their members. We have had some challenges with this because we would like to include other designers and design forms, such as advertising agencies, to the databank and the associations are not OK with the issue. But we're going to continue with the challenges we have had with the web service. It hasn't been that easy to have this kind of a website working. We don't have the financial resources to have the website up-to-date and active. (*general laughter*) Everyone has the same challenge. We have a web editor but she's doing lots of work with our own site, I'm in charge of this website and I only have a few days a month, if that, for it. Also the content production and information delivery from our partners has been quite difficult because of course it's not quite number 1 on their list and also the outsourcing of getting content for the site, for instance using freelance writers, has been quite difficult because there is always some level of involvement on our part – contacting the company, explaining to what this is all about and why we would like to have their case on the web pages and agreeing on issues.

I already mentioned the challenge with the databank – first of all not getting all the designers and consultancies that we would like to have on there. At the moment the most professional design consultancies don't want to be on the databank because they don't want to be associated with more art oriented and not-so-business oriented designers which can be on the databank so they don't see the advantage. In the future we will have to find some solutions to this. And of course the internet environment is quite challenging, there are so many changes all the time, new requirements for the interface and updating, etc, etc. But despite these challenges we haven't given up hope yet. Our development plan is to bring the service outside the internet, so to say. Design Forum is planning to activate cooperations on a regional level and start regional cooperation by arranging seminars and networking for SMEs and design consultancies and we are going to increase our cooperation with regional employment & economic development centres which are located in the most important cities and regions in Finland. We are also going to increase our cooperation with design schools, R&D centres and we're mapping out new potential partners who could be part of not only the work service, but part of our promotional activities as well.

And through this we aim to develop the web service itself and develop a databank on a regional level as well and once we have the registers we hope for them to be active and get the information on the different designers and consultancies working in the different areas. We are going to focus this web service on the case study section and developing of the design consultancy register.

Of course the regional development centres have their own databanks so through them we hope to get contact with the SMEs as well.

GR: So this is a database just for your own use?

KN: Yes, for marketing purposes of the web service and our activities.

KN: I now move on to tell you about the Design Start programme which is provided by the employment and economic development centres, there are around 15 of those located around Finland. They operate under the Ministry of trade and industry.

The Design Start programme is a nationwide design development programme for enterprises, especially SMEs. It's a consultation carried out by executive design consultancies on an

enterprise or a product. It could be a production enterprise who have a need to develop the vital characteristic and appearance of their final product or need to develop their company image and profile. Also newly established enterprises can have the advantage of participating in the programme for them to conceptualise and develop their product or service idea and then established enterprises can enter the programme to develop their identity.

The objectives are to identify and clarify the design requirement of a company's product, service or image. To provide company management with a clear view of the content, realisation prospects and the costs of the design project and to provide an illustrated and written proposal on the appearance and structure of the company's product, service or graphic image.

These are the steps of the programme. First of all, of course, the company has to have the desire to participate in the programme and be suitable for it. The various issues are discussed together with the regional TE centre Design Start product manager after which a suitable design consultant is chosen for the company. 'Suitability' means that big companies can't get into this programme because it is heavily subsidised by the Ministry and it also depends where they are in Finland. For example, in south Finland the competition is so fierce that companies do not get into this programme because the Ministry feels it is already market priced and companies operating in the north of Finland get into this programme more easily.

The programme itself is in two stages which are 1 plus 3 days accordingly. In the first stage, called 'The First Stage', the consultant outlines the design requirements, defines the design objectives of the company and determines the prerequisites and costs for realising the design project. After this the company itself decides whether to continue to the next stage or whether to abandon the project. In the next stage, the 3 days, the consultant engages in concrete design planning and clarifies the design requirements outlined in the first stage. In this stage the company gets a proposal on the characteristics and appearance of the product, service or graphic image in question. The consultant also does a final report and gives feedback to the company on further measures. After this the company can still apply for another 5 days of consultancy. The cost of this programme, the 1 plus 3 days, is 420 euros for companies which have operated for 3 years or less and it is double, 840 euros, for companies that have operated longer. It's cheap, and of course you can also divide the days into smaller parts.

JV: How much does it really cost?

KN: At least double.

IV: Is it only one designer?

KN: It includes doing the report. Usually it's one designer from the consultancy that is appointed, there is a selection process involved.

IV: How do you select which designer?

KN: Many times companies have to apply for the designer, but many times they might have heard of a designer. There's a list of designers that have been selected for the programme.

??: You mention design requirements ... ??

KN: I don't know the criteria exactly but of course the (design) company has to have experience already, it can't be a newly established design consultancy and of course they have to have a strong portfolio on which to operate.

(The programme can produce results quickly) for example for packaging design, during the 4 days companies have been able to get the packaging design ready and into production. Of course the challenge here is to get the companies to use designers after the programme has finished at full price and that hasn't been realised yet on a wide scale.

IV: Who pays the other half (of the costs)?

KN: The Ministry of trade and industry.

The programme was inaugurated in 1999 and the latest figures are that around 1,000 companies have passed through this programme. At the moment it's about 200-250 companies a year and the third most popular programme run by the centre. There's an internationalisation programme and a business planning programme that are more popular.

?: Is it used to develop new products or to solve design problems?

KN: It could be both. I know of a lighting company who used to do outside lighting and with the Design Start programme they developed lighting products that have done really well.

IV:??

KN: The design consultant goes into the firm and during the first day looks at the whole situation of the company and makes some suggestions for the company of where they could use design to improve on what they do and the company's position of how to do that.

IV: You have these three days and you come to the solution. Is it the same designer who works on this project?

KN: It's up to the company to decide.

I'm going to go quickly through some other projects aimed at the creative industries, to develop business know-how and improve design firms.

The first is the Vision 2009+ project which is subsidised about by the same employment and economic development centre and managed by Diges which is an important partner of ours. Diges is an organisation for developing the creative industries. The participants are SMEs from design, music, animation and audio-visual industries, and the objective is to improve their business, to develop common ideas and projects both inside and between the different creative industry clusters and to get them to network with each other.

We operate as a partner and for example we recruited the suitable design companies for this. The companies who participate really need to be un-prejudiced and ready to make brave changes to their operation. The project lasts 1 year and is compiled of practical training sessions covering issues such as strategy, economic planning and internationalisation. It includes workshops and ideation days, two days altogether, individual mentoring and consultation for business planning and a sort of foresight research and building of future scenarios, also this kind of 'crystal ball' discussions to get them to focus more with their operations. The programme is still going on and there have been many good experiences. Companies have experienced growth and had new customers and this is the first time that design companies are involved in this project and the results are really positive.

The last project is the Sile project, which provides consulting services for the creative industries. Its aim is to develop and clarify creative industry firms' business models, to speed up their product development processes and to find them technology partners and introduction channels. This project gives first free advice and then subsidised consulting for developing their business. Again funded by the Finnish Ministry of trade and industry, the project started in 2004 and will continue to the end of 2007. We have been a partner in this project for a year now and since it started 600 firms have gone through the programme and 40 of these, in this year, have been design firms.

The reason for developing this kind of programme for associated industry is the fact that content business and the creative industry are challenging and rapidly changing kinds of industries and the majority of these businesses are really small. The main objective is to

develop their business know-how, products and networks and so accelerate their growth. It also has a three stage process. 1st step is a clinic meeting, 1 hour with the firm where the current situation is discussed. This is, of course confidential. Afterwards either the experts say it's a good idea to continue to the consultancy stage or they look for other ways to help the company because sometimes the company might be so near the beginning of operations that there's no advantage to them in having consultation. The clinic meeting is free of charge. The next stage would be either the 'Refinery' day or going straight to consulting. The Refinery day can be divided into two half days – the firms situation, strategy and business plans are gone through more deeply than in the first stage. The cost of this is 100 euros, so again cost shouldn't be a barrier for the companies. The last stage is when specialised consultants concentrate on specific needs of the company, something to do with R&D, business planning, legal issues, etc. The cost of the consulting is 155 euros per day and extra consulting costs 330 euros.

Thankyou very much for your attention.

For more information on Design Forum Finland visit their site at:
www.designforum.fi

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