

## **ETHO workshop 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> April 2019 hosted by Aalto University**

### **Introduction:**

ETHO is short for European Technical Heads Organization and is a fairly new player and have only held two workshops before, so this was the third. According to the organizers the number of participants this time was dramatically increased, with more than 130 coming in from nearly all northern European countries (we were 6 from KHIO and 11 from Bergen), mainly technical employees from various art & design universities, perhaps the most prestigious being the RCA (Royal College of Arts) in London.

### *Disclaimer:*

*First of all, this is my own personal report, I do not guarantee that I have understood 100% all that was said and that it is truthfully recorded and repeated by me, I must confess that it is probably quite influenced by my own preconceptions and experiences. Further, there were two tracks that one could follow at the workshop, one was mainly for technical employees, and the second for more managerial staff. I was myself following track one and cannot therefore comment on what went on in track 2, but every day kicked off with plenary sessions as well, so we had something in common.*

### **Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> April:**

Opening address by **Tapio Koskinen** (conference host) and **Tuomas Auvinen** (Dean of Aalto University)

We were welcomed by the host, Tapio Koskinen, from Aalto ARTS, who gave some practical information about the workshop and what was happening when, and then gave the microphone to the dean of Aalto University, who held a profound and sincere welcome speech to us all – so that we all really felt included and indeed welcome, before giving the floor to the first speaker.

**Theme: *Service design – basics and applications (plenary)***

**Speaker: *Tuuli Mattelmäki*** (Head of department of Design) - **Institution: Aalto University**

Summary: Service design is surely a word we have heard bandied about, but perhaps without having a clear picture of what it is. So, what is it? It can be a lot of things, from a very limited and concrete way of solving a problem – say to make an app that makes it easier to buy public transportation tickets, to intricate and far-reaching solutions for complex problems. One important player in the market, KONE, says it like this: “Our mission is to improve the flow of urban life”! Service economy can be mobile service, collaborative service, sharing economy, safety, self-service, utilities, maintenance, digital platforms etc.

I got to thinking, why not use the service design idea to restructure and overhaul the way we do things at KHIO, towards a truly common destination? We all know there are bottlenecks and points of bad communication but hesitate to touch them. How can we do this? Start with the human (users, insights and empathy), then dare to challenge the existing (rethink, experiment), then co-create with others (again empathy, engagement, willingness and ability), via prototyping (mapping, test-cases) and finally finding new systems. Worth a think, surely?

**Theme: *Humorous Health and Safety (track 1)***

**Speaker: Hannah Pittman - Institution: London College of Fashion/University of London**

Summary: At the London college of Fashion they have been concerned about the challenge of giving correct H&S (health & safety) information to the increasing number of students of a varied cultural and language background. They felt that they used too much of their time “nagging” and “mothering” the students about what and what not to do, and their answer to this was to make videos using the students themselves as actors (and everything else) on such topics as “Don’t bring food & drink to the studios”, “Wear safe footwear” etc. The results were striking and effective, making the students much more H&S conscious.

**Theme: *The ideal of free access for a broad group of users: Managing workplace safety (track 1)***

**Speaker: Louisa Goldman - Institution: Zurich University of the Arts**

Summary: At The Zurich University of the Arts they have installed electronic “locks” to all the electrical machines of their workshops. During the daytime and when there is a technician on site they are unlocked and available for all, but after “office” hours students must unlock them using their key card and on weekends two cards must be used (two students) – AND Sundays are closed! This also leads to students often helping each other out. Abuse of the system can lead to blocked cards (students) and is mainly working even if it is built on trust. Liability in case of damages is a question although nothing serious has come up so far.

**Theme: *Using technology to mitigate the challenges of multicultural learning communities in use of workshops and studios (track 1)***

**Speaker: Sabin Garea - Institution: KABK**

Summary: Mr. Garea opened up by stating that a lot of the new students now coming through the Arts education often seem to be less “manually skilled”, something that is often seen as a problem. Instead of taking that position he offered that perhaps this could also be a good thing? To be a “tabula rasa” (a blank sheet) can surely also possibly open up to new experiences, usages and results? Perhaps this can even be some sort of a “salvation” for technologies or practices which might otherwise perhaps be threatened with extinction? He recommended a book, “The art of the maker” by Peter Dormer as a good example of this thinking.

**Theme: *A case study around innovative approaches to optimizing student engagement experience within the multidisciplinary resource centres (track 1)***

**Speakers: John Brennan & Stephen Larkin - Institution: University of the west of England**

Summary: This was a very expertly and fairly “theoretical” summary of how a college had restructured its facilities, hours and resources to fit the new and modern “pick and mix” demands from students and society, aiming to accomplish the “do more with less” commandment which is so prevalent these days. Their summary seemed successful, but was so professionally and seamlessly presented (read: very impressive but partially incomprehensible) that I wasn’t really sure what it was all about until question time. A challenge for us techies but would convince the bosses higher up, and as such it was a timely reminder to all us all that sometimes we have to speak a different language to be heard. But they were far from being pushovers to management, in fact they stated quite clearly that such a flexible attitude from the technical departments would be entirely subject to firm choices and commitments from the participating students, and no wavering allowed.

**After the last lecture on Thursday we had a full tour of all the marvelous new workshops in the Väre building** (the brand-new location of the Design college of Aalto university). All workshops are in fact on the same level, that is on the ground floor of the new building, and they are EXTENSIVE and impressive. As we were about 140 people, we were divided into 7 groups and our group guide was Mr. Janne Ojala, who is a bit of a maverick and knows many of these technologies intimately. Our tour took

about two hours and at the end of it I was overwhelmed. I have honestly never seen so many machines or workshops in my life, within the fields of metal, wood, ceramics, 3D-form, textiles, printing, filmmaking, photography, etc. etc. I know Finland is good at spending money at education (top nation with the Pisa tests etc.) but this was mind blowing. I'm afraid our (KHIO) effort of ten years ago pales in comparison. (We were quite modern.....10 years ago!)

## **Friday 5<sup>th</sup> April:**

### **Highlights from day 1**

Friday kicked off with a short summary between track 1 and 2 coordinators, and it fairly quickly became clear that we all (more or less) end up discussing the same issues, namely the conflict between “new” and “old” technologies and machinery. The pressure on resources, the widening gap between student expectations and reality and how can this be addressed? Is specializing the answer in a “shrinking” (college) market? Just like with hospitals which can't all have ace heart surgeons, perhaps the colleges need to choose too, shall we embrace the new or stick to what we know?

#### ***Theme: How to make the workshops an active educational space at the art academy (plenary)***

**Speaker: Vibeke Gieskes - Institution: Royal Academy of the Arts The Hague**

Summary: At this college the answer was to create something they call Individual Study Tracks, different workshops and students work together, and outside of their comfort zones. These study tracks exist alongside the more traditional faculties, but also cross or intersect them. Every student has to find his/her own path and commit to it, and balance concept and making until they find a solution. Two books were here recommended “The Craftsman” by Richard Sennett and “The Thinking Hand” by Juhani Pallasmaa.

#### ***Theme: Pedagogy in the “Stations” at Willem de Koonig Academy, best practices (track 1)***

**Speaker: Aldje van Meer - Institution: WdKA**

Summary: At the Willem de Koenig Academy they are trying to solve the “interactive problem” by establishing what they call STATIONS, which is a combination between workshop, classroom, project room and exhibition space, basically a space where they call all hang out while the work is being done and they also can do most of the things they need to do to finish the project. Tutors, technical staff and students would all collaborate in these stations, and of course more demanding technical work would still have to be done in the “heavier” workshops (H&S regulated work). At WdKA they have made a number of “Observations” (about how things did or did not work) which then resulted in certain “Principles” to guide future project work.

#### ***Theme: Shared use of facilities and infrastructure – working across disciplines (track 1)***

**Speakers: David Finney, David Edwards & Amber Taylor - Institution: Staffordshire University**

Summary: The Brits often have a certain self-deprecating humour, and these three had it in abundance. Both Davids basically told very funny and engaging stories about how they ended up in a teaching position at the university after years in the industry (careers in ceramics and animation respectively) and despite being quite anti-academic. Their view is that this benefitted the students in a very practical sense by simply asking “What can students do after their education”? And their answer was that the students must be confident enough in the technologies and “crafts” to be able to use them practicably. The last speaker here, Amber Taylor, was in the lucky situation of being able to create – from scratch – a brand new fashion department in two years. She could happily ignore all traditions and simply focus on what would make a new fashion department work for the (predominantly) “Generation Z” students that are in majority now. That means using internet platforms and social media to a much greater extent than what is usual, e.g. digitalizing out all technical instructions so that they are instantly available via laptop or phone.

**Theme: *Development of online induction courses for workshops and studios of art and design university (plenary)***

**Speaker: Antti Huittinen - Institution: Aalto University**

Summary: The very last speaker was from Aalto university, and dealt with how they are in the process of building up a really comprehensive website containing almost everything that students (and employees too, for that matter) can need in their daily pursuits at the college. This need arose from the fact that as the colleges have moved from site to site and become amalgamated and much bigger. So have student numbers, and it is impracticable (not to say impossible) to offer face to face (F2F) induction courses for everybody. So “media rich” online presentation is the answer, and they also employ the principle here of “flipped classroom” (NO: “omvendt læring”), which is quite exciting. This also extends to H&S, and almost all manner of things concerning college life. So, in that respect, we are back where we began, with Service Design!

**Post script (Executive summary?):**

It was a great relief to be part of this exchange of ideas, principally because it soon became clear that we all face the same challenges, fears and also hopes across the board of colleges, but how they choose to respond to this also varies greatly. It was a rich treasure trove to dive into to get ideas that can be tried out other places (perhaps even here) and I definitely feel more of a “sense of purpose” and also optimism, and me and the 5 others from KHIO that were there will start infecting everybody else now. More details will certainly come out later as we get to digest and discuss what went on (and it was a LOT) but we can already say that next year’s workshop will take place on April 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, but the place has yet to be determined. So, keep your ear to the ground (and your sighs on “heaven”!) One thing is for certain, **WORKSHOPS and TECHNICAL KNOWHOW will not stop being relevant anytime soon.**

On behalf of (absolutely nobody else but) myself

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