Author(s):	Kasvio, Antti; Anttiroiko, Ari-Veikko
Title:	Moving forward from the present experiences
Main work:	e-City : analysing efforts to generate local dynamism in the city of Tampere'
Editor(s):	Kasvio, Antti; Anttiroiko, Ari-Veikko
Year:	2005
Pages:	647-652
ISBN:	951-44-6525-3
Publisher:	Tampere University Press
Discipline:	Sociology
Item Type:	Article in Compiled Work
Language:	en
URN:	URN:NBN:fi:uta-201405301524

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Moving Forward from the Present Experiences

We hope that the materials included in our book have given the readers a good look both upon the overall dynamics of today's innovative regions and cities as well as into the various ways in which informational developments have been carried out and analysed during the last years in Tampere. Important research work related to these areas has been done as part of the eTampere initiative also in areas that haven't been covered in this collection – it is possible to mention for example the analyses about transformations going on in the world of work (Blom, Melin & Pyöriä 2003), studies about human-computer-interaction (Majaranta & Räihä 2002) or research on games and other new audiovisual cultural forms (Mäyrä 2002; Lehtonen & Herkman 2002). Still, this collection has perhaps offered at least some insights into those innovative processes and research activities that have been going on in this region during the last years.

In many ways the five-year initiative eTampere symbolises the particular way in which informational developments have been promoted in the Tampere Region during the last years. This initiative has received rather much publicity and it has raised many kinds of expectations. For example, already at a very early stage Manuel Castells and Pekka Himanen criticised the programme's self-representation as being 'often couched in the naïve terms of futurology' (Castells & Himanen 2002, 126). But, these same commentators stated also that 'the fundamental concept behind these words seems to be a major innovation on the prior policies of high-technology development. Indeed, the current trends in the expansion of the information society,

worldwide, point towards the increasing importance of the social uses of information technology. . . . To investigate how society adopts and shapes new information technologies, to advance research and development programs along these lines, and to support and launch new businesses on the basis of these strategic anticipations, is a bold project that could bring prosperity to Tampere and innovation to the world at large' (ibid.).

This is not the right place to present any final assessments about the extent to which the region of Tampere has been able to meet the very ambitious objectives set for its future development or the expectations directed towards its initiatives from the outside. The key activities are still continuing during the writing of these remarks, and the planned systematical evalutions about the results of eTampere have not been made yet. In any case, we assume that on the basis of materials presented in this book also some readers might be prepared to agree with our view that informational developments have been carried forward at Tampere in several different dimensions involving a multitude of actors and that there have been serious efforts to bring new strategic elements to these processes in order to create results that would also be socially and culturally feasible. On the other hand, the materials may give an impression that Tampere has not necessarily transformed yet into such a dynamically growing centre of new economic activities as was originally expected. The uses of new information and communication technologies in Tampere have perhaps not been entirely unique in comparison to developments going on in other comparable cities. Neither do the region's scientific accomplishments appear to have reached quite the level and visibility that was originally expected, even if significant progress has been made in certain areas of study.

The results of any development strategy are of course, at least to a certain extent, dependent upon the quality of their practical implementation. But in the case of Tampere, it is

important to consider the dramatic changes that have taken place in the external environment after the goals for the ongoing developmental activities were defined. For instance, planning of the eTampere programme took place at the height of the 1990s economic boom. Since then the burst of the stock market bubble and the worldwide crisis of the telecommunications industry have led into the ebbing away of just that economic wave on which Tampere was expected to continue its stride towards constantly increasing levels of affluence long into the present millenium. The whole Finnish economy has suffered greatly from these changes, and even if Tampere has not lost as many ICT jobs as the other leading Finnish growth centres, the city can no longer expect to reach similar rates of growth as it was able to enjoy in the late 1990s.

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From today's perspective, we could perhaps say that many of the analyses presented in this book have emerged from ideas developed during the late 1990s, and certain reminiscencies can be seen from the mental atmosphere that prevailed at that time. Nowadays we can only wonder how much the world has really changed since then. The information technology revolution may still be continuing and especially mobile telephony is spreading fast all over the world. New applications are taken to use in the advanced industrial countries, and the world wide web has developed into an organic part of our everyday activities. But the visions of information society no longer dominate the social and economic policies of advanced industrial societies in the same way they did during the late 1990s. Some social scientists have began to criticise the use of information society as a key metaphor incorporating the essence of ongoing societal changes. Many actors have started to look for fresh visions for future social and economic development even though the older ideas of

information society continue their existence, for instance, in the official policy rhetorics of many advanced industrial countries.

The efforts towards renewal can be detected also at the level of urban development strategies. In recent times many cities – including the City of Tampere – have either launched or are planning to launch new initiatives in order to promote the growth of their creative industries. Even though the ideas of 'creative city' originally developed by Richard Florida (Florida 2002) may mot be entirely free from the same hype that led to many ungrounded expectations during the late 1990s (see e.g. Mananga 2005, 90–106; Kotkin & Siegel 2004), such activities can also be seen as signs about the fact that urban competition is currently entering a qualitatively new stage. In the changed conditions, also the strategies of urban economic revitalisation must be reformulated.

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One of the recent times' most important macro-level phenomena has been the scale in which people living in China, India and many other developing countries are making efforts to abolish their long-standing poverty and to find themselves a role in the modern economy. This development has led to a significant increase in the worldwide supply of labour, and global job competition is reaching entirely new dimensions. Companies operating in advanced industrial countries have started to relocate activities into areas where the costs are lower and the prospects for market growth better than in their traditional environments. Even if the resulting faster worldwide economic growth will offer many benefits also for the advanced industrial countries, the same process puts them also in front of tightening global competitive pressures. One should take into account that even if initially the level of productivity in most business operations located in developing countries may still be on a relatively low level, the organisations operating in the developing countries are moving

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fast forward in their learning curves. Therefore also the advanced industrial countries must move continuously higher in the productivity ladder if they want to maintain their competitiveness despite cost levels that exceed significantly those prevailing in the new fast-growing areas.

In these conditions, it is evident that the processes of economic restructuring must proceed further with an accelerating pace in advanced industrial countries. These countries have to orient towards knowledge-intensive growth, and they must find increasingly sophisticated ways to use new information and communication technologies. Further scientific and technological innovations are needed in order to manage the very difficult resource constraints and environmental risks connected with the present worldwide economic growth. Thus the advanced industrial societies are sometimes said to be transforming into 'cybernetic empires' (Lafontaine 2004) that cannot any longer survive without the continuous functioning of extremely complex technological systems. At the same time, also the future of human species will be increasingly influenced by different kinds of posthuman developments. The dynamically developing urban centres are expected to function as forerunners of this process during the course of which many difficult civilisatory choices have to be made.

It is quite possible that these kinds of developments will dominate the societal renewal efforts and the research agendas in tomorrow's advanced industrial societies similarly to the visions of digital revolution and information society did during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Thus, even if much work remains still to be done in transforming Tampere into a real informational city and even if the eTampere activities will be continued further focusing upon certain specifically selected theme areas,* the local actors are nowadays prepared to move forward in their innovative activities and in the research work connected to them. They are

also willing to actively establish close cooperation with research teams and innovative actors in other cities sharing similar visions of future and of those challenges that need to be mastered before these visions can turn into reality.

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Endnotes

* The new so-called spearhead projects will deal with the promotion of entrepreneurship, the development of new electronic welfare services and certain carefully chosen areas of technological development.

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