

P R E S S E I N F O R M A T I O N

The Sound of Europe: The Conference's Visual and Musical Identity

The Ars Electronica Futurelab is using state-of-the-art information technology to develop innovative strategies for staging meetings, seminars and symposia.

The production of "The Sound of Europe" is pioneering new approaches to putting on such events facilitated by multimedia features. Cutting-edge communications and presentation methods help to structure themes and prolong their immediacy. This results in more intensive audience involvement in comparison to traditional situations in which a speaker stands in front of an audience to deliver an address, and this new approach produces a setting conducive to lively discussions. The upshot is to endow conferences and debates with a completely new quality.

At the EU's "The Sound of Europe" conference, prominent figures in the fields of politics, diplomacy, art, culture, science, media and business will convene January 27-28, 2006 in Salzburg, the birthplace 250 years ago of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Top priority on the conference's agenda is to host a broad debate about the significance and role of Europe, about tensions within the European Union and about concrete solutions to these problems. Special emphasis will be placed on a discussion of the role of art and culture in dealing with these issues. "The Sound of Europe" is the inaugural event of Austria's presidency of the Council of the European Union during the first half of 2006.

The media installations and infrastructure designed by the Ars Electronica Futurelab react to the program of events being held at the conference but do not intervene in or comment upon them; rather, these features support the discussions by providing recapitulations and analytical visualizations.

Several media art interventions provide a fascinating contrast to the panel discussions and complement the discourse in an inspiring way. The entire conference is thus endowed with a visual as well as a musical identity that is derived directly from the panels' topics and content rather than merely providing a decorative embellishment of them.

"Our media installations constitute a very fascinating way to reveal the astounding diversity of positions, insights and viewpoints of the conference's participants, attendees and staff. At the same time, we're developing new and more dynamic ways to stage public addresses by individual speakers," said Martin Honzik, the Ars Electronica Futurelab's project manager at "The Sound of Europe."

The multimedia installations and infrastructure set up for "The Sound of Europe" conference consist of three elements: first of all, there's the **custom-designed large-scale media display surfaces** spanning the entire periphery of the *Europasaal* (Europe Hall) in Salzburg's Congress Center; secondly, there are **interactive media installations** in front of and inside the conference venue; and there are several **media art interventions** that are an integral part of the conference's scheduled program and directly relate to the issues on which the proceedings will focus.

Linz's Ars Electronica Futurelab is responsible for the overall artistic conception and operative implementation of this mediatized environment.

1. Europasaal: Media Projection Screen and Multimedia Arena

The presentation of the addresses by the speakers in the *Europasaal* will be embedded within a medial *mise en scène* that encompasses the entire conference hall.

For its contribution to "The Sound of Europe," Ars Electronica Futurelab staffers are deploying a custom-made interactive media display (nine screens with a total area of about 160 m²), which will provide images of both the diversity of the topics and debates as well as the multifarious viewpoints of the participants. During each address, 12 so-called conference editors will be processing key words and statements culled from the speaker's remarks into graphic depictions. Statements and terms thus flow into the illustration of the addresses. At the end of each respective round, they will also remain displayed on the projection screens so that the content's presence can be prolonged. A multimedial arena makes it possible to hold keynote addresses, panels and intensive discussions. This innovative setting design is an effective way to eliminate the strict hierarchical separation of speaker and listeners that is typical of such situations. The audience participates more intensively and is more strongly integrated into the proceedings.

2. Interactive Installations throughout the Congress Center

Several media installations will be set up in front of and inside the Salzburg Congress Center to showcase a variety of European images and different ways of looking at Europe. The spectrum of these installations ranges from emotionally charged soundscapes portraying European diversity to cut-and-dried statistics.

"European Soundscapes"

A sound sculpture by artist Rupert Huber installed on the plaza in front of the Congress Center and in the adjacent park will reproduce various different European tonal landscapes—a harbinger of the conference that passersby will be enjoying during the days leading up to the big event. The cultural and social diversity of Europe thus becomes audible.

“Europe is Real”

Visitors ride an escalator to the conference venue’s first upper level, where they are immediately confronted by a large-scale projection screen displaying an image of the European flag. If, after stepping off the escalator, the visitor approaches the projection screen, that person is then depicted on-screen as a graphic symbol. The movement of the symbol on the screen then corresponds to the movements of the person, and this opens up a view of a satellite image of Europe that becomes gradually visible “behind” the European flag. If there is a sufficient number of people moving about in this area, then the view of the “real Europe” becomes a complete image.

“Leading Opinions”

Prominent figures from the worlds of art and culture and their perspectives on Europe are presented by the “Leading Opinions” installation in the Salzburg Congress Center’s lobby. Prior to the conference, each of the invited participants was asked to provide a statement in response to the question: “What does Europe mean to me?” The answers were combined with biographical data to create a dynamic, evolving visualization. The ultimate result is a European landscape of ideas that can be viewed not only onsite in Salzburg’s Congress Center but also on a TV channel available in the conference hotels.

“Landscape of Ideas”

This installation features a 12-meter-long map of Europe on which the geographical imagery has been augmented with statistical data and comparative values for all European countries. Integrated in this projection screen are two large-scale video monitors on which innovative visualizations enable conference participants to navigate through the statistical material.

For starters, these visualizations make use of the wealth of statistical data available from EUROSTAT. They also display the results of an opinion poll taken among conference participants. Plus, a network graphic created by Viennese institute FAS.research provides a vivid, easy-to-grasp visual representation of the European research landscape. Another facet of this project is Wikimap Europe, an interactive journal of the conference in which attendees and participants can inscribe messages and opinions.

Thus, "Landscape of Ideas" offers a striking depiction of highly complex European interrelationships, points of view and visions in a very inviting, easily accessible, user-friendly way.

3. Media Art Interventions

Embedded within the conference's schedule of events, these media art interventions provide a colorful contrast to the panel discussions and complement the discourse in an inspiring way. This is designed to endow the entire conference with a visual as well as a musical identity that is derived directly from the conference's themes and content rather than merely providing a decorative embellishment of them.

"Threshold to the Kingdom"; video by Mark Wallinger. This media art installation shows inbound travelers at the moment of arrival at the airport in Great Britain.

"January 27, 1945 – In Commemoration of the Victims of the Holocaust"; digital animation by Zachary Lieberman. January 27th, the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp, is international Holocaust Memorial Day. To mark this, an artistic work commemorating the victims of the Holocaust has been created for "The Sound of Europe" conference.

"This is Your Victory"; a remix of "Words that Won the War" by Martin Landquist and Stryngford Syntagma. This project utilizes audio material to take us back to the beginnings of the European Union.

"Faces of Europe"; portraits by Oliviero Toscani. 200 photos of European kids and young adults, the people who personify Europe's future. Extricated from the contexts of everyday life and inserted in front of the neutral background of the display screen, they illustrate modern Europe—a cross-section of our society, our cultures, our world.

“Strength and Opportunities of Europe”; a graphic representation of the results of an opinion poll about the current situation in Europe by Dietmar Offenhuber.

“Europe all Weather”; a “TV jam” by Thomas Schneider. What could better express the social and cultural similarities and differences to be found in Europe than TV programming. Cascading imagery amidst a cacophony of foreign tongues—the conference hall’s nine large-format display screens will deliver a presentation of the vibrant diversity as well as monotonous uniformity of the programming being broadcast by European television networks.

More information on the Ars Electronica Futurelab on the Ars Electronica Press Lounge **www.aec.at/press** or the Ars Electronica Futurelab Website **www.aec.at/futurelab**

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