

National Library of Finland launches Europe's first national e-program for crowdsourced archive digitization with Microtask

Online gaming experience combines entertainment and volunteer work for conserving Finnish cultural heritage

Helsinki, Finland – 8 February 2011 – The National Library of Finland announced today it has launched a national e-program for the digitization of Finland's historical documents and material. The first of its kind in Europe, the e-program **Digitalkoot** (Digital Volunteers) harnesses the power of crowdsourcing to mobilize people to help digitize millions of pages of archive material.

The e-program technology provider is Microtask, whose automated platform splits dull repetitive tasks into tiny microtasks and distributes them over the internet. Once carried out by interested microworkers around Finland or around the world, Microtask puts the results back together into a completed assignment.

In the first phase, The National Library of Finland's e-program consists of two online games. The online gaming experience provides both entertainment and the opportunity to contribute to the preservation of Finland's cultural heritage.

"We have millions and millions of pages of historically and culturally valuable magazines, newspapers and journals online. The challenge is that the optical character recognition often contains errors and omissions, which hamper for example searches," says Kai Ekholm, Director of the National Library of Finland. "Manual correction is needed to weed out these mistakes so that the texts become machine readable, enabling scholars and archivists to search the material for the information they need."

"Microtask loves the work you hate. With our technology, repetitive work can be split into smaller components and allocated to numerous people," says Microtask Managing Director **Harri Holopainen**. "In the Digitalkoot program, participants can do as much, or as little, work they want, where they want and when they want. We help turn routine work into fun, almost a parlor game."

The National Library of Finland aims to enhance the visibility, accessibility and usability of the Library's unique collections. Digital collections facilitate the use of cultural heritage materials in virtual environments. To date, four million pages of different types of texts from the 18th to 20th centuries have been digitized, but there still remain huge bulks of cultural heritage archived only in paper files. The e-program enables anyone to contribute converting portions of Finnish cultural heritage into a lasting format. The aim is to crowdsource thousands of volunteers to participate online utilizing modern technology developed in Finland.

"There is a constant flow of material, so we have a constant need for digitization. Everyone is welcome and everyone's contribution helps, whether they work five minutes or five hours. Our archives are national cultural heritage. I am proud that even such a small nation as we are able to launch something like this," Ekholm continues.

In the first phase, The National Library of Finland's e-program consists of two online games. In '**Mole Hunt**' (Myyräjahti), the player is shown two different words, and they must determine as quickly as possible if they are the same. This uncovers erroneous words in archived material. In '**Mole Bridge**' (Myyräsilta), players have to spell correctly the words appearing on the screen. Correct answers help badgers build a bridge across a river.

"We wanted to set up 'Angry Birds for the Thinking Person' – something which entertains but is also useful to us as a nation. Starting with a games application, we expect to attract schoolchildren interested in the Finnish language and history. Teachers can use our e-program for teaching purposes or school projects. Our program may also provide a hobby for the elderly or other people who want to stimulate their brain," Ekholm says.

In the next phase, the Digitalkoot e-program will be expanded to target also more serious history buffs.

“The coming new features enable people interested in a particular area to select and browse material related to their topic. If you want to know more about, say, the evolution of the key people who established the Finnish mining industry, digitizing will become much more motivating.”

The Digitalkoot e-program is launched on 8 Feb 2011 at 9 am CET. The games are internet-based. More information (in Finnish) is available on www.digitalkoot.fi.

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The National Library of Finland is the oldest and largest scholarly library in Finland as well as one of the largest independent institutes at the University of Helsinki. It is responsible for the collection, description, preservation and accessibility of Finland's printed national heritage and the unique collections under its care.

The National Library also serves as a national service and development centre for the library sector and promotes national and international cooperation in the field. www.nationallibrary.fi

Microtask loves the work you hate. We split repetitive tasks into tiny microtasks and distribute them over the internet. Once carried out by interested microworkers around the world, we put the results back together into a completed assignment. The quality of work is ensured by handing microtasks to more than one worker and cross-checking the results. With the automated Microtask platform, tasks are distributed to a very high number of microworkers in just seconds. Optimized workflow ensures efficiency, and game-like worker interface makes microworking an enjoyable experience. Microtask was founded in 2009 by four experienced serial entrepreneurs and is funded by Sunstone Capital and strategic private investors. For further information, please visit us at www.microtask.com.