

## **Media Lab Europe, The Ark and Temple Bar Properties Host Interactive Debate on Smoking and Its Effects**

Dublin, October 10<sup>th</sup> - A ground-breaking experiment aimed at discovering the dynamics that help shape 'public opinion' was launched this weekend by Media Lab Europe and the Dublin based children's cultural centre, The Ark.

TexTales is a large-scale installation with which people interact by sending SMS text message captions to a photographic display. The event dubbed "The Big Smoke" took place at Meeting House Square in Temple Bar in conjunction with Temple Bar Properties and focused on images and captions based on cigarette smoke and second-hand smoke. These images and captions were generated by young people and adults in and around Dublin.

The images were used to spark participation by passers-by who then entered their own captions in this new form of debate. Media Lab Europe teamed up with The Ark and local artist Michael Durand to launch this public debate on passive smoking and its effects. The Big Smoke represents one of an ongoing series of programmes examining the relationship between culture and technology held in partnership with Media Lab Europe and The Ark. "There is a long history of using the arts to engage the public with social and political issues. Today's digital technologies are allowing for dynamic forms of interaction between the viewer and a work of art resulting in new modes of creative and social expression," said Eric Fraad, The Ark's Creative Director.

The public was able to post captions to each smoking-related image via an SMS message, reflecting and supporting the collective dialogue among those present.

"Our goal is not to develop better ways of measuring public opinion, nor is it to connect citizens to their governments, nor is it even to create new kinds of consensus," explains Mike Ananny, Research Associate, Media Lab Europe. "Rather, we aim to better understand how public opinions emerge from comparing and contrasting individual perspectives."

The decision to focus on smoking was based on a desire to explore how attitudes to a timely issue of public concern evolve and are expressed. The initiative follows a separate Media Lab Europe tobacco-related experiment.

Earlier this year it unveiled Smoke Rings, a device that allows users to monitor environmental tobacco smoke and to simulate potential long-term health effects of passive smoking.

Researchers at Media Lab Europe displayed this device at the World Health Organization's meeting in Geneva in May. The wearable gadget takes readings of the amount of carbon monoxide and other constituents of tobacco smoke. Coupled with a simulation tool, it allows users, especially those who work in smoky environments, to see the affects of passive smoking.

"Media Lab Europe is not trying to take a stand on the smoking ban debate. Instead, we want to explore how people come to think about this and other issues that affect them both individually and collectively," said Carol Strohecker, leader of the Everyday Learning group.

**For Further information contact:**

John Mc Guinness  
Fleishman- Hillard Saunders  
01 6188459 / 087 6417451  
mcguinnj@fhs.ie

**About Media Lab Europe**

Media Lab Europe is an international research and innovation Lab. It is also the European research partner of the world renowned MIT Media Lab. Its interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to innovation provides a unique environment for exploring advanced research that facilitates the development of technologies that expand human potential right across society. Media Lab Europe is a not-for-profit organisation that supports its work through corporate, community, academic and public research partnerships.  
[www.medialabeurope.org](http://www.medialabeurope.org)

**About The Ark**

Opened in 1995, The Ark is Europe's only custom designed children's cultural centre. It is devoted to the presentation of the highest quality, innovative arts programming, in which the child is maker, doer and critically informed listener and viewer. Located in an award winning building in the heart of Temple Bar, Dublin's

cultural quarter, The Ark houses an indoor theatre, an outdoor amphitheatre, gallery spaces and a workshop. The Ark also fields a number of outreach programmes that bring the work of the company to children in numerous off site environments including hospitals, disadvantaged communities and arts venues throughout Ireland and beyond. Central to the vision of The Ark is the belief that all children, as citizens have cultural entitlements equal to that of any adult.