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For some Indymedia is an incomparable success; for others it is reproducing the same problems that we've had conditioned into us. Perhaps it is both. And perhaps there are ways to change our internal conflicts in order to achieve more of our potential and to enable us to empower more people to speak for themselves and engage in significant discussions about the issues that impact their local and global lives. This is not a critique of Indymedia, but a hope for more internal and yes external discussion and strategizing.

I'll be using a number of quotes from Evan Henshaw-Plath from Global Tech, Chris Burnett, both IMC people.

INTRODUCTION

Subcommandante Marcos wrote, "What governments should really fear is an expert in communications technology." It's no wonder then that the US government and at least 5 other governments have gone after Indymedia and local Independent Media Centers (www.indymedia.org/fbi), because within these Centers there are thousands of these kinds of "experts". People in Indymedia are taking technology and new and old media and recombining them for maximum use with minimum resources.

PERSONAL HISTORY/EARLY BACKGROUND OF IMC

My role in the IMC goes back to Fall of 1999 where I was part of a small group of people on the ground in Seattle who saw a need to open a space for independent and radical journalists to bypass the corporate media. This of course had been on the agenda for those of us who had been organizing around the WTO, but the main catalyst was the Grassroots Media Alliance conference in Austin in August 1999. That launched a conversation, a mailing list and the networking of many established media makers and organizations and geeks – from Freespeech TV to Paper Tiger and Deep Dish TV to Big Noise Films to Whispered Media and those who brought with them the ideals and practicalities of the open source movement.

Early that Fall on the organizing email list, some people wanted to see this communications space be only for the radical activists. Others argued that it needed to be open, there shouldn't be a limit to who could walk in the door. In the end, the philosophy of openness guided us and people signed up and we didn't ask them about their political affiliations -- we were facilitating a space less than deciding what should be produced in that space. This has been a guiding principle with strong roots in that first IMC and openness is one of the core principles that gets at the heart of our success and our

uniqueness. When we speak of open publishing, it is not just a technological phenomenon, it is a philosophical underpinning that forms a foundation of policy and praxis.

This presentation will focus on the internal processes of Indymedia, some of our challenges and some possible recommendations, as well as some casual theory about networks. Here's John Downing on the IMC: "The organizational dimension of IMCs may seem the least seductive of all possible topics, but are arguably a make-or-break issue. One of the intriguing and indeed one of the most promising features of the growth of the IMCs has been their degree of attention to precisely this humdrum matter." We're building our own internal democratic processes and they are critical to our ongoing success.

I'd also like to talk about the overarching theme of solidarity within a culturally, linquistically and politically diverse network like Indymedia. My underlying assumption is that we can exercise immense power over the current economic globalization systems, but only by means of a solidarity that crosses the boundaries of nations, political affiliations, identities and narrow interests. As this is true of our larger network of networks who are fighting for a more sane world, so it is true within Indymedia, one network of many. We are merely a microcosm of what is happening on the macro/global level.

To get people thinking, I'd like to pose the question of where do we (most inclusive sense) want to be in 5 or 10 years? And with that picture in our mind, how do we hope to get there? Just keep that in mind, for your own work and for our collective work together.

NETWORKS

The era of globalization has generated a wave of social movement experimentation with new forms of organization. The trendy term for describing these new forms is "network". In the book Activists Without Borders, the concept "advocacy networks" is defined as "forms of organization characterized by voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange."

Indymedia is part of the social movements that are connecting worldwide. And this worldwide movement of resistance is part of the "globalization from below" to use Jeremy Brecher's extremely useful concept. As an emergent network, we must recognize our commonalities and accept our differences as long as they don't go against our principles of unity (which in this case make up our commonalities). I'd argue that to be sustainable in the future, we must learn to deal with the gaps between those principles and allow for the diverse ways we do things. Because out of that acceptance will come a much more resilient and powerful network that can accomplish even more of our goals, tap into our potential that lies looming all around us, and can be a force to be reckoned with on the planet.

Tapping into that larger potential – that is the question before us.

Steven Johnson in his book "Emergence" talks about how emergent networks reach plateaus. A simple way of understanding emergent is that they usually occur more organically, with less intention. We didn't come together as a coalition of groups and then decide to call ourselves a network. We emerged, organically, chaordically – an interesting blend of order and chaos. Within Johnson's framework, I'd argue that Indymedia has reached a "plateau" of sorts. This plateau can mean several things – it can be a place of possibility, a place of collapse or a place of stagnation. In terms of living systems, it's about making choices and recognizing where we are. In order to take the next steps, we need to agree on a few things and start talking about them at our local, regional, continental and yes on the global lists (our network space of dialogue). Let's call this collective reflection, a much needed strategy space, all of which could be part of a "network assessment".

Indymedia is a huge success on many levels, but we are having significant problems at all levels, within locals, within nationals and within the network as a whole. I see this "problem" as being a stage we're going through and which needs an approach to be able to move to the next stage.

An effective network depends on many factors and understanding these factors will be key to improving the existing collective intelligence of our network and to anticipating and countering any threats to it. Probably the most important pattern to keep in mind is consciousness of the network itself. I have mentioned this in terms of reflection. Many people within Indymedia do not really understand what it means to be in a network. This lack of consciousness is detrimental to having any kind of serious dialogue. To a participating individual or local IMC, this consciousness means that they need to be an active, respectful and intelligent member of the network. They also must know that the network is in some sense alive; it must be sustained as well as used. Although some competition exists between members or nodes in the network, success in whatever endeavor will depend to some degree on others. This will vary according to the skill, interests and philosophical outlooks of the local members. Providing ideas, contact information, references or other information that other members of the network can use is an important way to contribute to the network. I call this "best or leading practices". Discussion among network participants helps identify critical issues and resolve internal divisions. The discussion of issues also lays the groundwork for the important transition from a discussion orientation to an action orientation. Collaborative projects (like the one Kate discussed) provide an important focusing mechanism or an "opportunity structure". Finally, the networks should be accessible, because important democratic interchanges take place at the margins of power and these 'marginal' political settings should be encouraged to grow and also, to be integrated.

From an unpublished white paper on Networks, here is a list of 10 key features and practices that contribute to the efficiency and power of networks. Remember of course that these are ideals, just like Indymedia's Principles of Unity are ideals. We strive for them.

- They are accountable to their members and mission
- Their structure provides a variety of ways for members to participate
- They pool local and expert knowledge
- They respond rapidly and flexibly to events
- They use members' time efficiently
- They serve as a forum for positive dialogue among diverse groups
- Their members internalize the resources of the network
- They grow strategically
- They aid movement building by spawning new networks
- They have multiple vibrant and vital communication channels.

These are some frameworks for talking about Indymedia and for understanding what is working and what isn't. I believe we are long overdue for a serious conversation about these issues and I hope that this presentation can be a small catalyst for those discussions. However, this discussion of networks is not just about Indymedia, even though I will be focusing on it, but since networks is a new organizing form, the theoretical and practical comments I will make can apply to other situations beyond Indymedia.

Within Indymedia, there are some IMCs which are more rigid or more "institutionalized" alongside some which are wildly unstructured. So we cover a huge spectrum. Even so, we are slowly, very slowly, developing ways that help us cope with the diversity within the network. I would argue that this should be a priority for us as a global community of locals as we intentionally grow and move to the next stage. Unless we embrace diversity as a central value, we will not be able to continue to grow at the exponential rate of 1 IMC every 10 days and continue to experience the kind of "success" we have experienced thus far. I'd argue that cooperation doesn't necessarily presuppose uniformity so we don't have to be afraid of losing our cultural or political integrity. Autonomy still reigns at the local level and at the working group level.

We are a network of networks and affinity groups that sees itself as one network (as defined because of digital connection and our principles of unity). But until we see and accept our differences within our network and see them as potential strengths, we will struggle internally and our potential power as a global network will be limited.

Indymedia is an experiment in radical democracy. Our roots are wide and diverse but one important one is the Zapatistas which brought in a new era of anti-free trade coalition building and use of the internet. It also brought to light a new form of inclusivity that took us far away from any kind of sectarianism or fundamentalism – the kind that says we're right, you're wrong; we're more radical than you so we don't want to work with you, let alone play with you. The Zapatistas showed us a much more inclusive way and I believe we still have a lot to learn from those roots.

So what is Indymedia? Indymedia is many things to many people; it is no ONE thing.

an international news organization;

a participatory media production and distribution platform;
a decentralized social and digital network.
a people's CNN;
an activist communications network;
an experiment in global democracy;
a social phenomenon;
an advocacy network;
a bulletin board;
an organizing tool;
a chat room;
a laboratory for social and technological innovation;
an incredible experiment in self-governance; and
a pioneer in the communication landscape;

In a recent email from an IMC Germany member, a more generalized tension between definitions was made: "We'll never solve our conflicts or contradictions about whether Indymedia is a network of already existing and quite experienced independent media groups trying to present the best possible work, or whether it's platforms to empower as many people as possible to publish their view of things. To me it's many things, of course, but the aspect of helping people making active use of media, becoming media, making them accessible is very relevant[to our times], and this is connected to working on invisible things; making structures work so that a lot of people can participate, can make decisions, understand why, how and which decisions have been made before." She goes on, but you get the picture.

One of the tensions present in what she describes is between facilitating media or producing media. I believe we can be all of these things and still function, but it probably means much more dialogue. She goes on to discuss the problems of geek culture and lack of communication about the technology. This brings up teaching and training and passing on the knowledge of technology. Her critique is not an isolated event nor is it something only Indymedia is experiencing. I'm interested in solutions and how we can shift these things. We are still a model and what we learn can be useful to other networks.

The success of this international tactical media project is unprecedented. WHY has it been so successful? Perhaps because it filled a void, it opened up new ways to participate in the production and distribution of information; it transformed an ancient practice into modern digital storytelling, it facilitated a place for dialogue and debate thanks the comments features and the open lists, but what else? In November 1999, we started with the first IMC, now more than 3 years later, there are more than 110 IMCs around the world, on 6 continents, in over 35 countries, and together we use over 22 languages. There are now IMCs in Israel and Palestine, India, Jakarta and new ones being proposed in Iceland, Baghdad, Afghanistan and Iran. All of this by a decentralized project run entirely by volunteers on a shoestring budget. Each of these locals has their own struggles and challenges and suffice it to say that we are all learning.

Chris Burnett from IMC-LA: "The success of the IMC model is attributable to both the organizational and technical advances made possible within the information age. The IMC model can be described, in the words of Rand Corporation researchers Arquilla and Ronfeldt, as a network with 'little to no hierarchy, where decision-making and operations are decentralized, allowing for local initiative and autonomy.'" A question that then comes up is what is the balance between autonomy and cooperation and coordination and having as much participation in making decisions that "affect the entire network"? Or in other terms, how does this relate to the principle that Chris Burnett and Matthew Arnison have both espoused in their work in labor and tech collectives: "Those who do the work, make the decisions." How does that fit in?

I would suggest that this ability to allow for local and individual initiative and autonomy is fundamental to our past and future success.

We must facilitate more cooperation without demanding organizational centralization.

There's been some excellent conversations on the IMC-strategies list about this very topic – some people arguing there needs to be more central control while others have argued eloquently for principles of a decentralized structure.

Here's someone from Thunder Bay IMC responding to another list member: "Should the goal of the IMC network be to eventually use one uniform decision making process, or is a multiplicity of processes actually more desirable? Fundamentally, I lean towards utilizing a multiplicity of processes, because obviously some processes are better for certain situations than others. Functionally speaking, the idea of a single uniform process is tempting because it would be way more predictable and just involve less work."

A Portland IMC member: "I personally feel that more experimentation, and less centralized structure is a vital direction for Indymedia. Everywhere in a healthy nature is diversity. Centralized structure is the basic disease we are fighting in the world. The mind easily turns towards central process because that is all it can see and control, but now we must resist this tendency. The mind sees a threat in diversity because such diversity is not under control, yet it is the letting go of control by the mind which is our great challenge in the world."

"You mentioned the goal of "creating (more clearly) a decision process for our flexible organization system of locals, regions and larger groups to coordinate actions". Compounding my confusion further, you mentioned the need for experimentation which I completely agree with. I am confused because I'm not sure how these two concepts could play out together. How do we experiment with process while "creating" a more comprehensive process". Is one side of this dichotomy more important than the other? I tend to think the experimentation side, however, without inter-IMC communication experimentation is only to the benefit of those IMCs who experiment. Conversely, if process "experimentation" only occurs at the global level or with any other minority IMC community, then this is more centralized, which I hope we can all agree is less valuable."

We are engaging in a very practical and idealistic path of self-organizing from below and obviously there will be many challenges. I don't see many examples to follow, although I think we can learn much more from those who participate in other networks, from those people who want to be in dialogue with us, and from those who are trying to theorize and understand networks as a new organizational form. All of us sitting here today are in a network and yet we are not adequately tapping into the collective resources we all have and engaging in greater mutual cooperation and aid

SOME THEMES

Distinction between the digital and social network aspects of Indymedia.

We need a new understanding of how our solidarity can create a network. A lot of time people think of Indymedia solely in terms of being a digital network. A digital network is not going to be a threat to the status quo and corporate power. Where the threat is is that we are organizing along radical democracy principles to create a coordinated social network and that means improving our communication from the many to the many and to all the local IMCs. The hard work is the social network side of things. It's easy to have a webserver and to link up different websites and to have a digital network. Where we start to transform the way institutions and organizations are run and organized is when we embark on this adventure of building a social network.

ONE EXAMPLE OF OUR SUCCESS

Cleaver again, "Of all the emerging roles of computer communications in social conflict, [I would argue] that the most serious challenge to the basic institutional structures of modern society flow from the emergence of computer-linked global social movements that are, increasingly, challenging both national and supranational policy-making institutions."

Indymedia's tech solidarity project is an example of this emergence and this building of better computer-linked social movements. Both Pablos can speak more about this. But 100's of computers are being shipped down to Latin America and heading to the grassroots groups who are using Indymedia. With this project we are expanding the network and spreading the meme. An excellent article on the early stages of this project is called *"Building the underground computer railroad: Anti-globalization activists in Oakland, Calif., are recycling old machines, loading them with free software and shipping them off to Ecuador."*
http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/2002/09/23/antiglobal_geeks/

Taking technology and blending the new and the old and see new innovations arise because of specific cultural and political situations. Again Evan: "In the last year Indymedia has been setting up popular media labs in the West Bank, in Andean indigenous and campesino communities, in MST landless peasant camps in Brasil, in squatted banks and piquetero community centers in Argentina. We are using the Internet to get these voices out. Without the Internet they would never be able to afford to create

their own media which could reach beyond their own communities. The Internet hasn't created social movements or participatory and community media, but it has become a critical tool to do this work." So it becomes clear here with this distinction how Indymedia is not just a digital network, but it is also a social network.

SOME CHALLENGES

> **Sad Decline of Indymedia by Chuck0, Infoshop**
> http://www.infoshop.org/inews/stories.php?story=02/12/08/2553147

- Some very interesting comments about the **problems with our open newswire**. New software in development will address what many people see as some of the main problems of open publishing. Matthew Arnison from CAT in Sydney, the programmer and visionary behind active software, says that open editing is the next evolution of open publishing. Should we be librarians or editors?

- **Who are we**? Quoting a woman from IMC-Belgium in recent cc email conversation in response to learning about another European IMC woman leaving the network and her local IMC: "I see certain kinds of problems reoccurring, independent of the size and the geographic location of an IMC. I think there are some inherent problems along the lines of tech vs. content of an IMC, between "short term action" and "long term maintenance" of an Indymedia site, between visible and invisible work, some of them overlapping with gender issues as well." And Evan from Global Tech: "In someway we are a movement media. But given the nature of the movement, we don't advocate a particular ideological perspective. Rather, we have a terrain of ideologies which are both contradictory and complimentary, but reflect the post-modern undercurrents of the anti-globalization struggle."

- **Inadequate training on all fronts** – from media production, to computers, to consensus and facilitation to new technological innovation..

- **Working with allies**. We make it very difficult.

- **Indymedia is a potential model** for a kind of global governance structure and as such we share many of the same challenges in terms of race, class, gender, language, national identities, north-south differences, conflicting needs of rich and poor.

- **How to stop losing valuable people** (Indymedia burn out and no appreciation for the invisible work – techies get most of the credit)

- **How to build more trust** and learn from each other rather than being in opposition to each other or assuming the worst rather than the best.

- **Conflict resolution processes needed** for many local and national IMCs as well as something specifically for our on-line environment.

- **Multilingual Support**: How to handle our diversity in terms of politics, language, historical experiences: we have over 700 mailing lists for the network, over 110 IMCs in the network and we are working in 22 languages.

- **Ongoing Legal issues** throughout the network.

- **How can we focus more on spreading a meme and not just a "brand"** – see critique from N5M list and IMC Romania request.

- **Challenges of money issues**: IMC Finance list, global bank account, lack any process for raising funds; different strategies for raising funds and accepting funds

- **Censorship within Indymedia.** There are claims of censorship within indymedia because of strong ideological biases that then become a kind of filter on the open newswires. We've seen complaints posted to the general helpdesk regarding a number of situations.

- **Finding ways to collaborate with more traditional, NGO-like, more hierarchically structured organizations.** One past and potentially future collaboration is with Greenpeace. In Evan's words, "How does a cooperative, networked, decentralized, anti-authoritarian, self-managed, and anarchist-principled organization like Indymedia work with other groups?" I'd suggest that the burden lies on us to put forth as much effort in that collaboration as we do to critique the other for being organized differently than us. At best, we can consider that the other can learn from us rather than declaring those collaborations too difficult. Short-term relationships project-based efforts seem like a good way to begin. See Evan's email to strategies list for more specifics.

- **How to bring more women onto the global lists and keep them in our local IMCs and on the lists?** Currently it's very male dominated and the Indymedia IRC channels are largely for guys with very few women. There are numerous examples recently and over the past few years of women leaving local IMCs and not participating on the global lists.

- **How to deal with what has been called "fundamentalism" within indymedia.** This could also be called the purist position. This leads to a kind of isolationism on the left and within Indymedia and it's not building or expanding the network. Our spectrum of allies is therefore extremely limited and we don't end up spreading the meme.

- **Strong tech culture** where there's not a lot of training for those who lack skills or knowledge. We need to continue to demystify technology or we are only encouraging the digital divide within our own network. This includes the fact that there's not enough communication between all the techies and the various codebases currently in development

- **General challenges of openness –** in which all information is available for everyone. It brings up the challenge of documenting processes and cc list communication and trust networks, etc. Sustainable, open and collaborative practice is difficult to achieve on-line and new specific to Indymedia designed tools must be developed in order to sustain the fine balance between openness and a healthy signal/noise ratio. "We have a rhetorical commitment to openness and the mass participation of media making yet we often end up empowering people who already are empowered." Evan, Global Tech.

OTHER PRESSING ISSUES

- New IMC process: how to allow for decentralized while maintaining a certain standard (some national IMCs (UK, Italy, Brasil for example) have policies for bringing on new collectives; this is different than other countries that do it by city/region and not by nation)
- We don't even have Liaisons from every IMC on the global lists – representation v. participatory democracy
- Needing summaries to increase the easy flow of communication to locals without inundating them with following all lists.

LOTS OF HOPE! Think of this as a feedback loop.

A FEW RECOMMENDATIONS – Internal Organization Process and Appropriate Technology Next Steps

- Spreading the Meme: (1) Using cutting edge technology to continue to move our mission forward. How do we stay at the head of the wave and influence which way it goes. The example of Norpheus imitating indymedia. The two elements that Morpheus has incorporated are proper multilingual support and audience collaborative editing. According to some techies, these are the next big steps. Morpheus is an online peer2peer networking software that is implementing an interactive news system...most likely based on Indymedia: (2) remaining flexible with our New IMC process to accommodate decentralization and differences throughout the network; (3) developing better relationships with allies and possible collaborations.

- Learn to see our differences as strengths and work from there; this would enable a greater amount of trust within Indymedia.

- Do a network assessment. The idea of a "network assessment" can be a practical way to look at Indymedia and to get an honest picture of where we are and where do we need to put more collective and local energy. Those levels are (1) **organizational** (process assessment re decision-making, responses to principles and criteria; capital, economic and political assessment; (2) **narrative** (documentation projects, outside coverage); (3) **doctrinal** (mission statement,

principles of unity, open publishing, editorial policy); (4) **technological** (communications assessments re lists, irc, server distribution, bandwidth assessment); and (5**) social** (contact db, volunteer and full-time organizers assessment, collaboration with allies).

- Begin to have more face-to-face conversations and have regional and continental meetings that are coordinated in terms of sharing of the information, agendas and outcomes.

- Seek outside support for conflict resolution on line and other communication technologies that exist for online communication at this international level.

- Seek out and develop translation software to enable us to communicate with each other multilingually (I've heard this kind of thing exists or is in development – we should be talking to these people and they should be helping us)

- Do weekly summaries for major international lists.

- Be willing to hear criticism as something positive that will move us forward and not something to be avoided (keep what is working and throw out what doesn't as a general principle)

- Adopt a principle of unity surrounding money. One that Chris Burnett has suggested is simply "Income coming into Indymedia shall not effect any other principle of unity".

- Develop a kind of best or leading practices for the network so we don't reinvent the wheel for local IMCs and so that we can tap into the absolutely phenomenal amount of collective intelligence housed within this international network. There exists a wiki page for this.

- Tap into open source intelligence. Learn from collaborative open source software principles and translate them to the social network side, our internal processes. Some of those principles include: peer review, reputation- rather than sanctions-based authority, the free sharing of products, and flexible levels of involvement and responsibility.

- Develop and share a flexible conflict resolution policy, assume the best of each other, work on trust on all levels, learn from our differences, build solidarity wherever possible.

- Share more of the knowledge about tech innovation with everyone in the network

- Bring together all of the academic writings on Indymedia into a "central" place so people can review and comment on them and we can learn from what people have written.

CONCLUSION

I'd like to conclude with two quotes:

"By not having to answer to the monster media monopolies, the independent media have a life's work, a political project, and a purpose to let the truth be known. This is increasingly important in the globalization process. Truth becomes a knot of resistance against the lie. Our only possibility is to save the truth, to maintain it and distribute it little by little in the same way that the books were saved in the Farenheit 451. In this same way independent media tries to save history, today's history, tries to save it and tries to share it so that it will not disappear. Moreover it tries to distribute it to other places so that this history is not limited to one country, one region, to one city or social group. It is necessary, not only for independent voices to exchange information and to broaden the channels but to resist the monopolies spreading lies. The truth that we build in our groups, our cities, our regions, our countries will reach full potential if we join with other groups and realize that what is occurring in other parts of the world also is part of human history." Marcos

Zapatista Spokesperson in Interview about Pacifica Radio Crisis:
"You must understand that politics must change, from relations of power, to solidarity relations. Capitalism is all about relations of power, that's how it expresses itself at the cultural, political, ideological, economic and social levels. We must go around that. [We need] to strengthen the collective spaces, the collective decision-making processes, all forms of collective participation. And to understand that we must create a new culture that is not based on isolating the individual from the world, nor on the premise that we stay equal. We must understand that we are equal because we are different, that is based in another way to conceive democracy, social and economic relations."

This is the network of networks and we are all a part of it. I hope that we can go from here with the desire to exchange more information, to debate and disagree but to at least to talk more between each other across the ocean and across continents, to save history from being written by those in power and to work together in more diverse and cooperative ways. If not us, then who?