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**Combining Digital Technology and Traditional Media
to create Cooperative and Participating Forms of Communication**

Indymedia was created in November 1999 by connecting the production of different alternative media through a web site. The technology used by Indymedia turned cooperation and participation into those media's main characteristics.

Firstly, cooperation was promoted because of the technical simplicity to publish articles and other information not only in text form but also Then,as sound, images and videos. Secondly, it iswas promoted because of the copyleft policy which allowed publications to be freely reproduced for non-commercial purposes through a copyright license.

The second trait —participation— derived from the technical possibility of making free or open publications. In Indymedia, everyone may be a real reporter. The only requirement is to fill out a form and the topic suggested is immediately posted on the web site.

However, these two characteristics depend on digital technology and the Internet. Only easy data reproduction and digital transmission wewould allow dynamic and large-scale cooperation. Also, only Internet technology would allow users to become reporters so easily and so reporter -immediately, that is to say, to pass from a passive to an active role.

When we collectivefirst wanted to have a collective action of Indymedia in Brazil, our major challenge was to preserve these two characteristics without limitation to the Internet. In Brazil, percentnowadays, only 15% of the 14 year-old and above population have access to the Internet. They are the richest 15%. How to create, then, media that would enhance the participation and cooperation observed in Indymedia's movement, but that would also cover more than that wealthiest 15% group? The strategy we used

was to combine digital and Internet technology with traditional media in order to stregthen them.

Radio stations

We would like to increase cooperation among local and community radio stations by encouraging them to post audios on the web site for exchange. Our idea was that if radio listeners did not have access to the Internet, radio stations could connect with each other to exchange data and so information would be diffused. But this effort was relatively successful since community radios' access to the Internet was and still is difficult.

A more successful strategy was the production of a news release to be sent to radio stations. In Porto Alegre, for example, dozens of community radio stations in the metropolitan area of the city receive weekly a news release taken from Indymedia. Bulletins not only increase information diffusion but also give room to participation. The relationship established between Indymedia and radio stations is also useful for the latter to send news about their own communities.

Printed matter

Another way of combining Internet technology with traditional media is turning news into printed matter. However, making, printing and distributing a newspaper is very costly. Large-scale production and distribution requires lots of resources and professional work not very compatible with voluntary job instability. We usually lack resources and all the work we do is voluntary. We resorted to wall newspapers – weekly bulleting boards we stick on walls and bus stops in eight Brazilian cities. In this way we managed to spread and increase the number of readers at a very low cost. We used Internet infrastructure to capture information in a more participatory way, and very cheap and traditional ways to spread such information.

Video

Video publication on the web site would be the result of a project seeking to foster cooperation on the Internet. Video producers would spontaneously publish on the web site different videos about one single event; the centralization of such material would allow the identification of other producers in order to make video documentaries. However, the high cost of digital cameras and the technical difficulties in compressing and producing video images made video publication almost impossible, except in the United States.

Thus, our video projects focused on regional and international cooperation for diffusing information beyond the Internet. The very few video-producing groups made dynamic documentaries and strived to exchange and broadcast them. Internet facilitates contact and gives room to new cooperation forms, such as that of voluntary translators or people who offer space for exhibition. This is how a single documentary video from Indymedia - Rio de Janeiro – about protests against the FTAA autonomously moved over 20 thousand people, or how even homeless communities in Sao Paulo or in Rio de Janeiro slums learnt about a similar reality, that of unemployed workers in Buenos Aires.

Internet

Although Internet access is still very expensive, we believe that its technical possibilities should be explored, especially if half of the population is expected to gain access to it in 10 years. Meanwhile, we try to support projects that make Internet popular, mainly through the creation of public access centers.

In Sao Paulo, Indymedia built two of these centers, one in an anarchist cultural center, and the other one in a building occupied by homeless people. These were very different experiences that served as a model for a bigger project; it includes the construction of dozens of centers of this kind and will be started soon.

The experience of building an Internet center in a middle-class, politicized scenario brought about a foreseen result: little Internet use (because users did have Internet access at home), and a largely Indymedia-focused use. On the other hand, the occupied-building center was largely used with various purposes. Some users just wanted to learn how to use the computer to increase job opportunities, and most of them were simply interested in playing games or visiting sex sites. Very few used the center to communicate. Surprisingly enough, among these was a group of 8 to 12 year-old children who set up an excellent radio station on the Internet.

Our challenge now is to build new, more intermediate experiences by increasing the number of centers in 15 cities. The idea is that these centers serve more public, but also that this public may get to know better the communication and participation dimensions of the Internet.

All these projects are new experiences built with scarce resources. Yet, they pave the way for the Internet not to be an obstacle but a tool to build popular media that are truly participative and cooperative.