Out in the open: Indymedia networks in Australia

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Abstract

Indymedia is a global open publishing project that has redefined what we might understand as ‘media’. Based upon the premise of openness the alternative media network has employed many novel features. It has attempted to practice participatory democracy to enable users to create, distribute and filter their own news. Analysis of this network enables the exploration of the complexity of such a project and the way in which the activists involved have dealt with its challenges. Indymedia has been highly successful in generating online participation and in creating a global identity. However, participants have had to modify the openness of the network to retain its workability, both in the scale at which it operates, and by imposing certain structures on the decision-making processes and daily website functions.

Keywords

Internet, alternative media, activism, participation, open publishing, open source.

Introduction

Alternative media has historically attempted to pose a challenge to more mainstream media forms. It has been used as an avenue for the expression of often radical ideas or actions, to criticise other media coverage, or as a practice in generating media without using hierarchical editorial structures (Atton, 2001). In particular, Indymedia (www.indymedia.org), founded in Seattle in 1999 during the World Trade Organisation (WTO) protests, was designed to offer new forms of alternative media using the internet, and to widen the possibilities for those online to participate openly in its construction (Smith, 2001). Indymedia has since gained international prominence as a global network of online independent news networks. With over one hundred websites now operating, Indymedia encourages everyone to ‘become the media’ (Nogueria, 2002). Through the use of open publishing any user is able to contribute content (be it text, graphics, audio or video) and discussion to a site immediately, with only minimal moderation (Arnison, 2001a).

This paper focuses upon the practices and innovations of Indymedia to explore its implications for the activists participating in it and for online interactions more broadly. It provides an illustrative trial of new forms of participation via the internet and it offers an example of the success of such an approach and information about the way in which any problematic issues or failures of the project were (or were not) resolved. Indymedia can be seen as one of the projects attempting to implement some of the participatory democracy principles of autonomous groups linked to many of the anti-corporate globalisation protests. In this way Indymedia is one manifestation of these large and heterogeneous movements’ ideals and desires. The outcome of the Indymedia experiment has been to illustrate the possibilities of encouraging participation both within media construction, more broadly within activists’ decision-making structures, and as a potential model for society. However, while attempts at subverting the need for hierarchies has been successful, participants have discovered that there is a need for a significant amount of structure to ensure such a network’s workability and when operating on a world-wide scale this structure can at times become burgeoning. Crucially, Indymedia has been about experimenting with openness, and although
parts of its operations are still mediated or face dissent, it is important to examine the successes and failures of such projects to aid our understandings of the possibilities of participation and political activism online.

This paper explores the details of this network by analysing the four key areas of Indymedia that are particularly novel and illustrative. Firstly, the extent to which Indymedia is an open system is delineated. This ‘openness’ is manifest in a number of ways; in its code, management, contributions, patterns of access and use. Secondly, this openness has implications for the possibility of participation and conversational interactivity online, and raises issues about the difficulty of gaining consensus online (notably through the use of passive consensus). Thirdly, the ways in which Indymedia is able to traverse borders - geographical, temporal, between activists, and between audiences, aids understandings of the complexity of participation in a global online network. Finally, a key aspect of Indymedia is that it is an unfinished experiment that is fluid and continuously evolving. This fragility is a necessity in order for it to remain ‘open’ and also serves as part of its strength, enabling innovation and development.

These areas of novelty highlight how activists are experimenting with new forms of collectivism, participation and consensus. This has implications for the extension of traditional understandings of the internet as a space of sharing and interaction, for online forms of democratic engagement, self-organisation, and the opening of the public sphere.

The assertions made here are based upon analysis of Indymedia collectives in Australia. In-depth interviews were conducted with eighteen participants of Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, and Sydney Indymedia collectives, and with those involved in Octapod in Newcastle and Tasmedia (both independent media projects) in Tasmania, between July 2001 and December 2002. In addition several of the collectives’ meetings and public access email lists were observed (in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney). Australia was chosen as the focus of the research to enable comprehensive analysis of one section of the global network. Australians from the Catalyst collective in Sydney also designed the Active software underpinning Indymedia. The paper begins by outlining what alternative media is, and then why Indymedia is unique in that context. The four keys areas of novelty outlined above are then explored, leading to a discussion of the broader implications of Indymedia.

**Alternative media online**

Political activists employ, attempt to manipulate, and subvert the mainstream media to advance their cause. This agitation has been expressed through the ‘political gimmick’, agitprop, culture jamming and alternative independent media. Activists often want media coverage in order to gain access to a wide and mixed audience. However, they also object to the framing of their actions by such media and consequently choose to create and distribute their own media (Paterson, 2000). Consequently the purpose of alternative media is often to challenge corporate determinations of what is news and who should have access to the public sphere (Downing, 1995).

There is a long tradition of independent media from the production of fanzines, newsletters, magazines, community radio and public television broadcasts, to the more recent use of the
internet (Downing, 2001). Notably many environmental and social justice alternative media producers were early users of the internet, for example, SchNEWS (a British direct action newsletter) went online in 1996.

Internet use changes the relationship between the media and the political actor. Elsewhere I have identified that the construction and publication of a digital alternative media results in three major changes in form (Pickerill, 2003). Firstly, it enables direct and detailed representation of activists’ ideas to their audience. Thus the internet is used as a form of media substitution enabling activists to distribute their detailed message direct to the public and with immediacy. Additionally, activists are now more able to practice intervention in the media’s framing of events by interacting with mainstream media using the internet as stories are constructed (Scalmer, 2002). It also facilitates the distribution of controversial information dissemination to a broad audience. Secondly, the use of the internet diminishes the onus of production by reducing the number of people required in a production team, decreasing costs and easing the research process. Finally, the internet permits the diversification of the formats of publication into multimedia projects. The informality of the internet has enabled media to transgress the boundary between a publication and communication. The point of publication has become a continuous moment of flux facilitating a more flexible and interactive form of alternative media.

The uniqueness of Indymedia

Indymedia has become the fastest growing, international, alternative media network in the world, mushrooming into dozens of physical and virtual sites that span six continents and work in a globally collaborative spirit which is a model to all. (Nogueira, 2002, p.294)

In the context of these online changes for other alternative media, Indymedia is unique. Its scale alone is almost unprecedented. A plethora of Indymedia sites are spread worldwide (from the USA to India to the Czech Republic to name a few), most with associated collectives and many of them running from dedicated offices or media labs7 (Hyde, 2002; Rosner, 2002). The network has been particularly successful in creating its own global brand of alternative media that has potentially widened its audience by having a main website (www.indymedia.org) with easy links to all other regional sites. This expansive network was based on volunteer effort. Any city or country can apply to set up their own Indymedia website. They tend to use similar software but the associated collective delineates the website structure and their decision-making process. Involvement in the global structure is coordinated via email lists. Some were initially established to cover a one-off event. For example, Melbourne Indymedia was initially established for the World Economic Forum protests, September 2000, while others were part of longer-term, localised political campaigns (Gibson and Kelly, 2000).

Indymedia is structured around the premise that everybody should be able to have access to all aspects of the media and that media production and consumption should be a many-to-many process, spreading the possibility of media production to a wider cohort of participants. This is in contrast to the traditional ‘representative’ one-to-many media approach. Thus
Indymedia is “a multimedia peoples’ newsroom that would reach a global audience without having to go through the corporate filter” (Tarleton, 2000).

By using the internet Indymedia advances earlier examples of online chat and bulletin boards to create a more multimedia, user-friendly, and website-based node of virtual interaction (Arnison, 2001a). Specifically, Indymedia advanced the notion of open publishing – the collective creation of a string of contributions that as a whole formed a rapidly evolving online magazine with minimal editorial interference:

Open publishing means that the process of creating news is transparent to the readers. They can contribute a story and see it instantly appear in the pool of stories publicly available … Readers can see editorial decisions being made by others. They can see how to get involved and help make editorial decisions. (Anon, 2002)

Furthermore these stories take a multitude of forms. Content is a mix of first-hand accounts, links to other news sources, pictures, analysis and audio links. While the internet enables the easy merger of a variety of these media formats, Indymedia facilitates users to have the freedom to upload their content how they wish and without time delay. Notably some innovative uploading technology has been developed. An IMC Phone System was designed by the Melbourne Indymedia collective to enable anyone with a phone to upload stories direct to Indymedia without accessing a computer (Pickerill, forthcoming). An addition to this open heterogeneous process of media creation, is the ability for any user to feedback comments and generate discussion on a particular posting. Thus a many-to-many critique of stories is possible.

In practice most sites are composed of several different frames. One is dedicated to the open publishing newswire, another to an edited features column written by the editorial collective, and a third to details on how to publish and get involved, along with links to other Indymedia sites. Many also have a section for upcoming events. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the components of the Melbourne (www.melbourne.indymedia.org) and Sydney Indymedia (www.sydney.indymedia.org) front pages respectively.
This approach contrasts with more corporate forms of media. Rather than attempting to own and sell ‘information’ to an audience, Indymedia tries to encourage participants to share ‘knowledge’. By doing this Indymedia attempts to reconceptualise what is interpreted as valid information into a more fluid understanding that there are often numerous truths. Furthermore, the global network is about challenging the large media conglomerates that dominate much media production. It is about challenging the idea that any oligarchy should have the power to determine what is newsworthy.
There are therefore several core principles that differentiate Indymedia from mainstream media production. The most obvious is Indymedia’s emphasis upon opening up the spaces of production to enable lateral access to all and to put into practice the slogan ‘Everyone is a witness. Everyone is a journalist’. This was most evidenced by the attempts to set up temporary Indymedia access points during large-scale demonstrations, even in remote desert locations (Pickerill, forthcoming). This is in contrast to the highly formalised hierarchically restricted process operating in most mainstream media corporations. In this way Indymedia is also far more mobile, de-centred and adaptable than the centrally orchestrated structure of mainstream media corporations. This is further reflected in the choice of software and mediums, with Indymedia deliberately based upon the use of open source software rather than corporately designed and owned products. We return to this point in the following section.

Related to the issue of access is that of ownership. Each Indymedia is autonomous and based upon the principle that it is run by a collective that anyone can join. Mainstream media outlets tend to be owned by large conglomerates such as the Rupert Murdoch, Conrad Black or Kerry Packer empires. The control that such patriarchs are able to assert is opaque and has led to criticisms of news being biased towards particular (hidden) agendas (Herman and Chomsky, 1994; Doyle, 1992). This is most clearly reflected in the way in which content is presented. Both Indymedia and mainstream outlets tend to represent a diversity of opinions, albeit often bent towards certain political influences (for example, Indymedia tends to be dominated by those from the political left just as certain national newspapers are more conservative). However, mainstream media groups have a tendency to present most of their content as fact and the ‘truth’, while actually the ‘facts’ are often merged with opinions. On Indymedia the subjectiveness of news is far more explicit, with an acknowledgement that there are multiple ‘truths’ and that all news is infused with the opinions of the provider.

**Open systems?**

Unlike many other alternative media projects Indymedia has situated its core premise around being ‘open’: “that is out kind of philosophy … that that lefty anarchistic gift economy idea should extend to all parts of the project” (Colene, Sydney Indymedia). Meikle (2002) employs a useful dichotomy between version 1.0 of the internet as an open system and version 2.0 as a closed one dominated by corporate concerns. In his model, Indymedia represents a perfect example of version 1.0. This ‘openness’ is manifest in a number of ways; in its code, management, contributions, access, and use.

**Open source software**

Indymedia was constructed using open source software. This is a form of code that is free to use, copy and improve (Moody, 2002; Arnison, 2000). Indymedia is “a community project that’s written by everyone together and the way to keep that flowing and moving forward and working as a community of equal individuals is make the code open source” (John, Sydney Indymedia). Thus any user can redevelop aspects of it. It was originally designed to counter the corporate domination over software by companies such as Microsoft. Indymedia was developed using PHP that is “open source. It started on a Unix based system and it runs on
anything now … it’s all free … PHP’s got really good politics as a code itself” (Adam, Melbourne Indymedia). 

Open management

In addition to using open code, the Indymedia collectives operated with transparent and open management. This was to ensure that there were multiple spaces through which newcomers could become involved in the collective, and thus the decision-making process. Thus all the Australian collectives had regular open face-to-face meetings and ran email discussion lists that were publicly accessible. In Adelaide decision-making took place in both of these forums, even though some members were not as keen on regular meetings; ‘It’s Indymedia policy to have regular open meetings … whether it’s easy or not, it depends on what sort of things you’re dealing with. Some things I find easier to deal with by email or by telephone - less time consuming’ (Dan, Adelaide Indymedia).

Opening up the space of contributions

As outlined earlier use of open publishing meant there was little mediation of postings and contributions to the site. This reflected an attempt to open up the space of contribution to all who wanted to participate. Thus it was intended there be as few filters as possible between the reader and the news as it occurred. This was ensured by the multiplicity of formats – enabling rapid upload of audio, visual or textual news direct from actions – a visible and limited editorial policy, and the ability to add comments instantly to postings that facilitated debate about versions of each story. On some Indymedia sites, such as Sydney, readers could also rate stories according to how good or useful they thought they were:

The rating is a way that allows the audience to say what’s important to them, what they’re interested in … what the community is talking about as good information. So it’s a group decision-making process. (John, Sydney Indymedia).

Furthermore, all contributions were anonymous, an author could attach their details if they wished, but the database was so designed that the source of their posting could not be traced. There was also a conscious effort to erode any distinction between being a journalist and being an activist: “there is no distinction, we don’t ‘cover’ events, we set up the conditions for people to cover them themselves. We also upload to Indymedia, but we do so as activists, not journalists” (Nik, Melbourne Indymedia).

Opening up spaces of access

While opening the space to contribute was an important process, Indymedia still relied upon users having access to the internet so a number of projects were run to open up spaces of access in terms of providing internet access, skills sharing and in developing novel uploading technology to Indymedia sites. Sydney, Newcastle and Melbourne have all run media labs, (though the Melbourne version – Spacestation - closed in June 2003 due to lack of funding and volunteers). These were relatively permanent spaces offering open access to online computers. They also provided spaces for the cheap production of media projects and as an arena for generating ideas. Effort was also made to provide internet access on site at protests,
for example a fully equipped desert.indymedia truck was used during the Woomera2002
protests on location in South Australia (Pickerill, forthcoming).

Media labs often also offered technical help. However, sharing the technical knowledge of
how to administrate Indymedia or even edit the code was limited to the Catalyst collective in
Sydney: ‘they had a week of workshops teaching people everything from how to design basic
websites, to doing multimedia, to administrating server systems’ (Ben, Octapod17). They also
ran courses on PHP code writing. But in Melbourne skill sharing was more informal and
limited to the more basic elements of how to upload to the site. Alex (Melbourne
Indymedia18) suggested this was typical of all forms of activism:

I think whatever form of activism you’re involved in … there are always,
always bottlenecks of information … people’s identity is so bound up with
their activism that sometimes you don’t necessarily want to skillshare … I
don’t think people like letting go of their identity that much.

Melbourne Indymedia also developed the PIMP (Phone IndyMedia Patch) system that
enabled anyone with a phone to upload stories to direct to Indymedia: “You dial the PIMP
number … leaving a message after the tone. This message is then turned into an MP3 file,
automatically uploaded to Indymedia” (Nik, Melbourne Indymedia). Sydney activists have
also been experimenting with “sending internet broadcasts via short wave radio” (Barry,
Brisbane Indymedia19) thus “developing a wireless networking system with line of sight point
to point transfer of data available through aerials and transmitters” (John, Sydney Indymedia).

Additionally, there were two projects which attempted to take Indymedia news out to those
who did not utilise the internet. In Melbourne, a monthly activist newspaper, The Paper,
began as an IndyBulletin which was “just a hard copy of the Indymedia website” (Marni, The
Paper, Melbourne20). Although it evolved into an edited non-interactive production which
covered topics not necessarily taken from Indymedia, it still intended to “get these kind of
issues out to people that didn’t already have access to them” (Marni, The Paper, Melbourne).
Similarly, Indymedia on Air in Sydney had begun as a project to share Indymedia stories with
a radio audience, but eventually covered stories “which have got nothing to do with
Indymedia” (Hugh, Sydney Indymedia21).

Open use of contributions

Finally, Indymedia used the principles of copyleft to ensure that all contributions could be
used openly. In contrast to the corporate use of copyright to restrict the use of much of their
material, copyleft allows material to be freely used and redistributed as long as it is only used
for non-profit purposes and retains its copyleft label. This fits Indymedia’s rejection of the
idea that information and ideas should be owned or the flow controlled.

This emphasis upon openness, as illustrated throughout all aspects of Indymedia’s operations,
is increasingly rare in a corporate profit-driven world. It is also not necessarily common
practise amongst other alternative media outlets. The Green Left Weekly, an Australian
nationally distributed alternative newspaper, is not independent (it is aligned to the political
beliefs of the Democratic Socialist Party) and relies upon a hierarchically organised
newsroom of established journalists to provide the content:
Indymedia is first hand accounts … all of which is interesting and lively and engaging but … it’s a definitional thing about what left wing journalism is, because they’re seeking to quite radically redefine it … we’ve still tried to follow … professional left wing journalism … Indymedia is more anarchist or autonomous influenced. (Sean, Green Left Weekly, Sydney).

The openness that Indymedia attempts to practise is rooted in the ideology of autonomous activists, and specifically a belief in collective activities based upon the idea of sharing. This is most clearly reflected in the free exchange of software (using open source) and the free sharing of ideas and material (through copyleft).

**Participation and consensus**

All these attempts at openness are grounded in an ideology of participatory democracy. That is, operating within structures that enable as many people as possible to directly participate in a project and decision-making. Indymedia is thus a ‘participatory media’ that challenges the organisational form of existing mainstream media. But involvement in any project is mediated by a number of factors, especially online projects that require a certain level of computer access and technical proficiency. The ways in which Australian Indymedia collectives have dealt with these limitations reflect their determination to create heterogeneous media projects, but also some of the broader boundaries of the Australian activist scene from which Indymedia emerged. Thus the network is very obviously rooted in politically left social justice and environmental ideals. This can constrain its ability to reach those in other subcultures.

A core feature of this experimentation in participation is that it is occurring online. For many of the early utopian theorists, such as Rheingold, the internet was a space of open, sharing and interactive communication. Indymedia is trying to replicate this ideal by constructing an alternative to the corporate-dominated discourse about online communication and media. It facilitates analysis of whether participatory projects that have been practised offline in small activist groups are also possible in an online environment on a larger scale.

**Technical and cultural barriers**

A key barrier to participation is access. While many of the collectives had successfully run open spaces of access to encourage public participation, access remained restricted in two different ways; technically and culturally. In order to preserve some basic security, access to the core software and databases was controlled via administration privileges – “we wouldn’t want heaps and heaps of people with access … it’s potentially troublesome, like someone could just delete everything” (Ben, Octapod). In order to attain these access privileges a newcomer had to prove their ability and trustworthiness by participating in the collective. In this way access to the core areas of technical responsibility was protected.

More significantly, however, were the cultural and social barriers to understanding the value of Indymedia or using the media labs available. In this sense ‘openness’ itself was not necessarily enough to encourage participation from other cultural groups or subcultures. Reaching beyond the activist community could be difficult because “we have our own language and our own discourse and our own acronyms” (Alex, Melbourne Indymedia) and “Indymedia, it’s only people that go there and people who are interested in it. You have to
find it first … it still has that problem of reach” (Adam, Melbourne Indymedia). This was most marked in Australia by collectives’ relationships with indigenous groups. While all interviewees supported aboriginal rights and had taken part in protests to that effect, most admitted that there was relatively little overlap between indigenous groups and Indymedia:

we’ve never made a concerted effort to hit the indigenous population of Newcastle, because we wouldn’t get them in here unless we made a concerted effort … I can understand why we don’t get a whole lot of those people in here just off their own back, because they sort of exist in different subcultures to us and they don’t know we exist … it’s sort of like understanding the way indigenous people work together. It’s quite a different framework from us a lot of the time. (Ben, Octapod)

When indigenous groups were approached things did not always run smoothly. For example, during the Olympics in Sydney there was an aboriginal tent embassy, which Indymedia approached for participation, “some of the Aboriginal people actually got quite defensive … about our involvement, afraid that we were like other media organisations, there to use and abuse them” (Hugh, Sydney Indymedia). Marni (The Paper, Melbourne) also noted “there’s a real communication problem … even when activists do tend to focus on indig issues there’s often a backlash … I think indigenous people don’t feel like they’re consulted enough on their own issues”. Those interviewees most concerned about this lack of interaction preferred to help on indigenous-led projects when possible, rather than enforce a ‘white’ project onto others. These cultural boundaries were further reflected in the lack of outreach to the large immigrant populations in some of the bigger cities such as Sydney and Melbourne.

Moreover, language served as a cultural barrier. While the Australian Indymedia sites only operated in English (and a Spanish posting was removed from the Sydney site), the global discussion lists attempted to be multilingual which considerably slowed the discussion process. To overcome this some proposed that Esperanto be adopted as the language of Indymedia, while others, such as Hugh argued “this is number one reason for linguistic regionalisation, because you cannot say, ‘our arms are open wide to grassroots participation in Indymedia, you’ve just got to learn Esperanto first’”. Consequently, Paul (Sydney Indymedia) felt “it is still very much a western radical media … there isn’t any sort of international participation because not many of them know English and not many of them as activists in the Third World want to know the dominant imperialist language”.

The divergent aims of Indymedia

Part of the reason why some of these cultural barriers were not more explicitly tackled may be the divergent understandings of the aims of Indymedia. The network has developed as new regional members join. Consequently there is continued debate about how Indymedia should evolve. This diversity of opinion, of course, is partly what Indymedia was designed to reflect. However, the variety of perspectives can also lead to confusion about its future direction.

For some, Indymedia was about developing a new broadcast model that would “become the nuclei around which activism against mainstream media can gel” (Albert, 2001). In this version a key feature is that the newswire is unedited open publishing. Consequently a broad
range of views is represented by a plethora of contributors and effort is put into encouraging participation from as wide a cohort of the population as possible.

Alternatively, Indymedia serves more as a “permanent record of our experience of protesting many social injustices” (Anon, 2003a), becoming more of an insular movement network melding an organising space with an online community of activists: “it’s clearly meant to be an activist site, open publishing for activists … free for all yet it’s clearly defined for something. I’m not going to pretend they both go together” (Paul, Sydney Indymedia). In this version the value of the network being ‘open publishing’ is less important; “it’s not like open publishing is the answer and then a bit more closed publishing all sucks, it really depends on what your purpose is” (Ben, Octapod). Consequently Indymedia becomes more focused upon being a space from which a politically left viewpoint can be expressed than one where all viewpoints are welcomed. The first version is a way to broaden participation, and perhaps the movements involved, while the latter is concerned more with creating an autonomous space for activism, which might not be as appealing or readable as the first to outsiders or newcomers:

There’s this ongoing struggle … a real conservative element in international Indymedia where people continually fall back into wanting to preach to the converted and exclude anybody who is racist or sexist … so that we never have anybody posting on Indymedia or reading Indymedia except the enlightened. (Hugh, Sydney Indymedia)

Editorial policies

These differing interpretations of the purpose of Indymedia were further reflected in collectives’ editorial policy. Despite being based on the premise of open publishing it has been necessary at times to edit some postings. Spam is sometimes removed in order to retain newswire quality. Additionally there is an element of fact-checking that occurs for postings. This is done by the websites editorial collectives when they feel it is appropriate, but more commonly is undertaken by other participants and contributors in the form of comments posted after each newswire submission. In this way the original post is not edited, but is corrected or countered by others as they visit the site.

More controversially, some posts are edited or removed because they are deemed inappropriate for the newswire. Each of the Australian collectives dealt with this issue differently and thus the level of editorial interference varied.

Melbourne Indymedia had the most specific Editorial Policy (with Perth Indymedia adopting the same policy). This enabled the collective (formed August 2001) to hide some posts from the front page (though they were still available elsewhere on the website) for a variety of reasons – some notifiable to the authors, some not. There were many ‘notifiable removals’ including the removal of posts that ‘promote racism, fascism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism etc, or any other form of discrimination’ (Anon, 2003b), that incited violence, were ‘obviously incorrect’ or ‘devoid of content’. Brisbane Indymedia collective adopted a version of the Melbourne policy, toning down some of the notifiable removals to exclude any reference to discrimination but including the removal of ‘notices for political parties or any other organizations except Brisbane Indymedia’ (Anon, 2003d). Thus posts have been hidden
from the Brisbane front page, but text was rarely edited unless the collective were requested to do so by the author.

In contrast, Sydney Indymedia had no formal editorial policy, but reflected the range of opinions within the collective on the issue on its website. This included those who thought an explicit policy was necessary and those who believed that it was inappropriate to silence views by editing postings. For example, John (Sydney Indymedia) believed “the only rule should be that there is no editing”. In practise collective members have edited the site. Hugh (Sydney Indymedia) has been involved in “dumping stuff off Indymedia that is inappropriate and our protocols aren’t always perfectly clear about that”.

A similarly vague informal policy operated at Adelaide. Material was only restricted if it was “overtly or consistently racist, sexist, homophobic or hate-mongering” or libellous (Anon, 2003c). Thus “the process of taking it down has been an individual one and following loosely defined group policies” (Dan, Adelaide Indymedia). Only in one instance has a contributor’s repeated postings been blocked (because they were disrupting the site with porn), and this was only done after a long consultation and a number of warnings to the offender.

For most of the collectives the extent of any editorial practice remains under debate even where policy has been agreed upon. There is a concern that any interference can be construed as a form of censorship. By excluding those postings that are fascist or employ another form of discrimination the collectives are delineating Indymedia as intolerant of far right views and as an explicitly left project. For many interviewees this exclusion was not problematic as long as the decision-making structure was transparent (and open to newcomers’ contributions). A visible editorial structure was deemed more egalitarian than mainstream medias’ hidden editorial process. However, some, such as Alex (Melbourne Indymedia) were still concerned that it remained difficult to define the accountability of the Indymedia network - “how do you define who can take it down and then who are they accountable to … how do you define what is not the right content for the website?”

The importance of the editorial collectives has been compounded since Indymedia first began by the proliferation of features columns on a number of the websites. On most sites the open publishing newswire has been restricted to one side of the screen. The central column contains edited features written by members of the collective. These often contain a summary of a particular topic or an event, with links to newswire contributions and other websites of related interest. Melbourne Indymedia, for example, began with only an open publishing newswire on its front page. In September 2001 a features column was created, and in April 2003 the entire site was restructured into categories. This meant that those interested in, for example, anti-nuclear issues, could select only features and newswire postings related to this topic.

The features column was developed in order to make better use of the variety of postings on the newswire. Some felt that well researched and valuable contributions were getting lost in the quantity of postings. Thus the features column was intended to frame and utilise more of the existing (quality) content. However, although the features related directly to newswire content, and thus in essence were determined by what postings were made, its use did detract
from Indymedia’s central tenet of open publishing. Features were written and collated by the editorial collectives who were unlikely to choose to do features on topics they did not deem important.

**Consensus decision-making online**

The way in which the editorial collectives operate and editorial decisions are made is crucial to the integrity of Indymedia. As the features column becomes a valuable component of each site then the propensity for a collective to abuse its power increases. Furthermore as Indymedia is comprised of a global network of participants, adequate structures need to be in place to ensure effective decision-making. At the global level, in order to make operational decisions much discussion has to occur online. In order to retain its participatory ideals consensus was required to prevent any form of hierarchy developing within the network. Consensus works on the principle that decisions should be made collectively with all participants having an equal influence and, preferably, with all participants agreeing on the final outcome. Consequently online consensus decision making had to be practised across time zones and cultural divides.

Inevitably as the network grew so did the global discussion lists, until the process became unmanageable. It was also obviously dominated by those who had more time to be online and by those from the more highly populated regions, such as the US, which skewed the cultural diversity of the network\(^{27}\). One of the responses to this was the development of a form of ‘passive consensus’; participants put forward a proposal and a time frame by which others are to comment or object; if others say nothing (i.e. are passive) then it is taken that you agree to the proposal. However, the passivity of a few participants did not prevent long arguments developing among others leading to unresolved proposals. Furthermore, many were attempting to design a global charter that new Indymedia’s would have to agree to and to formalise this processes of decision-making. The charter was intended to ensure that decision-making power remained with local Indymedia’s rather than a global hierarchy develop, however,

> it’s a very bold proposal to try and get them [the local Indymedia’s] all to come to a consensus on all these particular decision-making structures and … then actually try and implement that with decisions …it’s a very involved process … a lot of people just within Sydney didn’t think there was any need for a global decision-making network. (Paul, Sydney Indymedia)

Regional collectives have adopted this consensus-based approach on a smaller scale. Brisbane Indymedia collective strives ‘to make decisions in the most consensual, transparent and accountable manner’ (Anon, 2003d). Furthermore much of these collectives editorial discussion also takes place online. Consequently Melbourne Indymedia collective attempted to untangle the process of online decision-making by using a form of modified consensus. They used a structure whereby if consensus was not reached then the proposal could be resolved by a vote seventy-five percent in favour, or the proposal could be moved for discussion into a face-to-face meeting\(^{28}\) (Anon, 2003b).

Ultimately, however, those on the global lists conceded that it was the size of the list (and hence of the discussions) that was the crucial factor in whether consensus decision-making
online worked. Hence smaller global lists were designed. Ben (Octapod) noted that on the ‘new-imc list … consensus decision-making is possible because there’s not so many people on it and it’s more like they’re representatives from various regions’. Thus, the global network began to operate more as a spokescouncil.

For the regional collectives the problems of consensus decision-making online were tempered by the use of regular face-to-face meetings. While these served as a public arena for new participants to be introduced, the meetings were also a crucial space to resolve any conflict about discussions taking place online. In Sydney:

> the theory is we can make [decisions] on the email lists but they just never seem to quite happen … there’s all sorts of dynamics that happen with email … mostly the big decisions are made in meetings by whoever’s there … that’s often how decisions get made with activist groups … things sometimes just happen and things aren’t very clear. (Colene, Sydney Indymedia)

The Brisbane Indymedia collective moves any unresolved discussion into their weekly face-to-face meeting (Anon, 2003d). Thus, face-to-face interaction was deemed integral to the decision-making process as ‘you need to ground email … it’s better not to organise a group via email … it’s a networking device and I think in a lot of ways it’s no substitute’ (Nik, Melbourne Indymedia).

**Cliquies of control**

However, following a structure of consensus decision-making is not necessarily enough to prevent cliques of control developing around some tasks within Indymedia or to ensure that collectives are welcoming to newcomers. Indymedia is based upon structures designed to ensure the smooth running of the network and prevent power hierarchies developing. At the global scale where large numbers of participants are involved this has led to bottlenecks in decision-making, especially in the process of approving new Indymedia websites and their associated collectives: ‘there’s this whole bureaucracy to go through to become part of Indymedia which just seems so ridiculously counter … it does seem like Indymedia’s become an institution unto itself’ (Alex, Melbourne Indymedia). Thus many sites initially run without official affiliation. Moreover, in order to resolve issues sub-lists designed tackle each issue separately proliferated: “we’ve decided to be open and accessible and yet you have this other tendency where you want to break off into sub-lists with only a clique that you know who are going to participate” (Paul, Sydney Indymedia).

At the regional level many interviewees felt that the collectives operated well without evolving into oligarchies: “there’s no hierarchy … there’s just a space for everyone to do their own thing” (Barry, Brisbane Indymedia). However, there are two vital components involved in encouraging newcomers to participate in the Indymedia network. The first is to generate the motivation and trigger individuals into believing they should be involved. The media labs were partly meant to fulfil this role by making visible the practices and people of Indymedia so outsiders could see that “they’re just like me, I can do that” (Nik, Melbourne Indymedia). Once interest has been triggered, however, collectives have to be welcoming to sustain this participation. This second component can be harder to achieve. As Colene (Sydney Indymedia)
Indymedia) explained “you have to really deal with your own feelings of ownership of the site, because when you’ve been working on it for a long time you start to think it’s our Indymedia site, when it’s not, it’s everybody’s. We just happen to be the people who are maintaining it at this time”. Thus, as Alex (Melbourne Indymedia) suggests, some of the collectives needed to be more reflective about the potential for exclusion:

because of the urgency that drives activism people don’t often think that there’s space for new people to do things because we don't have time for people to make mistakes or learn … [but] if I have power and access then my responsibility is to help someone else gain that space as well or use that space to create more spaces.

**Borders and boundaries**

While Indymedia has encountered challenges in translating the ideals of participatory democracy into practice, the network has been able to transgress a number of limitations faced by other alternative media projects. Indymedia has reconfigured geographical borders, overcome temporal boundaries, eased divisions between activists, and attempted to reach new audiences.

**Geographical borders**

By being virtual, the network was able to operate globally, but national borders are not transgressed by technology alone. Cultural divisions remain and some of the participants of Australian Indymedia collectives retained their suspicion of North Americans being able to dominate the network (Arnison, 2001b). Instead of creating a global consciousness, Indymedia facilitated the strengthening of regional identities and reinforced the uniqueness of localities:

Things that are generated in the region are always going to be more appropriate for that region. On the global list there’s people wanting to have a whole control of how Indymedia should be …[but] it should come in different forms and flavours appropriately for the area. (John, Sydney Indymedia)

In Australia, a frustration with processes “having to go through a single global hub” (Ben, Octapod) led to the creation of Oceania in 2002. The Australian activists wanted the entire Indymedia network to be “further decentralised and regionalised” (Ben, Octapod). They began this process by creating the Oceania identity, manifest in face-to-face meetings, an email co-ordination list, and the launching of a regional syndication website. It is a regional network of Indymedia collectives in the Pacific region, incorporating Indonesia, New Zealand and Australia. The website compiles postings from all the separate sites in the region, but more importantly brought closer those in the region. Thus Indymedia was used to delineate new regional affiliations determined by its participants rather than historical national boundaries. This is particularly salient in Australia where mainstream media has failed to cover news on its regional doorstep (such as East Timor) but maintained historic links by covering British stories.
Temporal boundaries

As geographical borders are being reconstituted, temporal boundaries have been removed. There are no time constraints on Indymedia as there are no newsroom deadlines to be met. Consequently postings can be “instantaneous, you didn’t have to wait for the 7 o’clock news and wait for it to go through all the corporate filters” (Barry, Brisbane Indymedia) and thus “news from an activist perspective from across the world can be available as quickly as the satellite broadcasts of government or corporate-owned media” (Doherty, 2002, p.56). Additionally, contributors could spend more time carefully constructing their submissions if they wished, and discussions could continue about a topic after it was no longer deemed ‘newsworthy’ by the mainstream media.

Activists diversity

Another facet of Indymedia has been its appeal across a broad diversity of activism. Historically many alternative media publications were concerned only with specific issues – such as forest campaigns, animal rights, or racism – and thus were directed at discreet categories of activists. Consequently many of these media remained in relative obscurity disconnected from each other. Although Indymedia is rooted in anti-capitalist ideals it has been utilised by a wide cohort of activists who in turn have contributed submissions on a plethora of issues (Nogueira, 2002): “it’s another kind of community website where you can have dialogue to each other … its brought together a lot of different people … [and] there’s also a lot of really constructive criticism that goes on of the activist movement in Melbourne which hasn’t ever happened before” (Rosa Deluxembourg, Melbourne Indymedia31). This virtuous cycle of production and consumption, and discussion has contributed towards the cohesion of online media activism, and the creation of global networks of understanding and action between activists.

New audiences

Finally, as discussed above, there is contention over the aims of Indymedia which is reflected in the debates about who the intended audience is meant to be. Open publishing can result in a slightly chaotic mix of postings that can be hard to navigate. Crucially, the mix of varied opinions with well constructed reporting relies upon the reader to digest what is of value to them and disregard the rest. Readers therefore have to be able to filter their own news: “it gives a lot more credit to an audience because they can filter it themselves and also it’s not this completely biased slick left-wing propaganda machine” (Alex, Melbourne Indymedia). This in itself was one aim of Indymedia – to increase people’s ability to critically assess what they classify as ‘news’ and thus to generate critically aware readers and contributors. For newcomers, however, this process can seem confusing: “as a constructive space where you’re actually trying to communicate to audiences that aren’t necessarily familiar with the issues of activism, I think open publishing needs to be questioned a little bit” (Sam, Melbourne Indymedia32). Consequently, features-dominated Indymedia sites have eased navigation for non-initiated readers and attempted to engage a wider audience. While it is difficult to assess who the audience actually is, ironically new audiences have been reached indirectly through mainstream media’s adoption and referral to Indymedia stories33.
Fragility

A key element of Indymedia, based upon analysis of the networks in Australia, is this gradual but continuous reconfiguration of its aims and form. This fluidity and the reflectivity of the participants enables the network to evolve, adapt and improve in response to challenges and new ideas. It also, however, reflects fragility in the system – in the changing design, the turnover in participants, the lack of technical volunteers, and potential internal damage or security crackdowns. While such vulnerability can be problematic it is also crucial to retaining the ‘openness’ of Indymedia.

Indymedia as a work in progress

Indymedia is in many ways unfinished in its design. Rather than a perfectly constructed alternative to mainstream media it was an experiment based on trial and error, not a planned strategy. Its design has been a mix of restructuring to improve ease of use, and rear-guard action to solve problems that have arisen. Indymedia has deliberately avoided becoming professional or delineating any participants as being more ‘expert’ than another. Furthermore, the content of Indymedia is never deemed complete, but seen as a continuously evolving collection of contributions. Eventually, despite communication between the collectives, each Indymedia site is likely take a different form as they have adjusted aspects and chosen disparate paths of development.

Volunteer turnover

This fluidity in design is aided by the turnover in participants who bring new ideas to the network. Though this decentralisation of participation can hinder coherence in the network, it does serve to enable fresh perspectives to be more easily incorporated. Unfortunately, however, few of the collectives had as many volunteers as they would have liked, especially those with technical skill: “there’s a lot of pressure on those people, for one thing, and we’re totally reliant on them … one person owns the domain name, it all makes it quite fragile” (Adam, Melbourne Indymedia). Without those who know how to alter the code or keep the system running some sites could break down: “unless we as the global [tech] collective get our act together in training and documentation … it’ll gradually grind to a halt” (Paul, Sydney Indymedia).

Potential attack

This fragility was also evident in its vulnerability to attack from users or security forces. It is possible to damage the site by posting repeatedly or inappropriately, because the software is designed to immediately upload all stories - “it’s very trusting software … it’s kind of the point” (Adam, Melbourne Indymedia) - but few have attacked Australian sites. The biggest issue for many collectives has been how to protect the Indymedia sites from the undesirable ‘other’. Those who continually contribute racist, sexist, homophobic or far right postings to disrupt the site rather than to engage in debate, but to whom any reaction raises quandaries of censorship. Critics have suggested “the problems with the IMC’s vague politics … has allowed an international network of right wingers and racists to abuse and disrupt the IMC
websites, which has harmed the IMC’s functionality and reputation in ways that may not be fixable” (Chucko, 2002).

Another, perhaps more serious, threat has been state censorship of Indymedia. During the anti-G8 demonstrations in Genoa in July 2001 the Italian Police raided the Indymedia centre and Diaz school (also housing Indymedia) in a particularly violent manner: “The police entered … and they beat people … they left blood on the walls, on the windows, a pool of it on every spot where people had been” (Brian S, 2001, p.21). In an attempt to trace an author of a post during anti-capitalist demonstrations in Quebec, the Seattle Indymedia collective “had an FBI injunction served on it and they wanted their hard drives” (John, Sydney Indymedia) but “the FBI dropped their case at the last minute” (Paul, Sydney Indymedia) due to adverse publicity and pressure from free media advocates. In Australia, the New South Wales Police Minister, Michael Costa, attempted to force the Australian Broadcasting Authority to shut down the Melbourne Indymedia website, claiming it was ‘anti-democratic’ (Blissett, 2002). While the effectiveness of Indymedia’s challenge to existing systems could be gauged by the severity of these crackdowns, they have also raised issues as to how to protect those who work in such centres and how to ensure the continued running of each site.

**Opening the possibilities for participation**

Indymedia has exemplified the multiple forms that alternative media can take. Melding news construction and production with a space for debate and organising, it has asserted the value of tactical media and tried to redefine what media is. Furthermore “it is activism – writing is action, open publishing is a direct cultural intervention” (Meikle, 2002, p.97). Indymedia has been constructed and operated around the premise of ‘openness’. These open practices resulted in forms of participatory democracy and consensus decision making being put on trial online and the complexity of such processes becoming apparent. Consequently compromises were made, such as enabling the editing of some postings. This openness was also reflected in the ways that Indymedia traversed traditional geographical borders and temporal divisions, aided cross-topic activist communication, and attempted to reach new audiences. Finally, this openness was retained despite the fragility and threats that resulted from it.

The practice of participants in the Indymedia network in Australia conforms to what Wellman (2001) calls ‘networked individualism’. In other words, rather than family or place-based community ties being the determinant of social networks, an individual chooses their social ties based on affinity. Furthermore, rather than this form of social interaction leading to the development of different form of ‘communities’, it can lead to membership of an eclectic mix of networks, of which Indymedia might be just one.

One consequence of this individualism might be fragility of these social ties, especially if they are only construed online (as feared by Putnam, 2000). Alternatively, interaction via Indymedia can represent far more than affinity, or even a loose sense of identity. Not only are stories exchanged and narratives constructed, but open systems created, tested and practised as alternatives to the existing hegemony. In this sense Indymedia participants are attempting to construct a small autonomous space in society based not on the principles of ‘the triumph
of the individual’ (Castells, 2001, p.133) but on the success of the open source movement in redefining the importance of sharing, creating and interacting for free and for the benefit of all.

Whilst Indymedia may not be particularly inclusive to those outside the activist milieu, it has facilitated the collective operation of many within the “transnational direct action community” (Doherty, 2002, p.56). At the same time as transgressing national borders, however, Indymedia also reasserts the importance of locality, and in the case of Australia, regionalism. Protest, and its reporting, is rooted in places and spaces and Indymedia was designed to enable contributors to testify directly from their grassroots level.

Participants in Australian Indymedia in particular have experimented in using the premise of ‘openness’ to define their organisational form and democratic engagement. As illustrated through its manifestation in Indymedia, practising participatory democracy by decentralising decision-making can be problematic. When operating beyond the scale of a small group, or online, structures were required to keep it working effectively, which in turn could cause the process to become encumbered in bureaucracy. The open publishing model proved to provide too few structural guidelines to retain its workability. Instead collectives modified the open publishing approach by applying some editorial control and adopting features columns to retain the relevance and useability of the sites and preventing a chaotic mix of rants, opinions and arguments swamping useful material.

Consequently, two factors were crucial to the success of this participatory experiment; structures and scale. Structures (such as guidelines on how decisions will be reached or conflict resolved) are required to prevent implicit hierarchies holding power or for a ‘tyranny of structurelessness’ to result in a unwieldy and just as inequitable form of organising. Any structures, however, can become burgeoning when practised on a large scale, as evidenced by the bureaucracy that developed at the global level of decision-making in Indymedia. Thus the scale at which such participatory forms are practised becomes divisive. Australian Indymedia activists found the global level of decision-making impractical and they decentralised to a scale they found workable – their region. Only at this level did they find consensus decision-making (especially online) achievable. As the number of Indymedia collectives proliferates others within the global network have also pushed for more decentralisation. Apart from a few discussion lists and processes, Indymedia’s global network is essentially composed of autonomous regional units who rarely interact on a global level. When global decisions are required, increasingly only representatives (in the form of spokescouncils) from the regional collectives participate in order to retain the functionality of the decision-making process. So the network maintains its participatory principles at the regional level, but has had to modify to a more representative form at the global scale. This enables all the nodes to remain associated to the network for mutual support but without hierarchies developing: “they are integrally related, yet remain unique; they are symbiotic, yet function to their own rhythms and needs; there is self-determination at all levels, local to global, yet there is always a link” (Herndon, quoted by Nogueira, 2002, p.295).

The Indymedia model and the challenges the network has overcome can provide useful lessons for other projects attempting self-organisation, self-determination and autonomy.
Indymedia has demonstrated that as much as ‘openness’ can be problematic if it is adequately structured a global democratic project can be run without forfeiting participation, innovation, and creativity, and which can appear to threaten some aspects of the state. Moreover it can be immensely empowering to those who take part. Whilst in some ways Indymedia is only a media project, it plays a crucial role within the broad activist movements that have constructed and utilised it.

Moreover, media has always played a vital part in democratic processes and “access to and radicalisation of media are necessary for a radical democracy” (Jordan, 2002, p.149). The ‘openness’ espoused by the network is also crucial to reinvigorating the public sphere (Habermas, 1992). While Indymedia had to mediate the extent of its openness by imposing some forms of structure upon the interactions of its participants and by recognising that it was difficult to transgress cultural barriers, it was able to build a global network of participation. This global space of interaction and the self-empowerment gained from contributing to this news network facilitates the vitality of the public sphere (Rodriguez, 2001). Furthermore, it reconfirms that there are successful projects underway which are determined and able to counter the corporate-dominated, profit-driven versions of society and instead present open arenas for discussion and debate. Despite its limitations it has helped its participants to express their autonomy and views and contribute towards a more open, interactive, and networked public sphere.

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References


Notes

1 The term ‘internet’ is used broadly in this paper to refer to both the use of websites and email.

2 “We are dedicated to generating alternatives to the corporate media and to identifying and creating positive model for a sustainable and equitable society” (Anon, 2002).

3 All interviewees are quoted as participants rather than spokespeople from each collective. Furthermore, collectives consistency varied between cities. In Sydney the Indymedia collective was reasonably stable in its membership. Conversely, in Melbourne during the time of data collection participation was significantly more fluid and most interviewees identified with being a ‘media activist’ rather than being explicitly related to the cities Indymedia project.

4 Since the completion of data collection a new collective has formed in Perth that has launched a West Australian based Indymedia project. This was not included in this research.

5 Thus this paper is based upon 2001-2002 data and consequently only a snapshot of these rapidly evolving Indymedia networks.

6 Often a media stunt to attract the attention of the mainstream media.

7 Media labs (such as Spacestation in Melbourne) provide the space for cheap access to alternative media production and as an arena for sharing skills and generating ideas.

8 Specifically Indymedia was a reconfiguration of Active Sydney – an activists event calendar with a newswire, which was “action focused, it was focused on doing things … encouraging people to get out there on the streets” (Gabrielle, Active Sydney, Sydney). Gabrielle was a participant in the Active and Indymedia collectives in Sydney.

9 Indymedia is not the only online open publishing network, and actually drew its inspiration from sites such as slashdot.org, but which does not have the legion of locally affiliated sites and collective which has made Indymedia a truly global phenomena. Furthermore, while in design terms there are similarities between the layout of many Indymedia sites and corporate online new services such as BBC online – in the use of frame columns for features and in the possibilities for debate about a topic – Indymedia remains unique in enabling anyone to post stories.

10 This mix of content is a reflection not only of alternative media models, but also a trend within internet use to publish personal testaments and diary-like comments about life, most clearly represented by the growth of blogs.

11 Colene was a participant in the Catalyst and Indymedia collectives in Sydney.

12 John was a participant in the Catalyst and Indymedia collectives in Sydney.

13 Adam was a participant of Melbourne Indymedia collective and the Spacestation media lab, specifically the technical aspect of the site.
Adelaide and Melbourne collectives held fortnightly meetings, while Brisbane and Sydney held weekly meetings during 2002.

Dan was a participant of the Adelaide Indymedia collective. A pseudo name has been used.

Nik was a participant of the Melbourne Indymedia collective and the Spacestation media lab.

Ben was a participant in the Octapod collective in Newcastle that runs a media lab, he was also involved in the Sydney and Adelaide Indymedia websites.

Alex was a participant of the Melbourne Indymedia collective and the Spacestation media lab.

Barry was a participant of the Brisbane Indymedia collective.

Marni was a co-editor of The Paper, a national activist newspaper produced from Melbourne. The Paper evolved from the IndyBulletin which was a hardcopy of the Melbourne Indymedia website.

Hugh was a participant in the Catalyst, Active and Indymedia collectives in Sydney.

Sean was a journalist for Green Left Weekly, a national socialist newspaper.

The removal of the Spanish posting by Hugh caused contention within the collective, as Gabrielle (Sydney Indymedia) believed “as far as I was concerned there’s no reason why people couldn’t post in Spanish to the Sydney Indymedia site”.

Esperanto was designed by Zamenhof as a neutral language which was easy to learn (Newnham, 2003)

Paul co-wrote the Active software that underlies Indymedia, was a participant in the Catalyst and Indymedia collectives in Sydney, and involved in the global Indymedia tech collective. A pseudo name has been used.

As Hugh (Sydney Indymedia) confirms “We didn’t ever get right through the process of defining … the editorial policy … maybe we did get to a point where we agreed that we exclude only very few things which are determinedly offensive”.

As Marni (The Paper, Melbourne) commented “a couple of us are a bit disillusioned with the way … Americans are controlling the process and the way that its functioning … it would be better if it actually became a little bit more decentralised or autonomous”. Sam (Melbourne Indymedia) confirmed “if Indymedia was about empowering media locally then there should not be a global Indymedia website”.

Brisbane collective adjusted these modified consensus slightly to ensure that ‘before a majority rule vote can be cast the meeting must be asked if quarter of those present wish to keep discussing. If they do there shall be no vote’ (Anon, 2003d).

Thus, for example, Australians set-up Adelaide, Jakarta and Brisbane Indymedia on the indymedia.org.au domain before they went through the global process because they felt that this global system was taking too long to approve new sites.

Rosa Deluxembourg was a media activist from Melbourne who was involved in the Spacestation media lab which was affiliated to Melbourne Indymedia. A pseudo name has been used.

Sam was an early participant in Melbourne Indymedia but is no longer involved. Thus his comments only relate to is involvement up to and including 2001.

For example, a Brisbane newspaper used a story taken from the Brisbane Indymedia site only hours after it has been posted online.