

of action against the G8, the police announced that the organised protest march at Gleneagles had been cancelled - this was then relayed by much of the mainstream media. But within minutes, a statement from the march organisers taken over the phone by Dispatch was posted to the Indymedia website confirming the march was still on. At the same time, Indymedia was reporting that police in Edinburgh were preventing people from boarding coaches destined for Gleneagles, and stopping those already underway.

Prior to the main day of action, Indymedia reported how police were targeting volunteer street medics and legal observers for arrest. And in an underhand tactic that could only be described as 'chemical warfare by proxy', police refused to allow sewage trucks into the Hori-Zone campsite to empty the toilets – two stories you could only read on Indymedia.

#### After the mobilisation

While many protestors go home after the day's events, Indymedia keeps working, often long into the night. After the G8 the task of reporting continued: making sense of the huge amount of content; arranging it into chronological order; archiving audio, pictures and video; writing up summaries and feedback reports; following up on the criticisms of the official G8 outcomes; and getting updates on the 700 or so people who had been detained or arrested.

The buildings and campsites needed to be cleaned and cleared, and borrowed kit returned. Almost all of the 50 media centre computers were donated to local Indymedia groups and social centres, and Indymedia Scotland were left with a good deal of kit and a useable media space. Evaluations about what was achieved, with lessons learnt and recommendations for future media centres were made. These texts, together with pictures of the media centres are available online (<http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Local/ImcUkG8>).

This was the largest and most ambitious alternative media operation organised by the Indymedia UK Network to date, and many believe it to have been tremendously successful. In one analysis, the statistics stated here speak for themselves, but from another angle, perhaps the main point is that people reclaimed their own media, and volunteered their time, energy and expertise for free, truly living up to the Indymedia motto "Don't hate the Media, Be the media".



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Indymedia - reflections (1)



# (i) Indymedia and the politics of participation

Reporting the G8 in Scotland, 2005  
by Annie and Sam

"We will make (...) an intercontinental network of resistance against neoliberalism, an intercontinental network of resistance for humanity (...) This intercontinental network of resistance is not an organising structure; it doesn't have a central head or decision maker; it has no central command or hierarchies. We are the network, all of us who resist." (*Zapatista's Second Declaration of La Realidad*)

#### The miracle of alternative media

During the protests against the 2005 G8 Summit in Scotland, amidst the largest police and security operation in the UK since the Second World War, people marched in their hundreds of thousands, blocked roads and motorways, partied on bridges, created community gardens and eco-camps, held counter conferences, and fought with riot police. Some faced surveillance, harassment, dirty tricks, mass detentions and violence from police, some waved flags, attended concerts, lobbied MPs and signed petitions. And yet there is only one place where you can see an almost complete

archive of these events: a place called Indymedia.

During the protests, over 2300 photographs and hundreds of written reports were published on the open publishing newswire of the indymedia.org.uk website, creating an in-depth record of the various mobilisations that sought to challenge the legitimacy of the G8 and the policies it represents.

The front-page Indymedia article on the opening day of the G8 Summit linked directly to 93 reports, including 36 photo essays and 10 video reports. It covered events across Scotland in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling and Gleneagles, each of them with their own up-to-the-minute timeline, while international solidarity actions were reported from eight cities in six different countries (Imcista 2005).

That day, the Indymedia uk website recorded 1.5 million hits, with at least one million on each of the other protest days. By comparison, on average, the Guardian webpage receives 2 million hits per day (Guardian 2006). It seems that more and more people are logging onto the Indymedia websites to get the news direct from the streets - raw, radical and unfiltered by the restrictions of mainstream media.

This is the public face of Indymedia. It's what most people see - an alternative news website, providing counter-information and coverage of the protests. But the real story of Indymedia is what happens behind the smooth surface of the computer screens: the people, the places, the technology, the infrastructure, the networks, the organising - the Indymedia politics of participation - and how the entire G8 reporting operation was achieved for around £3500 - less than the cost of one professional TV camera.

The real Indymedia story is about the creation of an "intercontinental network of alternative communication", complete with online and offline communication tools and meeting spaces, and with a commitment to non-hierarchical organising, consensus decision-making and openness.

In writing about our G8 experiences, we hope to convey a glimpse of the raw, on-the-ground reality of setting up and running an independent media centre for a big mobilisation. We are drawing on many feedback reports, which can be found on the Indymedia documentation project (<http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Local/ImcUKG8>). But if you really want to know about Indymedia, you're best off getting in touch with a local collective near you, and learn through doing.

### **Free software, open publishing and pooling of resources in global Indymedia networks**

*"...it's like you're walking in to a big collective brain. Everything pulsing this way and that, information rushing around, spreading out and taking in information. It's a high tech temporary autonomous zone." (Evan, 2001)*

In today's age of universal blogging, the self-publishing of your own text or photographs seems easy, but in 1999, the software to do this had to be built from scratch. Thus an important point of reference for Indymedia is the Free Software Movement, generating software that's free for studying, copying, changing and distributing (Coleman 2004). The code that enables Indymedia to run a system of "Open Publishing" is free software (Arnison 2001), and is shared across IMC collectives throughout the world.

The sharing and distributing of resources is a powerful practice for every local Indymedia collective. Each of the almost 200 local nodes can draw on a global network of skills. We share technical infrastructure (servers, bandwidth, software) as well as many other resources ranging from expertise in media making or non-hierarchical organising to operating video cameras. In this way even a small collective with no technical or media experience can run its own Indymedia website by plugging into a pre-existing network of solidarity and support.

is distinguished from the centre column feature stories that aim to provide accurate, quality reports. Within Indymedia, there is space for both.

### **Edinburgh IMC: service provider or participatory project?**

The tension between the twin functions of setting up technical infrastructure to allow people to report their own news during a big protest and that of encouraging non-hierarchical mass participation has been with Indymedia since its inception. Dedicated Indymedia activists sometimes get frustrated at "being reduced to running a glorified internet cafe" or spending endless hours administering the websites instead of getting out on the streets, protesting and reporting.

Indymedia has become an element people expect to see at any large mobilisation, they expect to find online and offline facilities up and running ready for them to use, without necessarily feeling the need to contribute to the overall running of the spaces or infrastructures.

So what is Indymedia? - an alternative service provider or a participatory project? An almost professional news service, or a dirty, punky DIY project? The answer keeps shifting from one extreme to the other, but for the most part it's often to be found somewhere in the grey area, around the middle - and that's how we like it.

### **The First Casualty of War...**

"The first casualty of war is truth" runs the saying. An emergent pattern at large international protests, including previous G8 Summits, has been that Indymedia itself has been a target. Media Centres have been raided by riot police, sometimes firing stun grenades and tear gas, our equipment has been smashed, our footage seized, and reporters beaten by plain clothes police dressed as black bloc rioters. Sometimes telling the truth can be a dangerous pastime.

The backend electronic infrastructure of Indymedia has also been targeted. In 2004, just a week before the European Social Forum, two IMC servers in London hosting over 20 different Indymedia websites were seized under international jurisdiction (Stringer 2006:164-170). Then, one month before the 2005 G8 Summit itself, IMC Bristol's server was seized by police and one Indymedia volunteer arrested.

In the UK, Indymedia has been defended and supported by many journalist organisations and electronic privacy and civil liberty groups, including the NUJ, International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Reporters Without Borders, APC Network, Privacy International, Statewatch, Article 19, Liberty, Amnesty and IFEX. Even so, those of us planning the G8 media centres were taking issues of security very seriously. Backup locations were organised to continue reporting in case the media centres were raided, and safe locations for important footage or photos were found. In fact, the Edinburgh IMC was the first European G8 Media Centre not to be violently raided by the police. But the constant presence of the police Forward Intelligence Teams (FIT) outside the building, photographing, stopping and searching, and sometimes arresting people, served a similar purpose: to intimidate and harass those using the media centre.

Internet connectivity was also a constant problem at the centre. Orders for additional ADSL lines were mysteriously delayed until after the protests. The existing connection fluctuated wildly, to the point of becoming unusable. Luckily, local geeks came to the rescue and a powerful wireless antenna was erected on the roof, providing a good connection. But the next day, after the police FIT photographed the antenna, the council demanded it be removed. But luckily, in today's multi-connected world, it's almost impossible to cut off Internet communication, without cutting power to the whole building.

During big protests, mainstream media tends to rely on the police as their primary information source, while Indymedia as a news gathering tool relies on protesters and campaigners themselves. In Scotland, Indymedia reported on a host of dirty tricks employed by the police. On the main day

some running ludicrous horror stories claiming anti-globalisation protestors planned to attack police from the London Underground ventilation shafts, using samurai swords!

While things have progressed since then, with public dialogue on issues of climate change, poverty and global trade becoming more common place, the 2005 G8 represented a massive media coup for the UK Government - and by default, the G8.

Previous G8 Summits had seen united protests by all sections of the political spectrum, with huge marches held alongside spectacular mass civil disobedience. But for 2005, a joint strategy hatched by the major developmental NGOs along with Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor Gordon Brown, succeeded in dividing the mobilisation.

In short, the "Make Poverty History" coalition headed by Oxfam sought to capture public concern over global inequality by supporting the UK Government's position on Aid and Debt at the G8. They scheduled their massive demonstration to take place the weekend before the G8, thus legitimising the Summit itself and distancing themselves from any other form of protest. "When the Chancellor publicly backs a G8 protest you have to wonder what's going on," noted one commentator. They also capitalised on the 20th anniversary of Live Aid, with celebrity stars Bob Geldof and Bono staging massive publicly hyped pop concerts.

"Why anyone would want to protest against the G8 is beyond me," said Tony Blair after appearing in a photo call with Geldof, much to the annoyance of many of the smaller national and international NGOs. In fact, the 'Live8' concerts got more newspaper column inches than either the protests or the issues behind them, including the Make Poverty History march itself, and the coverage of the actual Summit negotiations and outcomes.

It's worth noting that even the major NGOs later realised they had made a public relations mistake. The G8 finished without anything near the outcomes they'd desired, while Geldof, without consulting them, declared the G8 a massive success for the world's poor.

In terms of the media war, the UK Government had succeeded in both dividing the opposition into 'good' and 'bad' protestors, and in obscuring the more critical NGO voices. The 'bad protestors' included the Dissent! Network (a network of grassroots direct action groups from across the UK) and G8Alternatives (a coalition of smaller Scottish NGOs, trade unions, anti-war and Trotskyist groups). It was these mobilisations, along with other smaller, more radical NGOs, that most used Indymedia to tell their stories. With all the celebrity hype sloshing around the mainstream media, it was essential to tell these sides of the story, to make some kind of intervention, to provide an alternative.

### **Making Media on Shifting Grounds:**

#### **geography, locations and logistics in Scotland**

Since the violent confrontations seen at the Genoa G8 Summit in 2001, the G8 has retreated from urban environments and instead have been hidden away in relatively rural or isolated places. For 2005, the exclusive Gleneagles hotel in the Scottish Highlands was chosen as the Summit location, protected by a concrete and steel cordon, helicopters and thousands of police supported by the military. This retreat makes it difficult to voice dissent anywhere near the G8, let alone report about those protests that do happen.

In Scotland, we wanted to set up a media infrastructure that would allow protestors to tell their own stories straight from the action, rather than running an exclusive media operation staffed by 'professional protest reporters'. To achieve this, we knew Indymedia had to be located where ever the protestors themselves would be: in demonstrations, crash spaces, campsites and convergence centres.

It became clear that people would gather and demonstrate in several different locations, both rural and urban. But until the last moment nobody knew the exact locations. Protest plans kept changing and several negotiations for the main convergence campsite fell through at the last

minute due to police interference. As is the case with many Indymedia operations: The ground keeps shifting and changing each day and plans have to be flexible to take account of each new development.

In an attempt to be true to the slogan "we are everywhere!", we accumulated enough equipment to set up physical media centres, or at least public internet access points, in as many places as possible, connected through the collective use of IRC chat channels, mobile phones and roving reporters. We bought 50 Pentium III Computers on ebay and two local computer recycling charities lent us the same number of monitors. Tables and chairs were borrowed from a local Trade Union. Many people brought their own equipment, and others lent some impressive and expensive kit. "Blagging and borrowing" has always been a maxim for Indymedia, multiplying the value of kit by sharing it.

### **Urban IMC Spaces and Technologies in Scotland**

The main spaces that Indymedia operated from were quite diverse, both in locations and technologies. In Glasgow, a few tech activists from Germany grabbed a bunch of equipment and set up public access reporting computers in a former hat factory turned squatted convergence centre. Internet bandwidth was borrowed wirelessly from a supportive neighbour: Dirty lo-tech DIY media at its best.

The backbone of the Indymedia operation was set up in a spacious 19th century chapel in Edinburgh's centre. Owned by a charity (The Settlement Trust), it was already home to "The Forest", a volunteer-based arts café and bar, and an existing hub for creative and alternative culture within the city.

With the Indymedia Centre on the first floor, it became one of the main communication nodes for the G8 protests, complete with a social vibe. The media centre space upstairs was made a no-alcohol, non-smoking zone (something quite unusual for European media centres). With Indymedia used to having more autonomy over the spaces it uses, sharing the building with the Forest Café meant liaising very closely with its collective of volunteers, carefully negotiating boundaries, responsibilities and working out how to co-operate in what we knew was going to be a very hectic period.

In the end this worked well and there were some great moments. On the first day of demonstrations, there was a big 'spontaneous' street party outside the building. With the front windows removed to make a stage for bands and DJs, and the Infernal Noise Brigade's drums echoing off the surrounding buildings, people danced late into the night under an Indymedia banner written in Gaelic.

The IMC space was open to everyone wanting to produce grassroots media coverage. But as is often standard Indymedia practice, mainstream media were banned, as all too often they simply pitch up and ask, "Where's the riot then?". We also had confirmed reports of mainstream TV crews candidly stating, "We're only interested in filming the violence". Interestingly, The Guardian set up its own 'independent journalist media centre', or rather, hired a small central internet café in Edinburgh, making it available for 'bloggers' and the updating of 'independent news websites'. The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) also supported the creation of a small centre to encourage media coverage of the main counter-conferences in Edinburgh. It seems the idea of temporary ad hoc 'independent' media centres is spreading... though the replications of course fail at the most important hurdle: participatory and transparent organising.

### **"Field Indymedia" Stirling: Frontline Reporting at the Eco-Village**

Most people engaged in direct action such as road blockades were staying in the rural convergence eco-village campsite ("Hori-Zone"). Being in a field outside Stirling, the Indymedia presence here was a mix of high- and low-tech. A satellite truck from mobile media veterans Psand provided the

Internet connectivity, while 20 old Pentium I laptops from Bristol Wireless were 'regenerated' with free open source software, and used as open access internet terminals in a big marquee. More modern computers were also used to upload picture reports and to stream audio coverage.

Power came partly from solar panels, but mostly from an eco-friendly bio-diesel generator - which was how much of the camp was powered. But with so many people wanting to charge mobile phones, cameras, and laptops, power remained a problem. In the end a rather strict power ration was instituted: the spare power sockets disappeared.

While the level of co-ordination here was lower than at the Edinburgh centre, the atmosphere was more frenetic and infectious. Field Indymedia Stirling was also more in the frontline, as riot police surrounded the campsite, and helicopters droned constantly overhead.

A small Indymedia team at the campsite was reinforced by a wider group of volunteers coalescing around the computers, from the US, Australia, New Zealand, Spain, France, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, and several cities in the UK. From the feedback report: "Some really fucking fantastic people came forward to help (...) People who had never even considered doing this type of work came forward and rose to the challenge."

### **The Edinburgh Backbone: Core Reporting and Co-ordination**

Almost 1000 people registered to use the Edinburgh media centre over the main week of protests. When the doors opened, we had around 25 public terminals providing access to the internet, hubs for people to plug their laptops into, and dedicated workspaces for video, audio, photo, and the core function of news reporting known as 'Dispatch'. Some volunteers were around to show newcomers the ropes, and also to look for people who were prepared to give a hand with mundane tasks like cleaning or "doing the door".

### **Beyond Dispatch: Media Teams and Production**

Within the Edinburgh IMC there were several co-ordinations beyond the core 'dispatch' news reporting team.

The Radical Radio Coalition set up a studio within the IMC. They streamed live news and pre-recorded content over the Internet. Using open source audio software, they also fully recorded and published some of the counter-conference events held by the more progressive and radical NGOs. In total they archived 162 audio reports on a dedicated radio website, with the content also being used by FM radio stations in the UK, Spain, Italy, US, Germany and Africa, in addition to other internet radio stations.

Prior to the G8 itself, radio activists had also worked with local campaigning, community and resident groups, to produce audio content relevant to G8 issues, much of which was aired on local community radio.

A team of experienced video activists ensured that all major events were covered by video cameras. There to help people coming into the centre with their own footage, they also edited short rushes and published them daily on the web - in total the video teams published 72 segments of video reports. Highlights were burned onto CD or DVD for screenings and distribution at the various activist centres, so that people could see what had happened in all the locations.

A dedicated photo desk provided a speedy drop off point where people with cameras could dump their memory cards and get back out on the streets as quickly as possible to carry on reporting. Photo volunteers helped people publish their pictures, and advised on legal and safety issues.

These teams worked well and ensured a higher than average standard of published material. However, for many Indymedia activists it's not actually the quality that counts, but the empowerment that comes from using technology to publish your own material without any interference from editors or line managers. Thus, the open publishing wire that serves these needs

Since 1999, Indymedia UK has grown from a single small collective to become the "United Kollektives". It now has local nodes in 13 cities and separate websites for Scotland to Bristol. For the G8 reporting operation, we really benefited from this network of nodes because it allowed reporting to exist in a somewhat decentralised fashion even though Indymedia UK was used as the main reporting website. The UK site was chosen because it has the largest pool of people, both in the UK and beyond, who would be online to help if anything went wrong, and the strongest distributed server set-up to deal with the expected high traffic. The scotland.indymedia.org website was run in parallel, carrying copies of the main features and additional articles, but without the heavy load placed on the main UK server.

But it's not just those who identify themselves as hardcore Indymedia volunteers that make it all happen. Sometimes the name Indymedia is just a convenient banner under which media activists can gather and co-ordinate. In Scotland, the G8 reporting saw collaborations with numerous media groups including Beyond TV, Bristol Wireless, Camcorder Guerrillas, KanalB?, Leith FM, Pilton Video, Psand, Red Pepper Magazine, SchNEWS?, Undercurrents, and the Variant Magazine to name just a few. Setting Up Independent Media Centres - temporary autonomous zones in the midst of global protest

The set-up sounds simple: find a space, get enough computers, connect them to the Internet, and then all the people will come and write their reports, post their pictures and phone in to the news dispatch centre to report what's happening in the streets and at the protests.

In practice of course there is always more: rewiring the mains electricity circuit, sourcing enough power cables, and then tables to stick 50 computers on, and then chairs to go with them, finding transport for all the kit, making sure phone lines and cables are working, juggling with printer drivers, sourcing smoke detectors and fire extinguishers, making banners and flyers with the address of the centre, publishing the reporting telephone numbers, finding safe places for people to sleep, liaising with a dozen different groups, sticking maps of Gleneagles on the wall, getting enough coffee and food to keep people going for those who don't get to leave very often, holding meetings to involve people and to decide on opening times and access procedures, designing information flows, making exhaustive lists of events to cover, identifying tasks and making rotas, and dealing with the police... and all this before even opening the doors.

Every physical Independent Media Centre has differed in its size, shape and the level of organisation and co-ordination that manifests itself. Some have been just a room to meet up in and plan coverage, like in Prague for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) / World Bank meeting in 2000 (Stringer 2006:69-71). There, media activists used public Internet cafes to work from, making it almost impossible for the repressive Czech authorities to shut down the IMC operation. In the US, several media centres have had serious financial funding, running to tens of thousands of US Dollars. Every IMC centre is different. Every centre is an experiment in on-the-ground horizontal organising, in participatory media making - and in reporting events that are ignored, obscured or misrepresented by the mainstream media.

### **Fighting a Media War**

Most of the early independent media centres were first set up to report the emerging large-scale mobilisations of the movement against neoliberal globalisation. They were set up to counter the mainstream media's refusal to accurately cover either the reasons why people were protesting or what was actually happening at the protests themselves.

The first Indymedia website in 1999, covering the Seattle WTO protests, published pictures and footage of riot police firing tear gas and rubber bullets at point blank range into crowds of peaceful protestors - while the major TV news networks were still denying that police were attacking people. Indymedia UK was set up following the June 18th International Carnival Against Capitalism protests in 1999 (Annie and Sam 2003). Many UK newspapers were demonising campaigners,