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Real, Meet the Hackers; Hackers, this is the Real

ByECN, Autistici and reload

[IMAGE]

In April 2004, the seventh Italian Hackmeeting (AKA HackIt) took place in Milano. Here, members of the Milan Hacklab reload and activist information networks ECN and Autistici give an overview of the changing experiences of Hacklabs and the Italian hacktivist scene

Hacking might be about ‘the act of understanding the functioning of complex machines in order to deconstruct them and reconstruct them in a non conventional manner’, but the hacker’s interest does not end at computing machinery. Hacklabs are a growing medium for new forms of networked organising, a social space in which people attempt to self-organise along the principles of practicality, participation, openness and creativity that have inspired and strengthened the hackers’ movement since its beginning.

Hackmeetings and Hacklabs have been crucial in creating a networked community able to experiment not only with technical issues but with the very fabric of social organisation – especially the way people relate to one another when building political spaces. At the same time they have been crucial in building the relational infrastructure behind several strategic projects. Along with various other networked communities, the hacking community was the base for Indymedia, a new way of using the media to describe what we face every day in our struggles and in our lives. It was also crucial to several independent servers providing autonomous internet services – Autistici and ECN amongst others – and diverse social projects in places as far afield as Palestine, Argentina, Serbia and South Africa.

In 2003, two years after Genoa and the big wave of struggles that culminated there, the global movements were faced with a not-so-new challenge: the need to recentre political activity and social struggle on the basis of a ‘political protagonism’. Rather than, as before, working rather comfortably behind a stage dominated by the squabbles of big political organisations, this meant a shift away from symbolic protest to active and positive interventions. Projects woven by a very diverse community now faced up to the challenge of bringing their experiments to fruition in concrete environments, whilst trying to avoid the mistakes they had always criticised. In Milan, with *reload*, we began to work on transforming the multiple identities and projects we had built in the urban landscape into a networked entity where individuals or groups could collaborate at various levels. The idea was to experiment with the network concept in our daily organising, creating a structural and infrastructural web all of our skills, ideas, potentials and project threads.

‘Social hacking’ was always an important project of the Hackmeeting and Hacklab communities. Since Genoa, the idea has become more and more crucial. As spaces of participation and autonomous self-organising have shrunk, the creativity and hacks of this network of people have focused on spreading the attitude out into real life. Mixing affinities, methodologies, technologies and identities and intertwining our practices and languages, we started looking for a way to bring our practice into a concrete social context. The name of our project is a tribute to the overall effort: ‘*reload* – reality hacking’. It also signifies our belief that there will be no single straight route for us, but a constant ‘reloading’ of multiple combinations and hypotheses.

The project started with the squatting of a shop in order to provide a direct, transparent, and open presence on the streets of a district we had been working in for six years, and the development of common project with other realities and spaces all around Milan. This project encompassed the establishment of a distributed radio FM/web network and a series of courses building a metropolitan

connective tissue that people struggling in Milan could use to gain access to information resources outside of concentrated communications media. The project takes new twists and turns every day, as it is shaped by and shapes the reality around it, building bridges and nodes with the communities it has participated in and trying to find, by trial and error, ways to better define a participatory dimension to social life.

An extensive interview on the Hacklabs was published in 2002 both by Autonomedia <http://slash.autonomeia.org> in English, Loahacklab site in Italian <http://www.autistici.org/loa/>, and Multitudes in French. The original discussion is available at the Interactivist site: <http://info.interactivist.net/article.pl?sid=02/07/23/1218226>

LINKS

Reload <http://reload.realityhacking.org>

ECN <http://www.ecn.org>

Autistici <http://www.autistici.org>

Indymedia <http://www.indymedia.org>