The Amateur Computerist

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Homo Neticus not *Homo Economicus*

The occasion for this issue is a panel that was part of the Ninth Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers which took place in Copenhagen, Denmark from October 15 to 18, 2008. This issue of the *Amateur Computerist* documents the presentations made at that panel, "The Internet, Netizens, and Journalism: Do Netizens Make Possible New Forms of Journalism?"

Besides contributions from each of the panelists, the issue includes reports about the panel in an online newspaper and a blog. Also we include an interview of Ronda Hauben by Guenter Hack, the editor of *Radio Austria International* website site for technical computer users, about the publication of the book *Netizens*. Ronda also was honored to be one of those nominated for the Ada Lovelace award for women in

technology. The nomination article is included as well.

Along with the presentations on netizen journalism in China and South Korea made as part of the panel, was Ulla Rannikko's presentation on citizen journalism, and Anders Ekeland's presentation on participatory technical design. In his presentation, Ekeland introduced the concept of *homo neticus* as the alternative to the more traditional economic concept of *homo economicus*. While *homo economicus* is traditionally the paradigm of the egoistic, short sighted economic individual, *homo neticus* presents the world with the active, innovative, collaborative alternative of the netizen.

[The following Abstract describes the panel that was presented at the 9th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. The titles of the four papers and the biographies of the four presenters follow the Abstract.]

The Internet, Netizens, and Journalism: Do Netizens Make Possible New Forms of Journalism?

Abstract

In his pioneering research about the impact of the Internet, Michael Hauben recognized that the participatory nature of the Net made possible a new form of citizenship, a non geographic form. He called the people who were developing this new form of citizenship, netizens.[1]

What would be the impact of this new phenomenon? Hauben investigated several areas where the impact of this phenomenon was particularly striking. One of these areas was journalism. What impact would this new form of non geographic citizenship, would netizens have on the news media? Would netizens make possible a new form of journalism? The Net "gives the power of the reporter to the Netizen" Hauben wrote.[2]

The papers in this panel explored what the nature of this power is. One paper considered the long desired goal of the press to act as a watchdog to challenge the abuse of power. Are netizens making such a press possible? Another paper looked at events in China where netizen online activity has led to changes in media practice and government policy. The paper explored whether the Internet and netizens are helping to expose social and political problems in

China and helping to clarify what is needed for their solution.

Another paper looked at the participatory nature of the Internet through the perspective of the South Korean *OhmyNews International* (this is the English edition of the Korean *OhmyNews*) and *Indymedia* in Finland. The paper addressed, by examining citizen reporters' practices, the possibilities and constraints of participation online. While the participatory nature of the Net makes possible these experiments in the field of journalism, it also facilitates other forms of interactive exploration. A paper in our panel explored how interactive participation impacts economic development, especially in the field of innovative design.

The panel discussed internet related developments in four countries. The panel focused on how the concept and role of netizens and the Internet are contributing to a different more participatory model of democracy. It raised the question of how this crosses national boundaries and geographic limitations.

Titles and Brief Biographies

1. Netizen Journalism as Watchdog Journalism (Ronda Hauben)
Ronda Hauben, is co-author of *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, IEEE Computer Society, Los Alamitos, CA, 1997. She is a researcher and writer. Currently she is a featured writer for *OhmyNews International* and is a correspondent covering the U.N.
2. China: Netizen impact on Government Policy and Media Practice (Jay Hauben)
Jay Hauben is an internet historian and editor of the *Amateur Computerist*. His published writings include biographies and historical articles especially about the Internet and communications technology. He has worked for the last 14 years in the Libraries of Columbia University.
3. The Relation Between Citizen Journalism and Its Organizational Context: The Cases of *Indymedia* in Finland and *OhmyNews International* (Ulla Rannikko)

Ulla Rannikko is a Ph.D. candidate in Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her research interests include alternative media, journalism, social aspects of the Internet and media activism.

4. Democratizing Innovation through the Internet? (Anders Ekeland)

Anders Ekeland, Economist from University of Oslo, also studied Computer Science, History and Czech Language. As the head of the department for innovation indicators and statistics at The Norwegian Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU STTEP), Ekeland has done research on innovation in various fields, especially ICT related. His research includes evaluation of Norwegian Broadband policy, use of Internet in political parties and issues related to semantic Web.

Notes:

1. See for example, Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben, *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, IEEE Computer Society, Los Alamitos, CA, 1997 and online: http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/netbook

2. Michael Hauben, "The Effect of the Net on the Professional News Media," in *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, and online at: http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x13

[This is a slightly edited version of a talk given in Copenhagen on Oct 17, 2008 at the 9th annual conference of the Association of Internet Researchers (The tag for the conference is IR9)]

Candlelight 2008 and the 15th Anniversary of 'The Net and Netizens'

by Ronda Hauben

This year, 2008 is the 15th anniversary of the publication of "The Net and Netizens" by Michael Hauben on the Internet in the summer of 1993. Michael posted this paper in four parts because it was fairly long. It was based on research he had done about the Internet by asking people questions about how they were using the Net in that period of the early 1990s. Also at the time there was some use of the term net.citizen on the net. Michael contracted the term net.citizen into the term netizen. Based on the responses and his analysis of them, Michael wrote a paper

defining what he called the netizen.

His paper was spread around the Net by the Usenet software network and by people forwarding it to each other via e-mail. People embraced the concept of netizen to describe the social and political phenomenon that Michael had identified in his paper. To be a netizen is not a passive identity. Rather a netizen is an active participant in the affairs of the Net and ultimately of the world.

Often when people online were acting in a manner socially empowered by the Net, they would call themselves netizens.[1] Identifying as a netizen has become an identity some people have embraced. They consider themselves to be netizens.

In a recent book,[2] netizen is described as a political concept. The impression is given that the concept showed up on the net more or less spontaneously. That is not accurate. Before Michael's work, the word netizen was rarely, if ever used. After his paper "The Net and Netizens" circulated widely, the use of the concept netizen became increasingly common. It was a whole process of research, of summarizing the research and analyzing it, and then putting the research back online and people embracing it. This was the process by which the foundation for the concept of a netizen identity was first established on the Internet in the early and mid 1990s.

The early 1990s was also a time when the privatization of the Internet was being actively promoted by commercial interests and U.S. government officials. Spreading the consciousness of oneself as a netizen became part of the fight defending the public essence of the Net from the attack by commercial interests. The result was that an understanding of the origin and development of the concept of netizens has in various ways been suppressed by those forces who wanted to promote the commercial domination of the Internet.[3]

In "The Net and Netizens," Michael wrote that the Net represents a significant new development. "We are seeing a revitalization of society," he explained. "The frameworks are being redesigned from the bottom up. A new, more democratic world is becoming possible." This new world had a number of characteristics that he outlined. He described a situation where "the old model of distribution of information from the central Network Broadcasting Company is being questioned and

challenged. The top-down model of information being distributed by a few for mass consumption is no longer the only news."[4]

Michael explained how "people now have the ability to broadcast their observations or questions around the world and have other people respond."

The computer networks, he wrote, "form a new grassroots connection that allows excluded sections of society to have a voice. This new medium is unprecedented. Previous grassroots media have existed for much smaller groups of people…."

The Net, Michael argued, was providing netizens with the ability to create the content and to set the agenda for what is to be discussed. Thus netizens had the power to not only determine the content for discussion forums but also to design the forms that online discussions take.

Michael wrote elsewhere that in its simplest form this characterizes democracy, making 'The Net and Netizens' a significant model for a democratic society. It is not elections that is the essence of democracy, where certain candidates are put forward once every 4 or 5 years so you can vote for them. But democracy is where you can be active participating and where what you say has some effect on what happens. The netizen is a participant in this continuous exercise of democracy. That is what I understand to be more appropriately considered a model of democracy.

Another one of the earliest pieces Michael wrote was looking at an article James Mill, who was the father of John Stuart Mill, wrote in 1825 about Freedom of the Press. Mill wrote that government officials are going to be corrupt. They cannot help it because they are put in a situation where they have power. Therefore a means is needed to monitor the actions of those with power. Mill argued that society needs a press that is a watchdog. The Net, Michael wrote, makes such a watchdog possible now.

Remember that "The Net and Netizens" was first posted online in 1993. The conceptual understanding it proposed when the article was posted was something new. The question to be raised is how much of this is possible to fulfill? How accurate was what Michael understood of the potential of the Net and of the netizen to make a more democratic world possible?

I want to come back to our current times. What is happening now?

I have found that it is very important to follow South Korea if one is interested in the development of the netizen.

In 2003 I read an article in the *Financial Times* that said that the new South Korean President had been elected by netizens.

What happened was that in 2002, netizens in South Korea made it possible to elect as the president someone from outside of the mainstream political establishment. Roh Moo-hyun was elected for a five year term as the President of South Korea.

In 2004 the National Assembly tried to impeach him and netizens again took up the fight this time against the impeachment. One of the means of fighting for democracy in South Korea are candlelight demonstrations. An activist in South Korea told us that they had taken inspiration from the candlelight demonstrations in Leipzig, Germany that helped to reunite Germany.

In 2008, there were over 100 days of candlelight demonstrations in South Korea, which started on May 2.

On May 2, 2008 I was in Seoul. I left on May 3. (I had been in South Korea for 9 days). On May 2, a new set of candlelight demonstrations began.

I did not go to the demonstration on May 2. But I do have a sense what was happening at the time from talking to people I know while in South Korea in April and early May. It was obvious that something was going to happen, just not when. And so I was not surprised. But I think what did happen is very important and if you look at this poster what you see is Candlelight Girl and her army.

The first candlelight demonstration on May 2 was called by middle school girls and high school students using their cell phones and a fan website on the Internet to announce that there was going to be a candlelight demonstration.

The demonstration was part of an effort to impeach the new
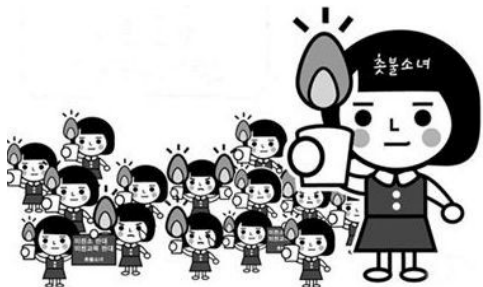
president of South Korea, Lee Myung-bak who had won the election in December 2007. (Internet posts about the election by netizens had been the object of censorship by the South Korean government from June - December 2007.) In April 2008, Lee Myung-bak, came to the U.S. and signed an agreement with George Bush to give the beef lobby in the U.S. Congress what they wanted. The agreement ended the former restrictions on the export of U.S. beef to South Korea. It eliminated the regulations that existed to provide precautions with regard to the danger of mad cow disease or other worries about unhealthy beef. Virtually all the restrictions were to be removed.

There were articles and a TV investigation program about this development in the news in Korea. Middle school and high school students who were already upset about the quality of the school lunches they get, felt this was only going to add to their problem of poor quality food in school. Also there was already an impeachment petition being circulated online as the new president and the program he was promoting led many in South Korea to fear that he would be taking South Korea backwards to its autocratic past. The candlelight demonstrations were a sign that many in South Korea saw the actions of the new president as a difficult problem for their country.

The Role of *OhmyNews*

In August 2008, Oh Yeon-ho who is the CEO and the founder of *OhmyNews* gave a talk in the U.S. about the candlelight 2008 demonstrations. *OhmyNews* is mainly an online newspaper that has committed itself to be a 21st century newspaper.

The Korean edition of *OhmyNews* combines articles submitted by its regular staff with those submitted by people from around the world, from the Korean-speaking population and then decides which will be put on its front pages. The Korean edition has a substantial regular staff, as opposed to the smaller English edition which is mainly based on contributions of articles by non-staff voluntary journalists from around the world. The Korean edition of *OhmyNews* is a major newspaper in South Korea.

There has been a very proud tradition of protest and sacrifice in South Korea. In 1987 the South Korean people got rid of the military

dictatorship. And it has been a hard fight since then. But it's only in the last 10 years that people have felt that they've had some minimal level of democracy. In his talk, Oh Yeon-ho explained that people had committed themselves to using the internet to try to guarantee and spread that democracy.

OhmyNews played an important role in the 2008 candlelight demonstrations. It started OhmyTV. Because of OhmyTV I was able to watch the candlelight demonstrations in my kitchen in the Bronx in New York City. I don't speak Korean but I could have a good idea of what was happening. I could chat using the Internet to talk to a former editor of *OhmyNews* who is in London. She and I would write back and forth to each other about what was happening in the demonstrations. *OhmyNews* had 24 hour coverage at times and they provided not only coverage on OhmyTV of the demonstrations, but also articles and photos on their web pages about the demonstrations. Also they had articles in English on the English edition of *OhmyNews* about the demonstrations. I found the coverage helpful and inspiring.

Though netizen is not a Korean word, it has been adopted in Korea. People use the word netizen to describe when they are active defending democracy using the Internet. Netizens in South Korea took on to broadcast whatever was going on. They would use text messages sent via their cell phones or their laptops. They would discuss what was happening online.

A report about the demonstrations by France24 was particularly helpful. The reporter recognized what was happening. France24 presented a netizen with his laptop. Even when the police were using water cannons attacking the demonstrators you could often see someone with plastic over his laptop trying to film what was going on. People took their cameras, their cell phones and their laptops however they could, they would broadcast on the Internet what was happening. They would get broadcasts back from other people at other areas of the demonstrations. Along with the OhmyTV broadcasts, there were many other sources of broadcasts, as for example via the Korean online video portal Afreeca or via "YouTube." People who weren't at the demonstration would discuss what they saw and interact with the demonstrators via their computers or cell phones. As one person explained to me, netizens

would go with their laptops to the demonstration. They could be at the demonstration and online at the same time. So online and offline reality came together in a lot of ways for a number of people during these demonstrations.

I was told that the demonstrations were different from the prior tradition of demonstrations. In South Korea, there is a tradition of militant demonstrations in the struggle for democracy. The demonstrations in 2008, however, were festivals. There were people of all ages, men, women, and children at the demonstrations. People would bring their instruments. For example, in one situation, in the middle of the police attacking demonstrators, some people began to play their accordions. At other times, there would be singing, there would be dancing. There was debating. There was something called a free speech stage that developed. People would line up for a chance to speak. Others would listen and react to the speakers. And the demonstrators became the press, so they were no longer dependent on how their demonstrations were reported in the traditional media.

These were an important set of activities. But in order to understand what happened it is crucial to recognize that South Korea is advanced in terms of the Internet.

South Korea is among the most advanced nations in having the highest number of people connected with broadband access. So it's my sense that what happens in South Korea represents a glimpse into the future in terms of what's possible when a large number of people in a country have access to high speed broadband connectivity.

If the Internet can spread and spread widely and if there's inexpensive wireless available, that is very helpful because if people have the internet and can write, film and carry on discussions about what is happening in the world, this can function as a watchdog over what is happening. At times during the candlelight demonstrations, the widespread media coverage proved to be a protection for people from the arbitrary actions of the police.

One such example is demonstrated by events that took place in Seoul on June 10 and 11. A very big demonstration was planned for June 10 to celebrate the victory over the military government in South Korea in June 1987. Some estimate as many as 600,000 to 700,00 people were

expected and actually participated in the demonstration in Seoul. What the government did to prepare for the demonstration was to try to blockade the president's house, which is called the Blue House, to keep the demonstrators from marching to the Blue House. The police put up barriers. They put out a number of shipping containers and filled them with sand which was reported to have weighed 40 tons each. The police put grease on the barriers so people would not be able to climb over them.

The netizens named this structure "Myung-bak's castle." They even made a wikipedia entry for "Myung-bak's castle" as a landmark of Seoul.

They decorated this new landmark of Seoul.

Below is a photo of what happened later, after the June 10 demonstration, from 12 midnight on June 11 until 5:30 a.m. On one side of the barrier is the crowd of people discussing what should they do about the barriers. On the other side of the shipping containers, there are buses filled with police and police outside the buses guarding the President's house.

The photo shows how people had brought blocks of Styrofoam to be able to go over the police barricade. But there was a 5-1/2 hour debate over what to do at the site of the demonstration with people lining up on

both sides of the debate. Through the discussion people decided not to go over the barricade for a number of reasons. People felt it was too dangerous to go over it. Instead several people with their banners went up on the barricade.

The people who went up on the barrier did so to show that they

could have gone over it if they wanted to but that they had decided not to.

The last photo presents the contrast between WHAT IS SUPPOSED to be democracy, which is the side of the barricade protecting the President from communicating with the people.

And WHAT IS democracy, which is the people communicating with each other to determine what action is in the interest of the people on the other side of the blockade. People online wrote about how important this all was to them, to see that there could be a discussion especially where people had real differences. This was significant in two ways:

First, the discussion made it possible to decide how to resolve the differences to come to a decision among all of them.

Second, they cooperatively determined how to construct a structure that would enable them to carry out their decision. They took the kind of plastic, cooperative process possible online and utilized it to construct an offline structure and action.

The discussion and decisions carried out on June 11 were by a combination of people acting as netizens and as citizens. What they did, I want to propose, represents an important achievement and serves as a fitting celebration of the 15th anniversary of the publication online of "The Net and Netizens."

Notes:
1. I say 'socially' because the concept of netizen refers to having a concern for the well being of others, not only for one's own concerns and interests.
2. *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines*, Mark Poster, Durham, NC, 2006, p. 78.
3. For example, we had difficulty getting the book *Netizens* published and distributed widely.
4. "The Net and Netizens" is the first chapter of the book "*Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*." There is an online version of the book at: http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/netbook/

China: Netizen Impact on Government Policy and Media Practice

by Jay Hauben

In this talk, I present two examples where the activity of netizens has had an impact on Chinese society. I hope to illustrate that active participation by a critical mass of net users in online discussions can influence national public opinion, activate the mainstream media, check actions of the authorities and set some of the political agenda of China. I submit this as evidence that netizens are beginning to exercise some political power and contributing to developing Chinese society in the direction of greater citizen participation.

I. Introduction

Internet adoption in China is still rapidly increasing. It was reported in July 2008 that there were more than 253 million online users in China,[1] forty three million more than a year earlier. Over 100 million of current users read online forums. A still smaller set of net users, less than 60 million are active contributors to forum and chat room discussions. It is among these users that I would locate net users who are "netizens."

1. http://www.cnnic.com.cn/html/Dir/2008/07/31/5247.htm

Netizen as a concept of scholarly interest was first analyzed in the research of Michael Hauben at Columbia University starting in 1992. Hauben had participated in the 1980s on local hobbyist run bulletin board systems (BBS) and in global Usenet newsgroups. He wrote about "a new social institution, an electronic commons developing."[2] He undertook research to explore how and why these communications forums served as an electronic commons. He posted questions on newsgroups, mailing lists and portals and found a very high level "of mutual respect and sharing of research and ideas fostering a sense of community and participation."[3] Hauben found there were people online who actively use and take up to defend public communication, who oppose censorship and disruptive online behavior. Hauben recognized this as a form of network citizenship. He contracted "net.citizen" into "netizen" to express the new online non-geographically based social identity and net citizenship he attributed to these people.

The self-identity and practice of netizenship spread around the world. Especially in analyzing the net in China, it is necessary to distinguish between all net users (*wang min*) and those users who participate constructively concerning social and political issues in forums and chat rooms.[4] This second category comes online for public rather than simply for personal and entertainment purposes. They act as citizens of the net (*wang luo gong min*) and are the netizens of this talk. The distinction must be emphasized because the Chinese characters for network people *wang min* are very often translated into English as "netizens." In the examples I will now read, I strictly adopt the second usage. Netizens are net citizens, not all net users.[5]

II. Examples[6]

My first example is the case of **The Death of Sun Zhigang**[7] (2003)

To help control migration of rural people to the cities, the Chinese government had in place for more than 20 years, "Measures for Internment and Deportation of Urban Vagrants."[8] On March 17, 2003, a college graduate from the city of Wuhan working away from home in the city of Guangzhou was stopped for an identity check. He was detained under these measures because he did not have the temporary residence card he was asked to show. In the police station he contacted

two friends who came quickly to vouch for him and his employed status. The police would not release him. Three days later his friends tried to contact him and were notified that he died from a heart attack. After learning of Mr. Sun's death, his relatives and friends contacted the local police for an explanation but received no definite answer as to what happened.

With financial help from Mr. Sun's former classmates, his family was able to have an autopsy performed which indicated that Mr. Sun was brutally beaten before his death. One of the classmates who was studying media in Beijing posted an appeal for help concerning Mr. Sun's death on a cyber forum for discussion among media professionals from all over China. A journalist working for the *South Metropolitan Daily* took the post as a lead and decided to initiate interviews of the family and authorities involved.[9] About one month after the death, a detailed report about it appeared in the *South Metropolitan Daily* with the headline, "University graduate detained and cruelly beaten to death for not showing temporary residence card."[10] On the same day, the journalist also made the report available online on the Southern Net news site.[11]

Following the reports, the news was picked up by editors of other online news portals. The net was quickly flooded with anger at the death and appeals for justice. Major national forums[12] featured extensive discussions of the detention system, the death of Mr. Sun and its implications. Other netizens commented about the obvious injustice and denial of his constitutional rights. Portal sites made the case a Hot Topic where links to related stories were gathered. Chinese language forums outside of China were also used for discussions and analysis of the case.

A memorial page was launched by a software engineer. It eventually received over 200,000 visits, many visitors leaving comments, messages of sadness and some money donations to the family. Some comments gave examples of other cases of police brutality. Others went further, demanding an end to the official policy that treated migrants as lower class citizens.

The intense online reaction influenced further reporting first by big non-governmental media and then by the mainstream national media, feeding more online ferment. A special committee was formed by the

Guangzhou government to investigate Sun's death. The subsequent blunt denial by the police of responsibility enraged many netizens. Their reaction was critical comments now focusing on the weakness of the investigation procedures.

Contributions of articles, responses, comments and calls for action appeared online from activists, lawyers, and academics all of whom had no other option where to publish their critical analysis. Online news articles typically received tens of thousands of responses. Live chat discussions formulated demands for a thorough investigation, punishment for those involved, change or abolition of vagrancy measures, and an immediate end to deportations. The combination of online outrage and mainstream media coverage made the case a topic of household conversation everywhere in China. *People's Daily* began to publish selected netizen comments in its online news site. Pressure from online communities, social groups and the central government gave the local officials no choice but to initiate a more serious investigation. The investigators acknowledged that netizen pressure added to their determination, resulting in thirteen arrests reported. An open trial from June 5 to 9 ended with 12 convictions of guards at the detention center and some of the detainees. There was one death sentence. Twenty-three governmental officials and police officers were disciplined for their roles in the death and lack of action after it.

Even after the arrest, online petitions were circulated and online protest letters were addressed to the National People's Congress calling for abolition of the current custody and repatriation system. Such letters virtually never appear in Chinese off line media. On May 15, a netizen posted an article, "On the Violation of 'Legislation Law' by the Holding System: The Case of Sun Zhigang" on a site maintained by the government which was followed by an online examination of the existing anti-vagrancy laws. On June 18, after over 20 years of enforcement, the State Council decide to abolished the 1982 Measures under which Mr. Sun had been detained. New measures were initiated which did not allow for detention but required a system of help for homeless people be available on a voluntary basis.

The collaboration of netizen and traditional media set the news agenda and helped public opinion to form so that the death of Sun

Zhigang, an ordinary person, was given extensive national coverage. This led to the relatively quick end of a long standing oppressive and discriminatory law. One scholar described this as "one of the first cases of popular opinion overriding and resetting official agendas and the first demonstration of the sociopolitical power of Chinese netizenship."[13]

Another event in 2003 was the **BMW Incident** (2003)

On Oct 16, 2003, two farmers, Liu Zhongxia and her husband, rode their tractor loaded with onions through a narrow street in Harbin, capital city of Heilongjiang Province in Northeast China. The tractor accidentally scrapped the rearview mirror of a car parked on the side of the street. The car was a BMW owned by Su Xiuwen's businessman husband. Ms. Su caused a commotion haranguing the two farmers because of the damage to her husband's expensive car. Then she got back into the car and drove it into the crowd which had gathered because of the commotion. Ms. Liu was killed and 12 bystanders were injured.

Ms. Su was tried in a Harbin court on Dec. 20. None of the bystanders testified. They had each received money from Ms. Su's husband. After two hours, the court ruled Ms. Su had not been properly handling her car. The death of Ms. Liu was judged accidental. Ms. Su was given a two year sentence which was suspended. There was brief local media coverage of the trial and it seemed it would pass as a fatal traffic accident, one of many every day in every country.

But two days after the trial, a post about the case appeared on the Strong Nation Forum, "Attention: The BMW killed a farmer." The person posting made three main points: 1) Ms. Su was related to a high ranking official. 2) Ms. Su had killed Ms. Liu deliberately. 3) The trial did not follow legal procedures. The post unleashed a wide spread questioning and discussion of the case throughout Chinese language cyberspace. Soon there were over 70,000 comments and opinions relating to the case on one portal alone. Many netizens saw in the incident a posing of the questions of rich versus poor in China, and justice versus corruption.

Within two weeks the BMW incident became the online hottest topic in the China. Journalists from out side the province who followed the online commotion went to Harbin to investigate and report for their newspapers. After January 8, China's mainstream national media began

intensive coverage. After all this attention, local authorities and legal organs began a reinvestigation.

The online uproar over the case put it on the national news agenda and offered an alternative framing to that of the court and the local media. Almost half of the early posts looked for "behind the scenes" reasons for Ms. Su's light sentence. Less than ten percent accepted the court's decision. Other netizens sought to understand the underlying causes. Some suggested remedies like greater government accountability to public opinion.

There was a growing call for the authorities to open a new investigation and hold a new trial. When it was reported in the press that province officials promised "a satisfactory solution to the 'BMW case' will be offered to the public," a post on the Strong Nation Forum titled "Why should we trust you?" precipitated a cynical thread casting doubt on the credibility of the officials.[14] More and more the question raised was what kind of China do we want? A netizen with the alias *stellyshi* commented that history shows that "…justice originates with the truth. But now in the world, or in China, the truth means nothing. In modern China, with power and money, you can say anything as you like. Even you can kill one person as you want. So, what is this? Is this fare (sic)? Is this so-called socialist country? I don't think so. Never!!!…"[15]

The hundreds of thousands of online posts took many forms including analysis, argumentation, poems, novels, dramas, letters, animations, and jokes. Most posts were sympathetic to Ms. Liu and hostile to Ms. Su. For many netizens, Ms. Su and Ms. Liu, the BMW and the onion cart became symbols of the growing gap and the character differences between the rich and the poor in China. While much coverage in the mainstream media called for government transparency and social improvement, a major direction taken in netizen posts was to raise the question of the direction in which China should be going. The mainstream media called for step-by-step social improvement, the online discussion raised deeper systemic questions.

The off line media and the government in response to the massive netizen activity took more action then they would have. A new investigation was promised and a retrial of Ms. Su. But by mid January the government forbad the mainstream media from any further coverage. It

also required the deletion of some and finally all old posts and any new netizen contributions on the major forums and portals. At the new trial there was no greater penalty for Ms. Su and the monitoring and deleting of BMW related posts caused online attention to shift to other incidents and issues including net censorship.

In this incident all the netizen activity did not lead to a different legal outcome. But it was another example that ferment around a not very uncommon event can lead to examination of contradictions buried in society. It is arguable that this netizen uprising had an effect on Chinese society regardless of the legal outcome or the deletion of hundreds of thousands of netizen comments. And in September 2004, the Fourth Session of the Sixteenth CCP Central Committee rejected the long standing policy orientation "efficiency first" which had been criticized by some netizens who in the course of their uprisings traced the specific problem to this systemic root.[16]

Discussion

Every year since 2003, there has been dozens of such national netizen uprisings and commotions around social and political issues, sometimes exposing fraud or corruption or questioning government actions or explanations, sometimes discussing foreign events like disruption of the Olympic touch relay. They have become a normal aspect of Chinese society.

The Chinese government has signaled its support for active posting on forums.[17] Government officials at all levels are encouraged to take part in forums or on blogs. Government related news sites tolerate very active and often highly critical forum discussions. President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jaibao both said publicly that netizen activity at the time of SARS was helpful. Summaries of each day's hottest netizen activity are made for the State Council. The dominant stress of censorship reported by media outside of China misses this level of support and the rapidly expanding new use for social and political discussion and debate.

Often ahead of the mainstream media, netizen up risings set the news agenda. Local events are given by netizen activity national or international attention. In alliance with more independent journalists and

editors, online issues can spread to the main stream national media and to the whole Chinese people. Netizen critical framing of issues differs from government and mainstream media framing. When popular opinion is formed about these issues it often follows the netizen rather than the government or media framing. The fight around censorship is creative and spirited. A possible result is that the percent of net users who view forums is increasing.

Some journalists come online for their leads and to find contacts to interview. Some are emboldened by netizen exposures and numbers to dig deeper and take on more controversial topics. The result is the media environment in China is livelier than in societies with less netizen activity even if those societies have less media supervision and guidance.

Setting the agenda, framing issues and arousing public opinion are all aspects of political power in modern society. That the netizens in China are able occasionally to play these roles suggests a political dynamism in Chinese society that is often denied by critics of China. Netizen activity in China is relatively recent. It has many obstacles including a trend toward nationalism and a contest over supervision and control. But it is fertile soil for scholarly attention. My intention with my examples was to attract such attention. One precaution is the need for collaborations that include Chinese speaking colleagues. I look forward to the results.

Thank you.

Notes

1. http://www.cnnic.com.cn/html/Dir/2008/07/31/5247.htm
2. "Preface: What is a netizen" in *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben, IEEE Computer Society Press, Los Alamitos, CA, 1997, p. ix. Also, an earlier version is online at: http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.xpr
3. Ibid.
4. Forum software hosted on internet accessible servers allows for sequential and threaded online text discussions which can be monitored and moderated. Similarly hosted chat room software allows for simultaneous multiple participant real time text conversations. In China, most forums allow alias registration and are often archived.

Chat room sessions are ephemeral and are not easily monitored.

5. My usage is similar to that of Haiqing Yu who writes, "I use 'netizen' in a narrow sense to mean 'Net plus citizen.' or 'citizen on the net.' Netizens are those who use the Internet as a venue for exercising citizenship through rational public debates on social and political issues of common concern." (Haiqing Yu, "From Active Audience to Media Citizenship: The Case of Post-Mao China," *Social Semiotics*, 16 (2), June 2006. http://www.informaworld.com/10.1080/10350330600664888 (access restricted))
 I add, however, that netizens are not only 'citizens on the net' but also 'citizens of the net' signifying those who actively contribute to the development and defense of the net as a global communications platform.

6. There are approximately 34 million Chinese speaking people living outside of mainland China, many take a keen interest in social and political issues in China. Those online often participate in forums, chat rooms and blogs hosted on servers in China and outside. In the examples that follow it is likely netizens outside of China have participated.

7. This case is well covered in the scholarly literature. See for example, Ibid, Tai, pp. 259-268 and other references in the following notes.

8. Ibid, p. 260.

9. Shaoguag Wang,"Changing Models of China's Policy Agenda Setting," *Modern China*, 2008, 34 p. 79. http://mcx.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/34/1/56 (access restricted)

10. http://news.sina.com.cn/s/2003-04-25/09501015845.shtml. See also, Haiqing Yu, "From Active Audience to Media Citizenship: The Case of Post-Mao China", *Social Semiotics*, 16 (2), June 2006.

11. http://news.21cn.com/social/shixiang/2003-04-25/1021755.html

12. Like Strong Nation Forum (qiangguo luntan), Development Forum (fazhan luntan) and China Youth Forum (zhongqing suntan)

13. Haiqing Yu, "Talking, Linking, Clicking: The Politics of AIDS and SARS in Urban China," *positions: east asia cultures critique*, 15 (1) Spring 2007: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/positions/v015/15/lyu.html (access restricted)

14. Christina Yuqiong Zhuo and Patricia Moy, "Frame Building and Frame Setting: The Interplay Between Online Public Opinion and Media Coverage," paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Dresden, June 16, 2006: http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p91118_index.html

15. Comment #11 at: http://bbs.chinadaily.com.cn/redirect.php?tid=39672&goto=lastpost&highlight=

16. Ibid, Shaoguang Wang, note 9, p. 80

17. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been officially promoted for the last 15 or 20 years as one of the most important driving forces of China's economic development. The government and party publicly support the spread of the Internet and its use by people within China. The result is the rapid spread of the Internet and its active use, averaging for net users in China almost three hours per day. A foreign journalist working in Beijing commented that users in China "are usually too busy enjoying the Internet they have to lament the Internet they do not have." (Quoted

in *OhmyNews International*,
http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?menu=c10400&no=3810
87&rel_no=1). But also, enthusiastic netizens have found ways to minimize the effect
of the censorship. And many of them are using it with the purpose of rational public
debates on social and political issues.

[The following is a script of the presentation made by Ulla Rannikko at
the Netizens panel at IR9.0. Rannikko is a Ph.D. candidate at the London
School of Economics and Political Science. The slides which accompa-
nied her presentation can be seen at:
http://www.ais.org/~jrh/netizen_panel_2008/URannikko.ppt]

The Relation Between Citizen Journalism and Its Organizational Context: The Cases of *Indymedia* in Finland and *OhmyNews International*

by Ulla Rannikko
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Slide 1

I am going to talk about how participatory media organizations,
more specifically *Indymedia* in Finland and *OhmyNews International*,
act as social resources for citizen journalists. My paper draws on
face-to-face interviews that I have conducted with citizen reporters and
people facilitating these two websites for my ongoing doctoral research
on citizen journalism. I will call these two organizations by their
abbreviations, hence *Indymedia* in Finland is VAI and *OhmyNews
International* is *OMNI*.

Slide 2

As a general background for my paper, I want to note a few
developments in media in recent years that seem to relate to citizen
journalism.

It has been argued that democratic journalism is in crisis and that

people are not always getting the kind of information from the media they need as citizens. The mainstream media have been criticized for being misleading and profit oriented. At the same time, media are struggling to maintain their profit margins. Media are also trying to adjust to the so-called digital revolution, part of which is that media content and original sources of information are increasingly available online and often for free, and the ordinary people are becoming involved in creating media content. There has been a rise in media activism, the idea being that it is our democratic right to express ourselves in the media, or as Hackett and Carroll (2006) have noted, that media activism is about democratization of the media, not through the media.

But what is citizen journalism, which for some appears to offer at least a partial solution to what the mainstream media are perceived to be doing wrong? Citizen journalism tends to be understood to include blogs, user-created content in the mainstream media and various participatory media. Not all citizen journalism is online, as, for example, newspapers publish people's photos in print format.

Slide 3

I will use as a starting point here a definition by Bowman and Willis (2003). Their definition of participatory journalism, their preferred term for citizen journalism is:

"The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires." (Ibid, 9)

I am not going to discuss in this presentation what this information that a democracy needs might be or how citizenship should be understood; instead, what is relevant here is the long list of adjectives that Bowman and Willis (2003) use to describe the type of information that citizen journalism should offer.

It seems to me that they have a great many expectations of citizen journalism. I wonder how often journalism in general succeeds in offering "independent" – one could ask independent of what – "reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information," yet citizen journalism

is expected to be able to do that. Interestingly, in discussions about citizen journalism, particularly in the mainstream media, it has been criticized for failing to meet these expectations. Instead, some have claimed that citizen journalism equates to poor quality and lack of accountability.

Now we have an idea of what citizen journalism is expected to provide, but what have media commentators said about how it is supposed to work? I am going to show you two quotes; the first is by Dan Gillmor (2006), who is one of the foremost advocates of citizen journalism. The second is by Andrew Keen (2007), who is not a proponent of the phenomenon.

Slide 4

"When people can express themselves, they will. When they can do so with powerful yet inexpensive tools, they take to the new-media realm quickly. When they can reach a potentially global audience, they literally can change the world" (Gillmor, 2006, p. xv).

"The simple ownership of a computer and an Internet connection doesn't transform one into a serious journalist any more than having access to a kitchen makes one into a serious cook" (Keen, 2007, 47).

Gillmor (2006, xv) suggests that if people are given the tools, in turn they "can change the world," whereas Keen (2007, 47) argues that not just anyone with a PC and Internet access can be a proper journalist. But are either of them right?

Slide 5

Gillmor (2006) is right to draw attention to the tools that citizen journalists need to be able to participate in citizen journalism online. But I argue that the tools only create the basic conditions, as citizen journalists must be motivated, and they need skills such as writing skills and language skills. Some citizen journalists may need support, as not everyone can be expected to be competent in journalistic writing and, for example, in taking pictures. This is where participatory media organizations play a role, as ideally they can act as social resources for citizen journalists.

Social resources refer to structures, in this case at the mesolevel of

organizations, that, I quote, 'allow people opportunities to form alliances, create joint accomplishments, and collectively defend their interests', as argued by Warschauer (2003, 160), who has written about social inclusion and the digital divide. My question then is how do participatory media organizations act as social resources for citizen journalists? Before I discuss *OMNI* and VAI, it is worth briefly looking at what people involved in citizen journalism see as desired skills and quality in citizen journalism.

Slide 6

"...citizen journalism should aim at the same quality as 'real' journalism ...?the skills required are the normal good writing skills, critical analytical skills and so forth... ?the 'critical citizen journalism' part comes from having a slightly different point of view from that of the mainstream media" (Laakso, 2006, VAI).

"A citizen journalist needs to be able to use solid and consistent grammar, write in their own voice, and use various resources effectively to gather as much information as they can about their story" (Hahn, 2007, *OMNI*).

"...they [citizen journalists] do need to know how to express themselves. Or they need an editor who can help them" (George, 2007, *OMNI*).

The first quote is by a globalization-critical movement activist (Laakso, 2006) and a reporter from VAI, and the second quote is by a citizen reporter (Hahn, 2007) for *OMNI*. As the first two statements indicate, it seems that citizen journalism should not be that different from journalism in general, except that writing from a certain perspective is seen as desirable. Unsurprisingly, good writing skills are seen as a requirement for citizen reporters. In the third quote, a former *OMNI* assistant editor (George, 2007) draws attention to the role of editors in helping citizen reporters.

I will move now to discuss VAI and *OMNI*.

Slide 7

VAI was active in Finland for three years at the beginning of this decade. *OMNI* is an English language edition of South Korean

OhmyNews and the website was launched in 2004. Both VAI and *OMNI* aim to empower people to become citizen journalists. Among the key differences between them is that VAI as part of international *Indymedia* network is associated with the alter-globalization movement and its content tends to reflect this, whereas *OMNI* offers a broader range of content from news articles and analysis to film reviews and commentary.

VAI was a volunteer organization, whereas *OMNI* is owned by a company. In VAI, people were not paid for their stories, whereas *OMNI* pays a small sum to its reporters.

Language is another difference because many *Indymedia* collectives, such as VAI, tend to operate in a local language, whereas *OMNI* operates in English. *Indymedia* websites are usually city, region or, such as VAI, country based, whereas *OMNI* is aimed at a global audience and has contributors from around the world.

I will discuss next how VAI and *OMNI* operate and the kind of support they provide for their citizen reporters.

Slide 8

VAI and *OMNI* demonstrate different approaches to offering online space for people's contributions. VAI by and large followed principles of open publishing, which means that the editorial decisions are made transparent to the users and potentially anyone can become involved in making those decisions, as well as in contributing content. Also, the filtering and modifying of stories is kept to a minimum. In reality, VAI, unlike some other *Indymedia* websites, did not edit stories, although the website was moderated and, for example, racist and sexist articles and comments were removed. If the moderators considered something to be very poorly written, they could return the article to the writer to be tidied up.

Although some *Indymedia* collectives train reporters, VAI, as a very small collective, did not provide training. *OMNI* has a code of ethics and style guidelines for reporters available on their website, whereas VAI only posted very basic editorial principles on the website. Stories that are published on the *OMNI* main website go through an editing process, although they also have a Talk Back forum on their website, which is a non-edited space for people's stories. In *OMNI*, editors can ask reporters

to rewrite a story. Based on the interviews, it seems that for *OMNI* reporters, getting facts right is very important and they appreciate that editors do fact-checking. *OMNI* editors offer advice for citizen journalists mainly through e-mail and online instant messaging, but sometimes also through voice services available online, such as Skype. Some reporters are invited to a yearly Citizen Reporters' Forum in Seoul. There they get to meet *OMNI* staff and other reporters. The forum builds a community feel among *OMNI*.

80% of *OMNI* contributors are non-native English speakers (Thacker, 2007). For editors, this means that correcting articles for spelling, grammar and punctuation is a central part of their work. For reporters not confident about their English language skills at the level required for writing a journalistic piece, help is available. For VAI, operating in Finnish was likely to encourage participation among Finns. Obviously, having the website in Finnish made it incomprehensible for the vast majority of the world's population and for other *Indymedia* readers and collectives. For *OMNI*, operating in English means that the website is incomprehensible for the majority of the world's population. Estimates of first or second language users of English vary between eight and eighteen per cent of people (Graddol, 2006, 62).

Slide 9

"You have to learn the art of diplomacy through text because it's very easy for people to misinterpret what you're saying, especially as often they're not native speakers either, so it's a double whammy" (Thacker, 2007).

"You know, he always answers me as soon as I write to him ...it's always better to talk to that person but it's...you know, when you're doing it in that kind of format online, um, that's the closest it comes to really being able to interact on a personal level" (Jacquot, 2006).

These two quotes, the first by the senior editor (Thacker, 2007) of *OMNI* and the second by a citizen reporter (Jacquot, 2006) for *OMNI*, refer to communication between editors and citizen reporters. As the senior editor notes, it is challenging to communicate in writing, especially as many of the citizen journalists are not native English speakers. In the second quote, a citizen reporter points out that speaking

in person with editors would be preferable. It is worth noting that although VAI was a local operation, the collective operated by and large using mailing lists. Some interviewees identified that this caused problems because the organization was seen to be too loose.

Slide 10

The cases of *OMNI* and VAI indicate that language is still a dividing factor on the Internet. When citizen journalism platforms choose a language, it means that while they open up access for some, they close it for others. Computed-mediated communication between editors and citizen reporters across cultures – this also came up in interviews with *OMNI* editors – has challenges, especially if it's not in the people's native language. Interestingly, if a website operates locally, it does not automatically mean that people meet in person, as the case of VAI shows. On the whole, reporters for *OMNI* appreciate input from editors and clear written guidelines seem to help.

These two cases indicate that the level of support available to citizen reporters can vary dramatically between citizen journalism platforms and it may not be enough just to provide a space for citizen journalism.

Slide 11

Appropriate support may encourage more people to become involved in citizen journalism, not just those who are confident about their skills. It seems reasonable to argue that the decisions that are made at the level of an organization, whether they concern the language of the content and communication, the editing process, or the training of citizen reporters, in turn not only affect who contributes to these websites and how, but also shape the readership, as certainly is the case with regard to the language.

There are many challenges in responsible citizen journalism. For example: How to make sure that help is available for those who need it. How to find volunteer or business models that allow the creation of support structures. How can participatory media organizations balance the power and responsibility that come with the territory when they offer a space for people's contributions?

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[The following resume for the *Amateur Computerist* is based on the presentation Anders Ekeland gave in Copenhagen, at IR9.0. Some topics have been extended by the author, some relating directly to pictures in the presentation have been dropped or reduced. Ekeland was at the time a Senior Researcher at the Norwegian Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education. The resume was written specially for this issue. The original slides can be seen at:

http://www.ais.org/~jrh/netizen_panel_2008/AEkeland.ppt]

Democratizing Innovation Through the Internet

by Anders Ekeland

After having read some of the literature on "user-driven innovation" I felt that it is was necessary to outline some alternative theoretical perspectives before going into a more systematic empirical study of how the Internet facilitates user-driven innovation. In my opinion the mainstream economic theory that is used as the theoretical framework to discuss the phenomenon of user-driven innovation is build on a set of atomistic, egoistic and static principles that makes mainstream economic theory ill suited to grasp this highly social and dynamic phenomenon.

Mainstream economic theory with its egoistic "*homo economicus*"[1] as its ideal of human rationality is in contest with precisely the cooperative, collaborative – "altruistic" – aspects of the Internet. User-driven innovation is also very interesting for those of us who are interested in forms of society where profit maximization and competition are not the main drivers for social and technological change. Consequently in this presentation the actual use of the Internet for the purpose of "user-driven innovation" will be more anecdotal, based on data and description in the literature and my own experiences. My own experiences are connected primarily to my interest in emission free vehicles, which includes human powered vehicles, but is broader since it includes all non-fossil vehicles.

The starting point is Eric von Hippel's recent book *Democratizing Innovation* (2005).[2] This book is the last in a series of books and articles by the same author related to the "sources of innovation," which was

also the title of von Hippel's 'breakthrough' book *Sources of Innovation* (1988). Here von Hippel described and discussed the role of users in the making of innovations. Von Hippel (1988, p. 4) showed that users of a variety of products were either the source of innovation or an important source. User in this context is both firms and persons. As von Hippel in Democratizing (p. 19) points out, the word 'consumer' gives an association of passive consumption. This is of course generally correct, but understates that some of us – many of us – in some spheres of life have a much more active attitude to the products we use. We sometimes modify them to make them better suited to our needs.

The conventional wisdom, that it is the manufacturer that finds out what we need and then designs and produces it – completely overlooks the social interaction that takes place even in a capitalist market economy. As a facilitator, the Internet should be well suited as a vehicle for democratizing innovation. Anecdotal evidence shows that the Internet creates better user-producer links, that it makes possible a creation of a wider and more customized variety of goods. Von Hippel points to several studies where the intra-user and user-producer exchange of ideas could only have been mediated through a medium with such low cost and rich information potential as the Internet.

A recent report written by a group of students at the Technical University of Norway (NTNU) "User-driven Innovation: When the user makes the difference" also includes several cases where the Internet have been instrumental for innovation. For some product categories like extreme outdoor equipment, the users are not only "lead users," i.e. advanced users giving early and insightful information to the manufacturers R&D department what problems to address – they are practically the developers, making modifications and/or extensions to the product that the manufacturer then puts into production.

These developments – based on "virtual" communities of interest – are interesting from various theoretical and policy points of view. One important aspect is the question of alienation, i.e. the phenomenon that the profit motive "perverts" the relationship between the producer and the user of goods and services. Under capitalism many in our role both as consumers and producers (workers) often get the feeling that we get/make an inferior product, less adapted to our real needs ("prefer-

ences") just because the producer was constrained by short term profit maximization. The producer has to save, has to introduce "fashion" and product differentiation characteristics that do not contribute to satisfy our "real" needs. As consumers we often have no other practical option than to buy this "lousy" product – gruntingly buy it.

For an economist like Karl Marx a major aspect of how markets worked was clearly the tension between the "private," atomistic labor that had to be socially accepted as "socially necessary labor" through the market. What Marx and later Marxists like Ernest Mandel clearly saw as a rather wasteful process – a view also confirmed by the little there is of empirical research of this topic. Von Hippel puts it this way, "It is striking that most new products developed and introduced to the market by manufacturers are commercial failures." The "success rates" are typically found to be between 20-30% (2005, p. 108).

So this is a topic related, but different from the issue of the Internet as a vehicle for democratization of the more strictly political sphere of society, i.e. the large literature on the possible role of the Internet for broadening and deepening political democracy, including how political parties and political movements use the Internet. Parties and movements influence the material artefacts around us – including the infrastructure (roads, trains, city- (non) planning) and environmental standards, but seldom individual products. That is where user-driven innovation comes in.

The economic literature on user-driven innovation

The literature on "user-driven" innovation is very strongly influenced by main-stream, neo-classical, static equilibrium, theory. The use of "economic theory" in the singular is a problem in itself. It excludes the heterodox schools of thought in economics, like evolutionary (Schumpeterian), post-Keynesian, Marxian and feminist economics, just to mention some of them. Mainstream, that is neo-classical economic theory, builds on a set of unrealistic, static first principles, among them a very narrow, "egoistic" view of the fundamental motivational structure of humans, the so-called *homo economicus*.

This theory has great difficulty in handling the "altruistic" nature of interactive activities in general. Such activities are an important part of

Internet use. The open source movement and community being the most well-know and analyzed example but far from the only one.

My core message is that it is necessary to use other theoretical models/traditions in order to understand such activities in general, and in order to promote such activities, among them also user-driven innovation. There are various ways to actively use the Internet to shape society for example by journalism or user-driven innovation to the betterment for all of us. It is the essence of being a Netizen

User-driven innovation – an old story

In *Democratizing Innovation*, von Hippel gives several examples of how user-driven innovation has been a topic of interest for several economists:

> [Adam] Smith pointed out the importance of "the invention of a great number of machines which facilitate and abridge labor, and enable one man to do the work of many." He also noted that "a great part of the machines made use of in those manufactures in which labor is most subdivided, were originally the invention of common workmen, who, being each of them employed in some very simple operation, naturally turned their thoughts towards finding out easier and readier methods of performing it.(2005, p. 21)

And from the post WWII era:

> Rosenberg (1976) studied the history of the U.S. machine tool industry and found that important and basic machine types like lathes and milling machines were first developed and built by user firms having a strong need for them. Textile manufacturing firms, gun manufacturers and sewing machine manufacturers were important early user-developers of machine tools. (2005, p. 22)

Users as the sources of innovation

As mentioned in the introduction, the starting point is von Hippel's recent book *Democratizing Innovation* (2005). Von Hippel's first major opus, published in 1988, *Sources of Innovation* is also downloadable

with permission from Oxford University Press. In *Sources of Innovation*, von Hippel described and discussed the role of users in the making of innovations (1988, p. 4). He showed that the users in domains like 'Scientific instruments' and 'Industrial gas using' were either the source of innovation or an important source. The users had often made important modifications that were many years ahead of commercial production. This is of course not surprising, since it is the users who have an intimate knowledge of their own needs, the problems with the equipment, etc. So they can propose to the producer improvements that will not only benefit themselves, but also other users.

The role of users in innovation is an important fact. By contrast, an important way of legitimizing the very high income differentials for entrepreneurs versus users that still exists is to present the entrepreneur as a kind of genius who actually invented the process. What case studies show is that, the picture is much more nuanced to say the least.

Bill Gates is one of the richest men on earth, but neither he nor Microsoft is very impressive when it comes to innovation or satisfying users' real needs. Most of us can point out clear defects with Windows. Also the business strategy of Microsoft has always been to price the product as high as possible by creating artificial market segmentation (for example, Home, Academic, Pro, Business Premium versions of the same operating system) that has no economic rationale. This market segmentation just creates problems and makes users waste a lot of time on products where very short term profit maximization clearly dictated how the product was developed. "VISTA" is a good example – an operating system that had few new real features, but quite a few new problems. That is of course why you have a "downgrade to "XP" option. This business strategy has stimulated in opposition to it the open source movement – which is a very systematic effort at collective, well-organized user-driven innovation. The point about Microsoft is not that it is particularly bad, but that the logic of capitalist competition very often makes a firm choose a business strategy like that of Microsoft.[3] Apple has clearly been more adjusted to user needs, but even it has to try to "lock-in" the customers to its equipment, its software. Much more could be said about this, but let me get back to user-driven innovation using the bicycle as an example.

The bike as an example of user-driven innovation

The bike not only has a past. In an era of climate change, it certainly has a future. Most of us have become so used to the 'diamond' frame (DF) bicycle that we can hardly think of anything else. But the DF bike is not optimal aerodynamically or ergonomically. Air resistance is the major problem for biking since rolling friction can be made very small. Having a more horizontal body position would reduce air resistance. From the early days of biking there were various "recumbent" designs with or without "fairing." A French inventor, George Mochet constructed and a French cyclist, Francis Fauret in 1933 rode these "horizontal" bikes to world records. The producers of ordinary bikes intervened and the recumbent bike was prohibited by defining the competition bike with certain standards. The recumbent bike almost died out, but with oil price "shocks" in the seventies and eighties, more interest in environmental issues, the recumbent bike had a renaissance.[4] It is obvious that both the sales of recumbent bikes and their development were stimulated by the spread of the Internet. To empirically quantify the importance of the Internet is a difficult and demanding task. But the reason why the recumbent has not become the ordinary bike is that it has certain disadvantages[5] like sitting low and uphill, manoeuverability in heavy city traffic.

One solution would be to make a hybrid bike, combining the advantages of the diamond frame, so-called convertible recumbents. The pictures illustrate this idea.[6] The convertible is built of standard, but in some cases modified, bicycle parts.

Real life and *homo economicus*

User-driven innovation points to other types of motives for innovative activities that are beyond the "egoistic," "egoistic profit/utility maximizing behavior, points towards a truly democratic, ecological, interactive way of organizing the production of goods and services. It is necessary to underscore that these motives or incentives, as most economists call them, are not irrational in any sense. They are not contrary to long run sustainable growth and its real and final goal, more welfare creation. On the contrary, it is only in a myopic profit maximizing perspective that these "altruistic" types of behavior can be considered irrational or sub-optimal. Ordinary economic models (market cross) cannot even be called myopic, since actually they do not have any time dimension, they are static.

I think that for modeling human behavior, a model of what is rational is needed. Indeed most of us have such a model internalized, since we are more satisfied with some parts of actions than others, we are more satisfied with the macro-social result of some types of behavior than others. The point is that a concept of rationality that has a real time perspective includes that obvious fact that life is a continuous learning process because we do not have global perfect information.

One obvious aspect of this learning process is that some products and firms are failures. If there was anything close to perfect information, no product would be a failure, no firms would go bust. Some of the firms that go bust clearly do so because they misjudge the real needs of the customers. But often the anarchistic nature of capitalist competition and profit maximization means that there is too much productive capacity created as everybody tries to be first to market - to create a (quasi-) monopoly, i.e. get the largest possible market share.

Von Hippel writes:

It is striking that most new products developed and introduced to the market by manufacturers are commercial failures. Mansfield and Wagner (1975) found the overall probability of success for new industrial products to be only 27%. Elrod and Kelman (1987) found an overall probability of success of 26% for consumer products. Balachandra and Friar (1997), Poolton and Barclay (1998), and

Redmond (1995) found similarly high failure rates in new products commercialized.

Although there clearly is some recycling of knowledge from failed projects to successful ones, much of the investment in product development is highly specific. This high failure rate therefore represents a huge inefficiency in the conversion of R&D investment to useful output, and a corresponding reduction in social welfare.(2005, p. 108)

It is quite clear that increasing the rate of successful products would result in increased welfare production. This is not taking into consideration successful products that we buy, but actually would have liked to be quite different – like Microsoft windows! Microsoft is a commercial success, but not a welfare success.

The great surprise…sharing information!

The obvious answer to the failure of firms and products would be to have mechanisms of information sharing, a dialog on how to best develop the product so that it would satisfy real needs. Von Hippel writes:

The empirical finding that users often freely reveal their innovations has been a major surprise to innovation researchers. On the face of it, if a user-innovator's proprietary information has value to others, one would think that the user would strive to prevent free diffusion rather than help others to free ride on what it has been developed at private cost. Nonetheless, it is now very clear that individual users and user firms-and sometimes manufacturers – often freely reveal detailed information about their innovations.

The practices visible in "open source" software development were important in bringing this phenomenon to general awareness. In these projects it was clear policy that project contributors would routinely and systematically freely reveal code they had developed at private expense. (2005, p. 9, my emphasis)

An alternative approach – theories of alienation

In my opinion the reason why this "sharing of information" comes as a surprise to innovation researchers is because the dominant paradigm in economics is utterly static and atomistic. The reason why economics uses the specific type of mathematical model it uses is because only under such extreme, non-scientific conditions can a set of pro-market, neo-liberal "results" be proven mathematically. Mainstream theory is a clear example of the SCOTh[7] (Social Construction Of Theory). The founding fathers did not want the theory to be that abstract, but every trace of real life had to bee weeded out in order to prove these "results."

I will here briefly outline an alternative approach, just to show that the question of what kind of theory one approaches the user-driven innovation phenomenon with matters. I will use the concept of alienation. Alienation has a long history. Originally ii was a religious concept, the tragic fate of man on earth, alienated from the "real" heavenly existence. According to Ernest remolded (1970), it was a theme in classical Greek/Roman philosophy. In modern times Hegel "secularized" the concept, relating it to "alienated labor" (needs outstrip what labor can produce since it produces new needs) – and as "Entäusserung" – "externalization." Marx remolded the Hegelian concept of alienation and pointed to new forms of alienation, alienation from the state as a hostile institution, loneliness as alienation created by a competitive "winner takes all" society and alienation of humans from the means of production, means of creativity – a historically new phenomenon (Mandel, The causes of Alienation). From this perspective being creative (innovating) together is overcoming alienation – becoming more human – getting back to the community way of doing things that are "in our genes" – and not as a theoretical surprise.

A surprise…for mainstream economics.

One example on how hard mainstream economics struggles to incorporate the "altruistic" (I would say rational) nature of Internet-aided, user-driven innovation, can be seen in an article from Research Policy 2003 with the title, "How communities support innovative activities: an exploration of assistance and sharing among

end-users" (Nikolaus Franke and Sonali Shah). The case studies in this article are taken from diverse sports communities: sailplanes, canoeing, boardercross (snowboard competition), and handicapped cycling – but of course there are many more. The origin of such online communities is the "newsgroups" on the Internet, which in the early years were mainly related to ICT, programming, programming languages, etc. Over the years (mid eighties to late nineties) newsgroups expanded exponentially both in quantity and scope. For those of us that have struggled with

The hydrofoil kayak. (If you were thinking of developing one, you will find the state of the art on the Internet – and possibilities for sharing of ideas, drawings, etc.

programming problems and bug-full software, the newsgroups were just fantastic. In minutes you could have the solution, or a good hint that saved you days of desperate debugging. The mutual benefit in such groups is evident so that even the most experienced programmers read and responded to the newsgroup posts. Once upon-a-time anyone online could get freely given advice. No human is all knowing. We are not experts in all domains. In some we are experts (responders), in others we are novices that ask for help. With the development of HTML, browsers, FAQ-pages, knowledge banks the newsgroups are no longer the only source of freely available help.

But our innovation researchers Nikolaus Franke and Sonali Shah seem to be unfamiliar with the ideas behind the creation of the Internet. Because to them "... the existence of generalized exchange is somewhat of a puzzle, because any member of the exchange system can free-ride since there is no guarantee of reciprocity" (p. 173). Not only is that the case but the traditional "egoistic" explanations of "free-revealing" and assistance like:

● Induce further improvements from others (which one then can egoistically benefit from)

● Setting my "egoistic" standard – benefitting me more than the others

● Reputation effects

● Low rivalry/competition context

…do not stand up to critical scrutiny of these successful communities, even when we are talking about products with a clear commercial potential. Franke and Shah find that a cause that is "overlooked" in the traditional theoretical framework is "the fun and enjoyment that arise through engagement in the task and in the community. From this perspective, the individual does not view the participation and contribution as a cost that has to be compensated. Rather these activities are enjoyable in and of themselves." (p. 173) This is not surprising from an alienation point of view. Modern life, where most products around us are too often "one size fits all" due to the extreme attention to short term profit maximisation leaves little room in our lives for our own creativity. We feel "big business" as an external, foreign and hostile force. By participating in communities of innovation we increase welfare by better products – and we overcome our alienation by shaping the material artefacts around us – and by working together, instead of the "bellum osmium contra omens" which is not only the ideal of mainstream economics, but also the ethos of our times. The authors further state that …"competition decreases the flow of information…a ski manufacturer is likely to be better off monitoring a community of ski fanatics…than a group of World Cup racers"… (p. 175) – so competition is not always the driving force for innovation/progress. Quite the contrary. What is even more "surprising" is that…"the communities do not appear to operate like traditional reciprocal exchange markets." (p. 171). Time does not allow me to discuss how they really work, but overcoming the alienation of and between user and producer is certainly a key issue. To develop the critique of main-stream economics is also important as a first step.

Further research

I have not touched upon how Internet-based user-driven innovation could be supported – by a fraction of the cost of the current "bail-out packages" – yet another example of how resources are systematically wasted under capitalism. There are also more collective innovations to make – for example standardization of mobile phone chargers, lap-top chargers – where the logic of capitalist competition result in a lot of wasted resources, a lot of wasted time and a lot of frustration for the

users. There is a range of topics connected to users as "Watch-dogs" for product quality, safety and sustainability – that would be an important role – even in a society where the logic of profit maximization would not dominate – because technology is always socially constructed and a male, white, high education world view might be too dominating. There is still a lot to do when it comes to empirical research on the specific role of the Internet – what does the **medium**, the Net mean – a methodological difficult question since we do not have any ex ante bench-mark. But maybe is that not needed, one could create one today – and then try to see if support of Internet based user-driven innovation made any difference. I am quite convinced it would.

Anyhow – my main point here was that from alienation – theory perspective user-driven innovation generally is not a theoretical problem, on the contrary – concrete examples show the possibility, the direction to take in order to find a way to make a more human, less competitive society, with more welfare, more equality and fewer lousy products. In short, a society where the active and innovative collaborative Netizen – *homo neticus* – and not the egoistic, short-sighted *homo economicus* is the theoretical and practical role model of the social sciences.

Notes:

1. *Homo economicus*, or Economic human, is the concept in some economic theories of humans as rational and broadly self-interested actors who have the ability to make judgments toward their subjectively defined ends. See for example:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo_economicus

2. This book is freely downloadable at:
 http://web.mit.edu/evhippel/www/democ1.htm under a 'Creative Commons License' and is "Dedicated to all who are building the information commons."

3. For those who think that Microsoft is a monopoly as opposed to "perfect" or "free" competition, see my paper "The Text-book Myth of the Monopoly case" presented at Association of Heterodox Economics conference, 2006.

4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recumbent_bicycle#History

5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recumbent_bicycle#Disadvantages

6. See also: http://revver.com/video/439960/switchbike-wwwfreshcreationnl/

7. See Wiebe Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change* (Inside Technology Series) (Hardcover), where the SCOT (Social Construction Of Technology) approach is outlined and illustrated by case

studies.

[The following is an entry by Axel Bruns on his blog at
http://snurb.info/node/881. In the entry Bruns summarizes the Netizen
panel at the IR9.0 conference in Copenhagen.]

Report on Panel Session held on Oct 17, 2008

<div align="right">

by Axel Bruns (from his blog)
http://snurb.info/node/881

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Netizens and Citizen Journalists around the World

The post-lunch session here at AoIR 2008 begins with a paper by
Ronda Hauben. She notes that 2008 is the fifteenth anniversary of the
publication of Michael Hauben's seminal article on the 'Netizen'
concept – a concept emerging from Michael's research that spread
rapidly and widely, and (especially in Asia) still has a great deal of
currency. The concept had a great deal to do with the fight against
commercialization of the Net which was prominent then; today, for the
same reason the concept has been suppressed to some extent by those
interested in a more commercial Internet.

The Netizen idea provides a bottom-up framework; the top-down
model of information is no longer the only model for news, it suggests,
and this can give voice to a greater section of society. This ties into older
ideas of the press as a watchdog over government, but (enabled by
technology) positions everyday Netizens rather than professional
journalists as such watchdogs. South Korea is an interesting example for
such trends: in 2002, Roh Moo-Hyun was elected president largely
because of Netizen activism, and in 2004, a drive to impeach him was
defeated for similar reasons.

This year (2008), there have been extensive candlelight demonstra-
tions in protest against the government; the first of these were called by
middle and high school girls, creating a "Candle Girl Army," and to

some extent these were directed in the first place against a new import deal for U.S. beef (some of which did not meet U.S. food quality standards), but they also tie into an underlying impeachment drive against the current president. Much of this also connects to the *OhmyNews* Pro-Am citizen journalism phenomenon, of course – and some of these demonstrations were Webcast live by a new sub-division, OhmyTV.

The presence of self-declared Netizens in such events is palpable – remarkably, there are people with laptops (sometimes wrapped in plastic to protect them against tear gas and water cannons) at the demonstrations, doing live DIY Webcasting using the wireless and mobile Internet connections which are ubiquitous in South Korea. One particularly notable demonstration involved the presidential palace which had been surrounded by a ring of sand-filled containers (described ironically by demonstrators as Myungbak Castle, with its own Wikipedia entry); there were lengthy online and face-to-face discussions amongst demonstrators about whether to scale these walls and enter the protected zone, again showing the important role of Netizens in these events.

Jay Hauben is next, and shifts our focus to the role of Netizens in China. Internet adoption in the country is growing rapidly, of course, with some 43 million more users coming online only this year. Some 60 million users are active contributors to forums and chat rooms, and it is amongst this group that Netizens can be found and that, as Michael Hauben wrote, a new electronic commons is forming. In Chinese language, in fact, there is a distinction between wang min (Net users) and wang luo gong min (Networked citizens, or Netizens) – but this is often lost in translation.

One case in which Netizens made their presence felt was the 2003 death of Sun Zhigang, a student who was falsely identified as an urban vagrant, detained by police, and died in custody after what turned out to be a brutal beating. This issue was raised on an online forum for media professionals in China, and taken up by journalists on the forum; a report was finally published in the *South Metropolitan Daily* newspaper and various online news portals, and generated a great deal of online discussion and protest. Various other online sites were created (gathering news reports, reports about police brutality, or creating online

memorials to Sun), *People's Daily* reported about the case and published selected Netizen comments, and some three months after the death 12 police were convicted for their actions in the death; shortly later, the 20-year-old anti-vagrancy measures were abolished, too.

Another incident occurred in the same year, when a tractor accidentally scraped a businessman's BMW, and the wife of the businessman drove into a crowd of locals in retaliation. The driver received only a suspended sentence, however, as many witnesses had been bribed by the businessman. This case, too, was taken by Netizens, and generated some 320,000 posts on one portal alone; there was substantial discussion about the growing gap between rich and poor, the corrupt judicial system, and related issues. It also expanded to a broader discussion about the overall direction of change in China.

However, while a new investigation was promised, discussion and coverage of the incident was ultimately removed and forbidden by the government, and a retrial did not lead to a different outcome. Here, then, Netizen power did not have a direct positive outcome; at the same time, however, there may be underlying effects, and there is some indication that there were broader, less immediate and longer-term policy changes which may have been driven by this and similar cases.

Ulla Rannikko is next, and takes us (in part) to Finland. She begins by pointing out discussions of a crisis of democratic journalism, and the related criticism of the quality of the mainstream media. Additionally, the media are struggling to maintain their profit margins, and journalism is being de-professionalized by the rise of alternative journalism and media activism. Citizen journalism (which may be online or offline) is seen to offer a partial solution to such challenges.

Citizen journalism is described by Bowman & Willis as ideally providing "independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging, and relevant information" – a tall order that it may never necessarily deliver on; however, this shopping list of adjectives may not provide the only definition of citizen journalism. Ulla contrasts the views of Dan Gillmor and Andrew Keen here, and extracts from this the realization that citizen journalists need Internet access, appropriate tools, motivation, skills, and support for their work – they do not simply emerge fully formed.

What is required of citizen journalists, then? Ulla draws on

interviews with citizen journalists at a Finnish *Indymedia* site and *OhmyNews International*: they should aim, they say, at a quality similar to that of conventional journalism, but provide different points of view from the mainstream media; journalistic skills are hardly different from those of 'professional' journalists, but they are put to somewhat different uses.

The two sites orchestrate such work differently, of course; citizen journalism in *OhmyNews* is clearly editor-assisted, while *Indymedia* practices a form of direct, unedited publishing which is moderated only for severe infringements against a set of basic standards. *Indymedia* provides no training for citizen journalists, and has only basic guidelines for participants, while there are a code of ethics and style guidelines for *OhmyNews* contributors. Editors on the latter site are there to help the citizen reporting process along. Additionally, of course, the Finnish-language nature of this specific *Indymedia* site limits the availability of a large community of participants.

Overall, then, there is a need for appropriate support and guidelines for citizen contributors; this may increase quality and in turn also the appeal of citizen journalism. The challenge is to develop a responsible and sustainable form of citizen journalism.

Finally, we move on to Anders Ekeland, who focuses on user-led innovation in Denmark. He points to the literature discussion the role of the Internet in democratic and policy-making innovation, as well as to literature on user-driven innovation which still works with a number of relatively old-fashioned concepts that have a hard time dealing with the altruistic nature of many forms of online collaborative efforts. So, there is a need also to look to other theoretical traditions.

Adam Smith noted that many early machines were the inventions of common workmen; this is a clear case of what von Hippel called innovation by lead users. In many cases discussed by von Hippel, users are either the or at least a source of innovation – the term 'consumer' certainly does not apply here. The Internet is especially instrumental here in the formation not only of information, but of innovation communities.

There are many implications of this. To begin with, if users are (co-) innovators, then the income generated from such innovations should be

more widely shared; if user-led innovation leads to fewer commercial failures, then governments should support such processes; if user participation is driven by non-egotistical motives, then this points to the potential for a democratization of innovation.

Indeed, the prevalence of 'free revealing' of innovation has been a major surprise for innovation researchers (as it is usually seen as encouraging free riding) – revealing perhaps more about the mind set of the researchers and the limitations of existing theory than about the user-innovators who engage in such sharing. Open source has been instrumental in bringing this phenomenon to wider attention.

Anders suggests that one way of overcoming this theoretical impasse is to draw from philosophical approaches which describe the phenomenon as a way of overcoming alienation through the formation of innovation communities. Market forces may be not as important drivers here as non-market forces – and indeed, strong competition reduces the likelihood of collaboration and learning from one another. The Netizen or *homo neticus*, rather than the egoistic, short-sighted *homo economicus*, may provide a better theoretical role model.

[The following is a report from the IR9.0 Conference in Copenhagen in Oct 2008. The original appeared in Danish on the citizen journalism website: http://flix.dk. The URL for the original is: http://www.flix.dk/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=5135. The translation is by the author.]

Report from Copenhagen IR9.0
By Erik Larsen

When young youth-house activist in the spring of 2008 demonstrated for a new youth-house (ungdomshus) in Copenhagen they used cell phones and the Internet so intelligently that you might label it 'a new cultural practice within cyberactivism.' That was the conclusion reached by Christie Stauning Andersen and Lotte Lund Larsen, two

students who followed the activists and their use of IT closely as part of their studies in Design, Communication and Media at the Danish IT University (ITU) in Copenhagen.

A report by Larsen and Andersen on the subject was presented at the conference Internet Research 9.0 (its tag is IR9) titled 'Rethinking Community Rethinking Space.' This was part of the 2008 annual meeting of IT researchers from all over the globe, organized by the Association of Internet Researches (AoIR). The meeting took place over three days, October 16-18, 2008, at the ITU in Copenhagen.

Andersen and Larsen kept close contact with and interviewed young people from the 'Ungdomshus' (Youth-House) movement* during and after the massive demonstrations in the streets of Copenhagen in Spring 2008. The two researchers thoroughly analyzed the chain SMS messages, web sites and mail correspondence related to Ungdomshus movement. Their report reveals a surprisingly high level of organization, creativity and discipline in the way the young people had used the digital tools – or weapons – during their struggle.

The report reveals sets of unwritten rules which streamline and optimize the communication flow between group members and between the activists and the press/society at large. One such rule is that you don't change the text of a chain SMS message – this would damage the cell phone distribution system's value as a reliable and cheap mass communication media. The researchers also revealed that people in the network all knew the names and numbers of certain key people who held the cheapest SMS subscriptions. These were the first 'nodes' when a chain SMS message was released and in turn insured that messages were distributed to as many people as possible. Chain SMS and the unwritten rules for good cell phone traffic was one of the reasons why the activists on multiple occasions were able to mobilize significant crowds quickly and efficiently in any given place or time.

The activists were also found to be extremely smart Internet users. Flyers and invitations for demonstrations and actions were distributed via the "MySpace" social networking system. Campaign material of different kinds were produced through a collaborative effort based on a very simple yet highly effective piece of collaboration software – the activists used one single G-mail account edited collaboratively by all

group members who would share a single username and password. Leaflets, flyers, translations and much more was stored in the drafts folder of the account and were produced, edited and released by a group of people working together independently of time and place.

The activists finally got what they fought for – a new 'Ungdomshus' – but to cyberactivists in other parts of the world there are more abstract yet ultimately important prizes at stake: The young democracy in South Korea is hanging by a thread and in China there is a growing pressure from the citizens for greater influence and the right to criticize authorities. In both countries IT is shaping the very identity of activists and to a large extent defining their range and choice of action, and in both countries cyberactivists call themselves 'netizens' – a word coined by the Internet pioneer and researcher Michael Hauben in the late 80s (by fusing net and citizens).

IR9.0 had invited Michael Hauben's parents, Internet researchers Jay and Ronda Hauben based at Columbia University in New York. With a keen interest in cyberactivism the Haubens have followed the development among netizens in South Korea and China closely and have visited both countries several times.

Ronda Hauben opened her presentation at IR9.0 with quotes from the 1997 book '*Netizens: On the history and impact of Usenet and the Internet*' which she co-wrote with Michael Hauben. In the book Michael Hauben reflects on his research into the discussion and knowledge sharing culture which flourished in the 80s on the Usenet:
"We are seeing a revitalization of society," he explained. "The frameworks are being redesigned from the bottom up. A new, more democratic world is becoming possible."

The vision of the Internet as a potential tool for democratic renewal was nearly drowned out by the dot.com craze around 2000 and the promising research of Michael Hauben stopped prematurely when he died in 2001 from the consequences of a traffic accident. But the Netizen concept had a strong comeback when South Korean Netizens with the citizen reporting newspaper Ohmynew*s*.com as the unifying media platform became an important factor for the choice of the reformist president Roh Moo-Hyun in 2002.

Using photo documentation, Ronda Hauben showed how something

resembling a culture revolution took place in South Korea in the spring of 2008. The backdrop for the events: The country's newly elected president, the conservative Lee Myung-Bak, had tightened his grip on the media of South Korea and had step-by-step begun to dismantle the fragile democracy which the South Korean population gained after massive demonstration and fights culminating in 1987.

Lee Myung-Bak became particularly unpopular when visiting George Bush in U.S.A. in April 2008 he gave the green light for South Korean import of American beef some of which was restricted by U.S. regulation from being sold in the U.S. This caused an uproar in parts of the population and became the launch-pad for the so-called 'Candle-Girl Army' – an army of schoolgirls who marched with lit candles through the streets of Seoul, protesting against school food which they feared might be infected with mad cow disease.

On June 10, 2008, thousands went on the street protesting against President Lee Myung-Bak. He reacted by immediately blocking access to the Presidential Palace (Blue House) in a baroque fashion. He ordered 40 containers filled with sand and stacked upon each other, welded together and tied to poles in the ground to be placed between the Blue House and the area of the demonstrations. Grease was poured over the entire construction to prevent activists from climbing over it.

Demonstrators spent hours discussing on a speaker's stage and on online flora the next move. They agreed to climb on top of the bizarre road block, but instead of climbing over and confronting the police who were behind the barricade to attack with unconventional weapons. They launched a battery of online satire ridiculing the monstrous presidential road-block device which was dubbed 'Myung-Bak Castle' and laconically labeled 'South Korea's tourist attraction number 0.'

For 100 days Seoul was the arena for a public rebellion where tens of thousands went on the street in peaceful demonstrations highlighted by subtly orchestrated 'happening' attacks on police and 'Myung-Bak Castle' – with music, happenings and street theater all being coordinated by netizens using online fora: The battle was discussed and planned step-by-step online before the IRL [In Real Life] execution.

The happening-like events and demos were followed by video activists and via cell phones and sent by portable computers to the TV

station OhmyTV.com and online video stream distribution servers. On these websites, all of South Korea could follow the events in real-time.

Ronda Hauben concluded that the June demonstration/festivals won a clear victory for the demonstrators in terms of P.R. and moral. She underlined the fact however that the situation in the country is still tense and that Lee Myung-Bak has shown earlier that he is willing to use brutal force against South Korean citizens.

In Jay Hauben's presentation on the same panel focus was turned toward the growing Netizen movement in China – a country where the distribution of the Internet is growing explosively. It is estimated that more than 253 million Chinese were online in July of 2008 and more than 100 million of these are reading online fora. It is from these online fora that Jay Hauben has collected examples of the Chinese netizens raising critique against the Chinese government and authorities.

A student from the Wuhan province, Sun Zhigang, died in 2003 while in police custody. He had been detained for not being able to show ID papers. One of his friends wrote to an online forum frequented by Chinese media people and asked for media support to investigate the matter fully.

The police claimed that Zhigang died from a heart attack but this explanation didn't fit with all the signs of beating and violence which were obvious from the coronary papers.

A journalist from the newspaper *South Metropolitan Daily* brought the case to the public both offline and online. Before long, all the details of the case ran like a fire through Chinese web fora and more people came forward with examples of police brutality. The citizen and netizen commotion resulted in 12 policemen and detainees being arrested for lethal violence.

An online petition against the rules for police detainment was gathered and sent to the National People's Congress. The central government removed the detention law and issued a revised system that no longer allowed for arrest or involuntary holding of migrants or others without proper ID papers.

Jay Hauben mentioned another episode which happened in Harbin, the capital of the Heilongjiang province, in 2003. By accident a tractor made a scratch in a BMW owned by businessmen. In a rage over the

incident the businessman's wife drove the car directly into a crowd of local peasants.

One was killed and 12 wounded but the court case which followed the event ruled that it was an accident and the driver of the BMW was released. It was later revealed that the witnesses to the event had been paid off by the businessman. Two days after the court case a post popped up at the national web forum Strong Nation Forum entitled "Attention: BMW Kills Peasant."

Within a short time 70,000 comments were posted in response to the original post and the nation wide online debate quickly turned toward general issues such as the different treatment of the rich and poor in China and corruption in the court system.

When the case finally was mentioned in the print media, with an assurance from authorities that the case would be reopened, one netizen reaction was skepticism: "Why should we trust government officials?" the title of one post read.

The government eventually shut the case down completely when it deleted more than 300,000 comments on Chinese web fora. The reprise court case reached the same conclusion as the first.

Jay Hauben argued that the Chinese Netizen movement is a potentially important phenomenon in the development of democracy in China.

The BMW case didn't yield any actual result for the offended Netizens but according to Jay Hauben the underlying effect should not be underestimated. He mentioned that the Chinese government has admitted that the debate about SARS in web fora was actually helpful for the country and that China has begun to challenge government officials on all levels to take active part in debates on the web.

From SMS chain messages and collaborative G-mail accounts in Copenhagen, Netizen TV in Seoul and system critical comments on Chinese web fora – cyberactivism is here to stay. In Asia the Netizen movement has become a key element in the fight for direct democracy – which the Hauben's have missed in their home country U.S.A. since in 1964 when for the first time they walked side by side in a demonstration against the Vietnam War. It was an era where SMS chain messages, G-mail accounts and web fora were activist tools beyond the wildest

imagination.

Today's means of protest may be digital but the goal remains the same. "The critical students movement in which we were active from the beginning of the 60s viewed republicanism and representative democracy as a derailment of direct democracy which was envisioned by U.S.A.'s founding fathers," says Jay Hauben who believes that U.S.A. could learn something from the South Korean Netizen methods and involvement.

"Democracy in U.S.A. works to the extent that people have succeeded in fighting and sometimes even winning important battles against government policy at certain points, but the political system we have now does not represent the people," says Jay Hauben. Hauben, who categorizes himself as a participatory democratic, is baffled by the massive Danish media coverage of the McCain and Obama presidential campaigns, since it "doesn't really make any difference if one or the other wins," he says.

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*For background information about the 'Ungdomshus' conflict in Copenhagen, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ungdomshuset

[In response to questions from *Radio Austria International* (ORF), Ronda Hauben reviews how she and Michael Hauben came to write and get the book *Netizens: On the History of and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* published. Below are her answers to questions sent to her via e-mail by Guenter Hack, an editor at ORF. The occasion was the tenth anniversary of the book.]

One Decade of the Net Citizen

ORF: How did Michael and you get the idea for the book *Netizens*?
Ronda Hauben: In 1992 Michael and I had just gotten access to Usenet even though we had known about it for a while. (Usenet is an online

forum. See Chapter 10 of *Netizens*.)

Michael began posting articles on Usenet that he was writing as part of his research as an undergraduate college student about the social impact and the history of the Net.

Little was known among the Net community at this time about the history of the Net, and there was little research or writing about the social impact of the Net. People who were online were excited by the experience they were having online and eager to understand it better.

Michael's research, especially about the experience of users online was pioneering at the time. Some of the earliest articles Michael posted were "The Computer As Democratizer" and "The Social Forces Behind the Development of Usenet." His articles were welcomed by people online.

After reading some of what Michael posted, a Canadian netizen, Phil Fleisher, who was then in Ottawa, wrote Michael suggesting that there was a need for a book length collection of articles from various perspectives describing the important new advance represented by the participatory interactive nature of the global Internet.

In a parallel development I had been reading 17th and 18th Century British economic works which provided me with a framework to appreciate the importance of communication in the economic development of society. Once I had gotten onto Usenet, I began to think about how it might be possible to apply the scientific framework I had found in the economic works of writers like Sir William Petty and others to try to document the significance of what I was finding as the practice and historical foundations of the Internet. I remember I was thinking of writing a "Political Anatomy of the Net" after reading Petty's "Political Anatomy of Ireland."

One day I received a review copy in the mail of a print edition of a book that had been online about how to use the Net. Books about the Internet were just beginning to appear.

Michael and I thought it would be a good idea to take Phil's proposal seriously. It was worth our contributing the work we were doing to a print edition of *Netizens*. Around this time we approached a few publishers and inquired if they would be interested in a book. We soon learned that being able to put out a print edition of the book we

were proposing would be much harder than we had anticipated because publishers were promoting the commercialization of the Internet, while our book was a challenge and critique of such a change in the nature of the Net.

By Fall of 1993, I gathered the articles Michael and I had been writing and put them together as a collection of articles to be put online. We titled the netbook, as we called it, "Netizens and the Wonderful World of the Net." We set a date in January of 1994 to have a book reading in honor of the online publication of the book. We posted a notice online and in a local newspaper about the event. At the time we lived in Dearborn, Michigan. Michael was then at Columbia University in New York City as an undergraduate student but was home for intersession. We had our book launch at Henry Ford Community College, Dearborn, on January 12, 1994. Several people came to our event. Michael read from the first chapter of the book "The Net and the Netizen." We had some discussion about the impact of the Net that Michael had documented in his online research. Then we went to a computer with Internet access and showed people who had come that the book was online and how they could use ftp to copy the book by downloading it to their computers.

Three months later, on April 24, 1994, I visited Michael at Columbia University. Students in the student chapter of the Association for Computer Machinery (ACM) sponsored a book reading for us.

Michael and I both made presentations. There was a lively discussion about what should be the future direction for the Net. Should the emphasis be on multimedia or participatory interactive development? Students welcomed the book. I remember visiting Michael after that and meeting students who would ask if we had yet been able to get a print edition of the book published.

This was an example of the continuing encouragement we got to keep up the effort to get a print edition published of the book.

This was the period when there were a variety of people coming online who saw the Internet as a way to make their million dollar fortunes. For example, some lawyers, who came to be known online as the Green Card lawyers, posted an ad on many Usenet newsgroups advertising their services. They were greeted with much anger among

netizens online who took up to fight them and their spam.

Our online book was welcomed by netizens. Steve Samuel, who I think lived in Canada, proposed that we make a print edition and that he and others online could take it to their local bookstores and ask them to sell it. A netizen from Ireland offered to make a Latex version of the book once we had a final manuscript. Ron Newman, a U.S. Internet pioneer, supported our efforts and let people know about the book. He also encouraged us to keep up the efforts to find a publisher.

Cal Woods, from Dublin, offered to put the text into html which he did one weekend. We then had a text version and an html version online.

It took us three more years to be able to get a print edition of the book published. Our book focused on documenting the scientific, public and participatory nature of the Internet. During this period, the books being promoted by U.S. publishers were those books which were either "how to" books or books which encouraged the commercialization of the Internet. (The Green card lawyers had been given a book contract for $40,000 to publish a book on how to make millions using the Internet.)

At one point a publisher wrote me with an offer to publish the book. His copy editor proceeded to change the text. She took out sections where we challenged the commercialization of the Internet and replaced them with language promoting Internet commercialization. When we objected, the publisher threatened that we would never get the book published in a print edition. We said we wouldn't agree to the changes. This publisher ended his offer to publish the book.

Michael didn't let this bad experience sidetrack our efforts. He posted the table of contents of the book online on some mailing lists and Usenet. He received an e-mail from the IEEE Computer Society publisher saying that if we really did have a manuscript they would be interested in publishing the book.

The copy-editing and publishing process took more than a year. Among the other people who stand out during this period helping us to get the book published were Jan Lee and Deborah Scherrer, who were active in the IEEE Computer Society at the time. Jan Lee was then editor of the IEEE Annals of Computing encouraging us to get the research we had done into print. Debbie was especially helpful as the IEEE Computer Society Ombusperson helping us work through problems when

they developed in the publishing process. The book was finally published in a print edition in May 1997. We had a book party welcoming the publication on Bastille Day July 14, 1997 at a book store near Columbia. Michael and I both read sections from the book. Our publisher came from California and so did some friends from Michigan.

Several Japanese colleagues helped to have the book translated into Japanese so that a Japanese translation appeared in a print edition in October 1997.

ORF: Who is a Netizen to you?

Ronda Hauben: This is a question that makes me smile. It is quite amazing to see how the evolution of "netizens," that Michael discovered in his initial research into the impact of the Internet in 1992, continues to develop.

One quite fascinating example of netizens are the young scientists of the scientific community in South Korea who unmasked the fraud in the research papers of one of the most famous Korean scientists Hwang Woo-suk.

The South Korean government gave great honors to Professor Hwang for his stem cell research. The highly regarded U.S. scientific journal *Science* had published Professor Hwang's papers. And there was a fan club both online and offline supporting Professor Hwang and relying on his false promises of medical breakthroughs to offer remedies for their handicaps or diseases.

Yet the young scientists who participated in online forums such as BRIC (Biological Research Information Center), DC Inside (A photography web site) and Scieng (the site of the Association of Korean Scientists and Engineers) succeeded in not only challenging the powerful forces who supported Hwang, but also in spreading an understanding online of the evidence of the fraudulent nature of Hwang's work.

In an article I wrote for *OhmyNews* 12/29/2005, I proposed that these young scientists were the South Korean "Netizens of the Year" http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?menu=c10 400&no=266352&rel_no=1

Netizens in South Korea also made it possible for a relatively unknown politician to win the presidency of the country in 2002 based

on the candidate's stated commitment to participatory government. Unfortunately he did not live up to his promises.

I consider the work of Florian Roetzer and the *Telepolis* community to be the activity of netizens. As the editor and a journalist, Florian has created *Telepolis*, which I consider to be a pioneering online magazine created in 1996. *Telepolis* reports on news events often not covered elsewhere. Even more important, however, the online community who read and contribute to *Telepolis* often have serious and interesting discussions about the articles. *Telepolis* is one example of an online publication that I would call "netizen journalism." This is a form of journalism where those who are the staff of the publication and its readers are active participants in the discussion of the problems of our society.

There is a need for a journalism that is independent of the powers that be, of a journalism critical of what those in power are doing. Journalism should be able to expose the underlying but hidden motives and interests behind the news. Too often journalists tell the story those in power want to be told. The journalists too often act as if they are the public relations department for the powerful. Rarely do journalists tell the news from the point of view of the powerless, of those who are the victims of the abuse of power by those in public office.

Telepolis publishes mainly in German. The url is:
http://www.heise.de/tp

Journalists who write for *Telepolis* are encouraged to ask the questions and tell the news that no other newspaper will support.

An important example is the set of articles by Mathias Broechers published immediately after the attacks on the World Trade Center in the U.S. on September 11, 2001.

Three days later and continuing on a regular basis for several months, Broechers wrote articles which challenged the official U.S. government account of how 9-11 had happened and who was responsible.

Broechers has said that only one or two other newspapers were willing to publish one or two articles challenging the official explanation of 9-11 at the time, and no news media with the exception of *Telepolis* was willing to publish the series of articles he did.

The articles appearing in *Telepolis* raised serious questions about the what was the role of the U.S. government with regard to what had happened on 9-11.

Not only did *Telepolis* print a number of articles challenging the official U.S. government explanation of 9-11 and the lack of an investigation, but there was a lively ongoing discussion and debate in the reader's forum section of *Telepolis* on the articles. Broechers reports, also, that he received a number of e-mail responses to his articles with leads and information that were helpful for his ongoing series of articles.

A similar process has gone on with articles appearing in *Telepolis* on other significant issues of the times. For example, a series of articles appeared in *Telepolis* challenging the U.S. government claim of the existence of "weapons of mass destruction" as a pretext for its invasion of Iraq. Articles on many different events and problems, and on scientific and technical developments are featured in *Telepolis*. The Hungarian journalist John Horvath reports from Hungary about the developments in Eastern Europe for *Telepolis.* Other journalists write about events in Palestine and other areas of Europe, Africa and the Middle East. There has been a continuing series on the domination of the U.S. government over the management of the Internet's infrastructure. In honor of the 10th anniversary of *Telepolis*, in March 2006, a number of people wrote about their appreciation for the work done by this pioneering online newspaper.

Some people now use the word netizen to refer to anyone who is online. When Michael introduced and used the word, however, he reserved the word to refer to those who participate online not only for entertainment or personal reasons but more importantly toward contributing to a better world.

Actually Michael, describing netizens, wrote: "Netizens...are people who understand it takes effort and action on each and everyone's part to make the Net a regenerative and vibrant community and resource. Netizens are people who decide to devote time and effort into making the Net, this new part of our world, a better place." (Michael Hauben, "Preface," *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*) The *Telepolis* readers and staff are one example of netizens.

ORF: Has it been easier to be a Netizen in the more homogeneously populated Internet then it is now?

Ronda Hauben: Before the commercialization of the Internet, there was a very supportive netizen community that welcomed contributions and shared their work and responded actively to the work of others. The U.S. government's privatization and commercialization activities, however, gave support to those elements who abused the Net and the online community.

There was a very diverse population of people online before the Internet was privatized on May 1, 1995. The fact that commercial activity was not allowed, however, made the Net a more welcoming environment than later after the commercialization.

ORF: For the book, you did extensive research on the history of the Internet. Do you see some of the original spirit of the Internet's masterminds like J. C. R. Licklider still around today?

Ronda Hauben: Yes.

It is not that I see something akin to the original vision by people like J. C. R. Licklider now in any individual person who stands out.

Instead, the spirit has become more diffuse and spread out. It has become the challenge for netizens to carry on the vision and figure out how to implement it in the day to day developments that occur online and off.

For example, the area that I particularly follow is the area of how the Internet can help to create a publicly oriented newspaper or other news media here in the U.S. and else where around the world.

OhmyNews in South Korea and *Telepoli*s in Germany are examples of netizens utilizing the Internet to make such a news media possible. While there isn't such a news media in the U.S. yet, there are lots of efforts by people to make something happen.

For example, there was a scandal exposed during the George W. Bush administration that bloggers had been active bringing to public attention. That scandal involved U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and the decision to fire eight U.S. Attorneys, some of whom were in the midst of politically hot criminal investigations. (See especially TPM Muckraker http://www.tpmmuckraker.com/)

Similarly in the scandal involving Paul Wolfowitz, the head of the

world bank and the architect of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, there were anonymous comments put online by the staff at the world bank that helped to document the frustration of people who worked under him. The scandal involving him was not only that he claimed to be requiring governments elsewhere to fight corruption while he used his office to give large salaries to those who had a personal or political relationship to him, but also that he geared the program of the World Bank toward the Bush political agenda rather than toward a program supporting economic development goals.

Similarly, in the situation with the mass killing at Virginia Tech, there was at least one web site with discussion about the problems in U.S. society that lead to someone becoming so isolated and frustrated so they can become a danger to themselves and others. While much of the mainstream media used the situation to discuss gun control, the online discussion I found looked for an understanding of the social problems in U.S. society that led to this tragedy.

While the mainstream U.S. media continues to offer a very narrow set of news for people, netizens are actively exploring how the Internet can help them to bypass the mainstream U.S. media so that public opinion and the public agenda become broadened to represent the public interest, not the interest of the powerful.

As Michael wrote in *Netizens*, the Net brings "the power of the reporter to the netizen."

He explained: "People now have the ability to broadcast their observations or questions around the world and have other people respond. The computer networks form a new grassroots connection that allows the excluded sections of society to have a voice. This new medium is unprecedented. Previous grassroots media have existed for much smaller-sized selections of people. The model of the Net proves the old way does not have to be the only way of networking. The Net extends the idea of networking – of making connections with strangers that prove to be advantageous to one or both parties."

http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/CompHum/speech_acm.html

Michael was referring particularly to online discussion groups.

The forms of discussion groups have expanded now to include

discussion on blogs, news articles and other formats. But the achieve-ment is the same.

The netizen has a power and is using it :-)

Licklider described the need for citizen involvement in government decisions to help determine how to support the continuing development of computer technology. More significantly, Licklider proposes that people will not be interested in government processes until they have a means to participate in those processes. He foresees how computer developments will provide such a means. He writes: "Computer power to the people is essential to the realization of a future in which most citizens are informed about, and interested and involved in, the process of government."

This is a goal now particularly of those who are trying to develop a new form of media, a media which will provide for a more participa-tory and discursive interaction between writers and readers.

Though this process is still young, it is developing and will develop more as the Internet spreads and more people get access. Netizens are finding ways to implement and spread the vision of a more democratic society that the Net helps to make possible.

ORF: In February 2001, Google acquired Deja News' archive of then 500 million Usenet messages, dating back to 1995. I remember you opposing the deal and questioning whether corporations could sell postings like a commodity. What do you think of collaborative websites a.k.a. web 2.0?

Ronda Hauben: I still feel that Google has an obligation to the online community with regard to what it does with Usenet messages. After I wrote the article in *Telepolis* about the problem with Google treating Usenet postings as a commercial commodity, I was invited to speak at Stanford and then at Google. Afterward, I was told that someone from Google would speak with me about what I saw as the problems, such as with Google making decisions about what should happen with regard to Usenet newsgroups and Usenet posts without having a mechanism of input from users.

I made the effort to talk to the Google person I was put in contact with. He asked me what I wanted them to do. I said for a start not to claim that they owned the copyright on Usenet posts. (Google put their

copyright notice on each post.) At the time the person from Google ended the conversation with me.

Since then Google has made several changes with regard to how they treat Usenet newsgroup posts. Still, however, I don't know of any mechanism that exists for them to have substantial user input into their decisions.

How Google treats Usenet newsgroups affects Usenet, so it is important there be a mechanism for input and discussion with users about this. In general it is interesting that Google and some commercial entities like Google seem to function without the realization that they need to have solid means of interaction and discussion with users with regard to how their activities impact the user community.

So I was glad I tried to open up a process with regard to this and that my article was printed in *Telepolis* and I was invited to speak at Stanford and at Google about the issues involved, but I was not happy that this problem was not treated in a constructive way by Google management.

You asked about web 2.0.

The term "web 2.0" seem to be used a lot and I'm not sure exactly what it means.

In general it seems that this means the interactive and participatory processes of collaborative networking and multimedia.

This all was part of the early vision for the Internet and its development, so to call this web 2.0 seems to be suggesting that this is a new development or something particular to the web. It isn't something new, or particular to the web, so in that way the term seems misleading.

Nevertheless it is good to have lots of people have access to the collaborative processes that the Internet makes possible.

But it seems that perhaps what gets lost in the web 2.0 formulation is that there is a social orientation intended as part of the early vision for the Internet. The development of the net was projected as the development of a public utility, and as an empowerment of the user for socially related purposes. I don't know if this is part of what is considered 'web 2.0' or if 'web 2.0' focuses mainly on the technology and loses the social orientation of the vision guiding the development and use of the technology. In any case, the netizen is a concept that has maintained the

sense of a social orientation.

Also, an important part of the original vision for the Net was that all who wanted access be able to have access to the Internet at a low cost.

I do not know if this is part of what is considered web 2.0. It is part of what Michael included when developing the concept of the 'netizen.' Many people who wrote him in 1993 and 1994 wanted everyone to have access to the Internet. The vision of widespread accessibility of the Net was an important part of its potential promise.

In the U.S. there seems little commitment on the part of the government to the spread of broadband.

Recently (circa 2008) the U.S. ranking is given as 25th globally (at a household level) with respect to the widespread availability of broadband access. See for example:
http://www.websiteoptimization.com/bw/0704/

ORF: There's so much information in *Netizens*. It's a very dense and powerful text.

[The editors were happy to find online the following tribute to Ronda Hauben one of the founding editors of the *Amateur Computerist*.]

Ada Lovelace Day +1: Honoring Ronda Hauben

posted by metaverse* (March 25, 2009)

Yesterday [March 24, 2009] was Ada Lovelace Day, a day to honor women in technology.** When I first heard about the event, I knew instantly who I wanted to honor. Though we never met, this woman helped inspire me to participate in the community that is the Internet. I'd lost track of what she was doing over the years, so I had to do some research, which of course led to more research...so, I'm late.

So let me introduce you to an underappreciated Internet visionary, one of the original Netizens: Ronda Hauben. In her youth, Hauben worked in Detroit at the world's largest car factory, Ford Rouge. As the

story goes, Ford was sponsoring continuing education classes in computer programming. Hauben and others were outraged when the company canceled the program in 1987. After an unsuccessful attempt to revive the company-sponsored program, Hauben launched The *Amateur Computerist* newsletter to foster technology education among the workers. The first issue (http://www.ais.org/~jrh/acn/acn1-1.pdf) came out on February 11, 1988, the 51st anniversary of the Flint Sit-Down Strike. It declared: "We want to keep interest alive because computers are the future. We want to disperse information to users about computers. Since the computer is still in the early stage of development, the ideas and experiences of the users need to be shared and built on if this technology is to advance. To this end, this newsletter is dedicated to all people interested in learning about computers."

Sometime later, Hauben found Usenet newsgroups, and figured out early that collaboration and participation among users were the key to the future. In September 1992, the alt.amateur-comp newsgroup was founded to circulate the electronic version of the newsletter, which was: "dedicated to support for grassroots efforts and movements like the 'computers for the people movement' that gave birth to the personal computer in the 1970s and 1980s. Hard efforts of many people over hundreds of years led to the production of a working computer in the 1940s and then a personal computer that people could afford in the 1970s. This history has been serialized in several issues of the newsletter."

A year later, Hauben delivered a speech on the history and promise of Usenet, which may have been my first acquaintance with her work.

Among the early stories The *Amateur Computerist* published included one of the first histories of Usenet in its Fall 1992 Supplement, "The Linux Movement" and the Free Software Foundation in Spring 1994, and more than a few basic (and BASIC) programs for its readers to try out, much like *Dr. Dobb's Journal*.

In 1994, Ronda and her son Michael released *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* for free on the web. (http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/) It was later published by IEEE Computer Society Press. It offers a terrific glimpse at the early history of the Internet, and an important discussion of its promise that remains

largely relevant today; especially with the increasing corporatization of the Net.

Today, Ronda is a citizen journalist living in New York City. She is an award-winning United Nations correspondent for *OhMyNews International*, and still contributes articles on the democratic promise of the Internet.

So go out and take a look at the complete *Amateur Computerist* archives, and think about how you can contribute to your online communities – including this one (http://www.ais.org/~jrh/acn/). Comments always appreciated.

Notes:

* *Notes from the Metaverse* is the mostly technology-related weblog of Mike McCallister.

** Ada Lovelace Day is an international day of blogging to draw attention to women excelling in technology. See: http://findingada.com/

The opinions expressed in articles are those of their authors and not necessarily the opinions of the *Amateur Computerist* newsletter. We welcome submissions from a spectrum of viewpoints.

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