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the Internet – a Kula Ring of today

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abstract

This study aims to investigate whether the Internet can be a useful tool in organisations in developing countries that are working for empowerment, democratisation and an increased global justice. I have elucidated the opportunities involved and the prerequisites for it to happen. The ability for groups to interact at great distances and at a rapid speed raises interesting questions about collective, political action and thanks to a Minor Field Study (MFS) scholarship I got the opportunity to go to Costa Rica to approach the chosen area and to participate in FIRE's among others work.

New telecommunication technology has undeniably advanced rapidly and more and more people around the globe have today direct access to it and to the information it conveys, but there are still vast regions in the world which have either no or very limited access to these new means of communication and exchanging information, which also is something that has been considered.

Information transformed into knowledge could be viewed upon as equal to social power, a power that can be used in the fight for equality and empowerment of socially marginalized groups. The Internet as an ultimate carrier of information could definitely be to some help in the production and in the distribution of knowledge. I have also argued for the Internet being able to give individuals and organisations a possibility to escape prevailing power structures, even though it is just another media produced within the society it is used in.

I have argued for how important it is to conceptualise the medium as a tool that might be useful in the process, and how significant it is not to forget the social actors behind this tool. In the organisations I had the opportunity to visit in Costa Rica there were a constantly present, never ending burning, passion to fight for their ideals. Their work were permeated by a strong believe in the possibility to change and they had all made the decision to use the Internet as a tool for their accomplishment.

Welcome to join me on the journey within the Kula Ring of today.

key words:

Internet, transnational networks, NGOs, empowerment, developing world, Costa Rica, digital divide, utopia

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1 introduction

In the last two decades, the growth of the global computer network more known as the Internet has facilitated the rapid emergence of communication between groups and individuals with shared interests scattered all around the world. It has become an arena for small groups entirely focused on narrow topics, as well as a platform for millions of users engaged in exchange networks of information and goods. The Internet – the network of networks – gives us an opportunity to understand the concept of networks. The Internet, as other networks, is a dynamic, decentralised, ever-changing configuration based on dispersed nodes. It follows the principle of flow rather than structure and stretches across a vast amount of social environments, thus could be seen as eliminating boundaries. By having these characteristics this new media might be an effective tool in the work for an increased global justice. The collective mobilisation might take on a more political agenda, bring people together to organise around the will to change.

I am in this study going to discuss the new possibility of communication and information exchange that the Internet contributes to and what impact it could have in the work for some sort of change of the current world order. This certainly raises questions about power, access and a possibility to participate, which also is going to be considered.

1.1 background

I will here in this section present some underlying ideas and thoughts, which the study is based on. It is on the basis of these my questions of research were discerned and my respondents thought of being good representatives.

1.1.1 the Internet and the process of empowerment

In western countries still many people have an idea of the Internet as a neutral environment, a technology-rich medium within which messages, documents, reports, images and words easily can be authored and distributed by writers and read and understood by end-users. It is easy to see that this medium has a good potential for information exchange and how it could support the spreading of democratic ideals. In an ethnocentric perspective one can see how this sophisticated network, initially developed by engineers educated within democratic and highly technological cultures, could connect the world in a “global community” where all the geographical borders are dissolved.

Although many people have raised concerns towards this vision of an online utopia, by pointing out that issues of class, gender and race could prevent equal access, there have been a number of examples during the years that have shown an effective use of the Internet. One, commonly referred to, is the Zapatista movement in the Chiapas (*web1*). Therefore, it is too drastic to deny that by using the Internet it is possible to inform and empower individuals and social groups globally by subverting existing power structures. But, at the same time it is significant to be aware of the power of the states and not underestimate their ability to control information access.

Globalisation could be seen both as a structural process as well as a conceptual process. At the structural level, globalisation refers to all those things that make the world smaller, all that promotes the binding of different parts together in a web of interconnectedness. The Internet, a good representative for this process, could easily be seen as a global communication infrastructure. At a more abstract conceptual level the Internet could be seen as a global phenomenon in the way it provides a way to communicate and interact with one another, regardless of physical location, distance and time. I would like to make clear that I have the same view of the Internet as Miller & Slater have in their book (2000), as a sort of material culture - not a virtual world that stands against and defines or supersedes something else called real. The Internet is contributing to a raised awareness of the world as a whole and it is this less economy-centred approach I would like to use concerning the issues of globalisation in the context.

1.2 aim and objectives

My aim with this study is to investigate whether the Internet can be a useful tool in organisations in developing countries that are working for empowerment, democratisation and an increased global justice and to elucidate the opportunities with it and the prerequisites for it to happen. By tackling complex issues such as modernisation and globalisation this study further contributes to an understanding of some of the most dynamic changes arising from a greater degree of global interconnectedness.

1.3 questions of research

The ability for groups to interact at great distances and at a rapid speed raises interesting questions about collective, political action. To be able to find out more about the subject I intend to discuss the following:

In what way could the Internet allow individuals, groups and social organisations to create a public opinion, to be able to influence and make things happen, rather than to be bound to passivity and things are happening to them.
– This seen out of an overall social context.

In what way might the Internet be the base for new forms of solidarity?

What are the primary factors that are required if this is going to become reality?

1.4 delimitation

Even though I have used an extensive amount of data that describes different parts of the world my focus in this study lies on Latin America and Costa Rica. It is here my main respondents live and work and where the organisations and movements they represent (see **Appendix A**) are located as well as where my fieldwork took place.

1.5 outline of narrative

In the next chapter I place myself as a researcher in the context and put forth my scientific position. I argue for why a *hermeneutic approach* has been important and how Critical Theory has been an influence in the process. I present the different methods I used for data gathering, describe how the interviews were conducted and where my field study took place. I also introduce the reader to the organisations in Costa Rica that provided me with a huge amount of data, criticise myself as a researcher, present some essential approaches that are underlying the process of interpreting and finally criticise the chosen method.

In chapter number three I offer a brief journey through the development of the Internet concerning both the actual technique as well as mentioning different conceptions that has occurred parallel to its growth. I present some early history of the Internet era, indicate on the rapid growth it underwent and briefly mention what it came to represent. I end this chapter by arguing for how the conceptualisation of the Internet differs from one extreme to the other.

Chapter four aims to theoretize the Internet. Here I discuss the structure of the Internet and point out that it is participating to an interconnectedness of the world by being unbounded, transnational and fluid, a transient form of organisation, thus could globalisation be seen to accelerate. I elucidate how globalisation processes have brought a sense of a 'one world' where terms and images such as 'democracy', 'welfare', 'freedom' and 'rights' are flowing and how this has been acted and reacted upon. I also mention how new movements have started to appear which are organised, often over national borders, and what impact that could have.

In Chapter number five I indicate on what the consequences could be by fusing the network [of networks] with its social counterpart. Here I discuss the new conception of time and space, networking and other possibilities with the web.

The sixth chapter is mainly based on the research in Costa Rica. Here I present some underlying ideas about what the basic prerequisites are to make it possible to use the Internet as a useful tool in social organisations in developing countries. I am dissecting different factors that are complicating the issue which all were crystallised through my fieldwork.

In the seventh chapter I intend to analyse and discuss the subject of research and finally come with a conclusion section in chapter number eight.

The journey could start...

2 method and approach

In all scientific studies it is important as a researcher to be reflective, that you are aware of and have a serious attitude towards its interpretative, political and rhetorical nature. Reflectivity is about an awareness of the ethnographic texts' dual relation to the reality that has been studied. Reflection also includes an interpretative perspective of your own interpretations, that you put your own authority as an author and interpreter under critique.

I am here in this study aiming, on scientific basis, to shed some light on a chosen area and hopefully this will give some opportunities for *understanding* rather than a confirmation of some sort of 'truth'.

Researchers have always their own points of reference while going into a certain 'project', and a constant and ongoing process of interpretation is taking place within the frames of these. This is the reason why interpretations only occupy a relative objectivity rather than an absolute. (Alvesson & Sköldberg 1994:121) Naturally it is obvious that my expectations of the Internet affected the way the study was accomplished.

2.1 *scientific position*

Hermeneutic approach, which today could be seen as one of the main schools within philosophic science and qualitative method, is what mainly has been used in this study. It is an approach full of contradictory perspectives and methods, but I will not go further into that here. The aim in this study is to investigate, interpret and try to understand the wholeness, which means that I will not focus on truth as correspondence or truth as application, which would correspond to a more positivistic approach. Through an ability to enter into another person's philosophy it is possible to interpret her/his thoughts, motives and feelings and in that way be able to get some sort of understanding of her/his behaviour and actions. (Alvesson & Sköldberg 1994:117) But, we never approach this understanding unprejudiced, as I said, we always bring with us either consciously or unconsciously a sort of understanding, this through frames of references, theories, concepts and values. It is in the light of these that the process of interpretation takes place. (Alvesson & Sköldberg 1994:165)

My first reflections about the Internet revolved around political issues and a facilitation of a free flow of information. I believed that if others with the same ease as myself could access information and channel it further to other people, wouldn't that be a way to empower people around the globe, a way to bypass existing power structures? Having said that discerns a bias rather clearly, but I do believe the Internet has a good potential to empower individuals and social groups around the world. By giving them access to information and resources they are given an opportunity to enhance their knowledge and with that their power. Why did I affiliate with this perspective? In what way is the method connected to my questions of research? The reasons are many but I would like to concentrate on the most fundamental. By using a Hermeneutic approach we are unavoidably basing the perspective in its most basic philosophical statements about how

human beings relate to the world. Supported by Phenomenology the Hermeneutic approach postulate the fact that a human being clothe one's reality with meaning, something that could be seen as her understanding of the reality, her knowledge about it. This process is according to the Hermeneutic school a process of interpretation.

I have also been influenced by *Critical Theory* both in the way that it has increased my awareness of social phenomena's political characteristics as well as it has developed my ability to have a critical reflective attitude towards the reality I am a part of as well as study. It has also opened my eyes for the fact that social phenomena must be understood in a historical context. (Alvesson & Sköldberg 1994:176-223)

But how could we know and be sure of the correctness of this interpretation, how it is in accordance to 'reality'? The answer is you can't. 'Truth' within this school is not a question of statistic correspondence between interpretation and 'facts'. 'Facts' are already results of interpretation, as we have seen, and the hermeneutic approach questions the traditional concept of truth. There are going to be as many interpretations as there are researchers. This is not to be understood as no overlapping or unanimity can occur between the researcher's different interpretations, which is rather likely.

There are within the area of science a number of different types of research, which could be seen as explorative, descriptive, trying out hypothesis and diagnostic. I believe it is necessary to make clear to which one of these I as a researcher connect with. As the chosen subject, *social organisations and the Internet*, to me is totally untrodden ground I consider this study to be explorative so, consequently the chosen method for gathering data was to conduct qualitative (flexible) interviews. Thanks to a *Minor Field Study scholarship* (MFS) from SIDA I was also given the possibility to conduct research in place, through participant observation as well.

It is in the context worth mentioning that a situation that can occur is the one when a researcher believes she/he is conducting an explorative study, and it shows that the person isn't. One reason could be that the spreading of knowledge between researchers often is imperfect, which leads to people carrying out research in the same area by using the same approach. This is not something bad in all situations, but you should make sure that you do not invent the wheel once again. Some sort of progression is desirable. (Alvesson & Sköldberg 1994:72)

2.2 data gathering

The chosen method for data gathering was as mentioned above interviews with Internet users from various different sectors in Costa Rica combined with more informal discussions with the local population. A number of in-depth interviews with different organisations have provided a great amount of data of Internet development in the region. These have also been combined with informal interviews with students, lecturers, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Internet Café staff and storekeepers. Websites have provided me with a huge amount of relevant data and it was partly thanks to them I found my respondents. Since it is hard to assure the reliability of Internet sources I tried to use mainly sources I am familiar with. Having carried out my research in various locations, including the virtual world represented by the Internet, this study has also been based on literary sources. When using literary sources I have combined

authoritative narratives with 'native' texts and haven't made any distinction between the two. Both are lying as a base for my further theoretical analysis.

2.3 the way the interviews were conducted

Why did I choose to conduct *flexible interviews* and not another form of interview? What could be seen as problematic within interview research is that there aren't any common procedures for the actual accomplishment; there are as many different forms of interview-analysis as there are ways of reading a text. (Kvale 1997) When using flexible interviews there are usually no fixed distinguished questions, you rather use a number of different subjects, which work as a sort of framework for the actual accomplishment. The interviewer is here free to probe to get down to more precise answers. This method is the most time-consuming and the most difficult one, both concerning the actual performance as well as the later analysis of the data, but you can expose many hidden and unconscious thoughts, which I believe are important for the questions of research. This led to that much analysis and methodological conclusions had to be made in place, during the actual interview.

During all interviews I used a tape recorder, mainly to be able to constantly focus on what was said and to have my hands free but also to get the sounds we were surrounded by, to contextualize the interview in a different way. I made sure that my respondents weren't going to be bothered by my decision. Worth mentioning is that nearly all of them are or have been working with similar issues and are used to being recorded.

2.3.1 the interview procedure

To be able to get an understanding of people's intentions I believe it is rather important to describe the context of the interview. Something worth mentioning in this circumstance is a discussion María Suárez Toro co-director of FIRE and I had during a interview situation that actually touched the subject.

I asked her if they, while webcasting, take into consideration the fact that their audience has a multitude of different origins, with a big diversity of cultural backgrounds, María said among other things:

"Yea, we have some techniques... contextualize, describe things, that's why the language of radio has to be very descriptive. We usually tell them to bring the women here and I tell the women when I interview them from Palestine or Israel: "Bring the international audience to the plaza where you had your meeting this morning", so that you give them a clue that you have to describe very vividly. That is both to support the fact that it is only sound, and also to support the fact that it is international and people don't necessary have many references."

Therefore I would like to contextualize this interview by using her words when she starts a webcast by first describing where they are sitting. She says:

“When the bells ring you have to tell people why the bells are ringing like: - We are only two blocks away from the Catholic Church in the town of Ciudad Colón. This is a small town and it has 12 000 people, this is where we are webcasting from, it is a rural town and you are going to hear the dogs barking and you are going to hear the church bell ring, and”

And this is how it was like, sitting there in their little office, the telephone did ring as well as the church bell and the dogs did bark. Like María asserts *“You have to create a city only by speaking because you don’t have pictures”*. It is nevertheless as important to take this into consideration even when it is about documenting rather than some sort of mediating of words. For the only thing people can rely on when reading, are the words of the ethnographer. The interviews with Acceso and Incorpore were also conducted in their buzzing offices, where fans were cooling the air and the traffic outside making itself heard, while the one with SEM was held at Hotel Radison in San José on Thaís Aguilar Zúñiga’s request, this over a cup of coffee while facing the beautiful garden.

I got there a bit early this particular day, you never knew how the traffic was supposed to be, sometimes you were stuck for ages and didn’t get anywhere, and I didn’t want to be late for our appointment. It feels pretty ironic but the “mañana” attitude is really permeating the Costa Rican society and I was waiting for an hour and a half. The lobby of the hotel was beautiful and I sat down in a big comfortable sofa and started reading through my questions over and over again, I checked the tape recorder and my extra batteries, you do not want to do mistakes like coming home with a blank tape! I was nervous, it felt different in a way, to meet up there, not as casual as being in somebody’s office. The words from Bernard’s method book were echoing... when you are in field, write down your feelings, the surroundings, and the context you are in... So I did.

2.3.2 interview-guide

The questions used in the different interviews were tailor-made for each organisation to suit the specific context. An interview-guide were worked out and the framing of the questions were formulated in a way so that I later would be able to deal with the original question of research; the relationship between Internet and a social organisation. The interview-guide was designed in the way that to start with I had a few probing questions, which were followed by, if necessary, more specific questions. Situations occurred when I wanted to focus on and further develop some of their answers, but this was a decision I took there, during the interview situation.

2.4 field study

Radio International Feminista (FIRE) was the organisation, NGO, I spent most of my time with, which ended up being almost three months. I was more than welcome to participate in their daily work, using there office for reading and asking them questions whenever I wanted to. By being able to spend such amount of time there I believe I have been able to understand them at a level I otherwise wouldn’t have been able to reach.

Thanks to the fact that FIRE started using the Internet already in 1998 they had had some time to evaluate the media and the consequences of the shift from producing short-wave radio to internet-radio, which makes them a good representative in the context. The fieldwork in Costa Rica really provided me with an unforgettable experience that I always will carry with me.

2.5 analysing the collected data

There are many different lines of action when analysing collected data, to be able to discern different patterns and categories. A very open and close empirical way of “treating” transcripts is *Grounded Theory*, invented by Glaser and Strauss. (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 1994:63-95) The main goal here is to generate theory out of the empirical collected data by using some sort of comparative analysis. The fact that “reality” always already is interpreted, that it is always fused with some sort of theory in its origin, do they defend with the importance not to read too much in beforehand about the area of research, that you have to keep on having a clear vision. The data, that generally could be seen as being “something empirical, often an occurrence, often in the form of an incident, often in some sort of form of social interaction” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 1994:76), is your starting point, and out of this are you supposed to discern *categories*, a procedure usually named *coding*. This coding process continues until a theoretical saturation occurs. A number of authors have criticised this approach for various reasons, but many people are still influenced by it, which I have been, as well. It is important to mention that in an early stage of analysis there is still an ongoing process of interpretation. A big risk when working ‘close empirical’ is that you create trivial knowledge.

2.5.1 coding by colours

After the interviews were entirely transcribed from tape format to paper format they had to be coded. One way to accomplish this is, on the basis of the discerned categories, to code the transcript by colours. This procedure is mentioned in a book written by Kvale; “*Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun*” and is there called *meningskategorisering*. The purpose is to reduce long statements into simple categories and to reduce and structure a big amount of text. (Kvale 1997:174)

2.6 the interpretation

This study is among other things based on interviews and to these are related a number of methodological and theoretical ideas. I believe a Hermeneutic approach is double relevant within the area of interview research, firstly by shedding some light on how the interview texts that are to be interpreted were created and secondly to elucidate the process where the interview text itself is interpreted. What I am trying to say is that an interpretation occurred both when my respondents and I discussed different subjects as well as when I interpreted their statements.

How did my idea of the subject, my understanding of it, gradually change throughout the study? How did I get to understand things the way I did? How come did I interpret it as I

did? Many anthropologists have for long focused on 'the differences' that appear, all those small indications that violate one's assumption of perfect coherence or simply when expectations aren't met. I would say I've been working in a similar way while going through the material. Heidegger used a term: *breakdowns* while discussing the concept and for the sake of convenience I will use the same. The central role of breakdowns is that they bring out problems for ethnographic attention, (Agar 1987:20) which then are to be eliminated by giving an explanation to the problem, a sort of *resolution*. But how do you carry this out? Hirsch has one way of reasoning "A breakdown is a lack of fit between one's encounter with a tradition and the schema-guided expectations by which one organises experience. One then modifies the schemas or constructs new ones and tries again. Based on this new try, further modifications are made, and the process continue iteratively until the breakdown is resolved" (Agar 1987:20) Once resolution is complete you have reached the endpoint called *coherence*.

As with all studies the ensuring process of its reliability is somewhat surrounded by problems. One has to assume that the chosen respondents are professional and good represents for the organisations they represent and I take for granted that they mediate their knowledge in a reliable and correct way. Concerning the reliability with the literature study that has been carried out I will use the same argument. Due to the fact that this study only is based on well known literature and mainly scientific articles I assume they are reliable, which also includes the chosen method. A hundred percentage assurance can not be guaranteed though.

2.6.1 a summarise of the process of building up an understanding

To illustrate how my understanding of the way my respondents look at the Internet became clearer, I would like to base my statements on Gadamer's method about *horizons* (which originally is a term borrowed from Husserl). (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 1994:135-136) A person's conception, her field of understanding, could be seen as the visual field that includes all that is visual from one point of view. This *horizon*, could be seen as something flexible and ever changing, a field in which other people can enter and explore. I believe it has been a strong tendency in the human existence to have narrow *horizons*, but it is however possible to broaden these, as well as open up new ones. When individuals and social groups gradually start learning from each other, when the originally strange system of references is more and more understood, Gadamer is talking about a *fusion of horizons*, and I think this is what has come out of my study.

2.7 critique of chosen method

A pretty common problem that occurs when dealing with qualitative data is when contradictory information is received or when there are some uncertainties about the information gathered; when the respondent is biased because she/he is affected by someone else, or because a long period of time has passed since the occurrence it is referred to happened. To solve these sorts of problems a specific science has been introduced; *källkritik* – a hermeneutic method that serves as some sort of criteria for evaluation and interpretation of data. An alignment on 'oral history' has made this

method relevant within the area of interview investigations. (Alvesson & Sköldberg 1994:123)

I have tried to be aware of the originator's intentions, if the person in question is honest or dishonest about her/his intentions with the source as well as the source's grade of conscious or unconscious tendency to bias the information. The more suspicious you are, the less the source should be valued. But, a certain tendency could be very valuable to put some attention to and a political bias is important concerning this subject of matter. I have also had in mind how far away in time and space the source is from the actual event and how many links the information has passed through before reaching the source. Both these aspects contribute to worsen the source's "trueness".

I will finish this chapter by saying a few words about language. I believe it is worth mentioning that neither the language of my or my respondents' mother tongue was used during the interview situations, which naturally led to a constant interpretation of what was said. In this shared vision of reality the words used "*lies on the borderline between oneself and other. The word in language is half someone else's*", says Bakhtin. (Clifford 1983:41) Gadamer asserts that the fusion of horizons, which I mentioned above, is "*a proper achievement of language*" (Clifford 1983:41), which I would argue is difficult. Some misunderstandings did occur, but the most problematic thing was to steer how the interview was to proceed due to my insignificant skills in interviewing. In this case my respondents were able to speak very freely about the subject, which resulted in a lot of gathered data that I at the time didn't think of as useful for the area of research. Having said that I have to admit we did touch subjects I believe we would have missed out if my interview-methods had been more practised.

3 a social history background of the Internet

It is preached about the Internet globally. More and more people are letting themselves connect to the World Wide Web, but what does this involve and embrace, how did it arise? I will in this chapter offer a journey through the development of the Internet both concerning the actual technique as well as different conceptions that has occurred parallel to its growth.

3.1 Background

One myth of the origin of the Internet is firmly rooted in the period of the Cold War, during which conflicts using nuclear weapons constantly were threatening the world. Although the state security never was really threatened by this, it contributed to the constitution of the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) in the United States Department of Defence.

3.1.1 the ARPANET – constructed because of a nuclear threat?

By combining the results of research on packet switching and networking, to allow participants in the network to share scarce computer resources, the creation of ARPANET in 1969 was a fact. (Slevin 2000:29) The first nodes in the network were the University of California, Los Angeles, SRI (Stanford Research Institute), the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the University of Utah and next step was to connect the ARPANET with other computerised networks and they started with PRNET and SATNET, two networks that ARPA was managing. A new concept was introduced: the networks of networks. (Castells 2001a:11) Several networks were created and ARPANET became ARPA-INTERNET and by 1990 most computers in the US had networking possibilities, laying the ground for the fusion of inter-networking.

Today I don't believe you would say that the ARPANET is the only source of the Internet. The current shape of it is very dependent on the outcome of a grassroots tradition of computer networking, which could be seen as the BBS – Bulletin Board Systems – movement that originates from the networking of computers in the late 1970s. Although American military interests did play a big role in the conceptualisation and funding of ARPANET, the pioneers of the Internet have denied the widespread notion that it originated from a need to communicate after a nuclear war. (Uimonen 2001:34)

3.1.2 rapid growth

In the early 1990s a number of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) built their own networks and set up their own gateways on commercial basis. Over the years the Internet grew rapidly, providing a gateway to other computerised networks that were springing up all around the world. All this was possible thanks to the original design of the ARPANET, which was based on a multi-layered, decentralised architecture and on open communication protocols. These conditions were a perfect breeding ground for its development and it was expanding for each node that was added. Although still mainly restricted to academic circles exchanging research results, the Internet soon became a global phenomenon connecting scientists all over the world.

One of the main reasons to the rapid growth the Internet underwent, and one of its strengths is the openness of the architecture and thereto its self-evolving development, as users become producers of the technology, and shapers of the whole network. (Castells 2001a:27) Another factor that contributed to its popularity was the development of a more user-friendly interface that the *world wide web (www)* provided. (Slevin 2001:37) Tim Berners-Lee who had been working with hypertext ideas since the 1980s was the one who created the Web. He got a widespread support and was helped and stimulated by a numerous of hackers all around the world.

The ability to communicate and share resources, through an open, decentralised technology devoted to an uninterrupted free flow of information, came to represent the basis of the culture of networking. This was in turn influenced by other social trends, especially the ideals of the counterculture movements of the 1960s, and the most specific link between these and computer networking is found in the subculture of hackers. (Uimonen 2000:40) Jordan suggests that the concept of 'freedom of information' is a symbolic articulation of a desire to achieve 'individual freedom', (Jordan 1999:194, here Uimonen 2000:40) something that seemed to become a motto for the mostly young, male programmers all around the globe.

3.2 from Utopia to digital divide

3.2.1 "here I come to save the world"

Soon the Internet was looked upon naively optimistic concerning the opportunities it offered. There are technological crusaders convinced that the Internet is about to change the world and often the Internet became a metaphor for development, democracy and empowerment. The *Internet Society* describes the Internet as: "The Internet is a global network of networks enabling computers of all kinds to directly and transparently communicate and share services throughout much of the world" (*web2*). By using concepts like 'enabling', 'transparently' and 'share', I believe they rather clearly show a positive value laden view of the Internet as a democratising technology that can escape power structures and is of global reach. At the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) conference in Buenos Aires 21-29 March 1994 Al Gore was calling for international collaboration in the work towards a Global Information Infrastructure (GII):

“I believe that an essential prerequisite to sustainable development, for all members of the human family, is the creation of this network of networks [...] This GII will circle the globe with information superhighways on which all people can travel. These highways or, more accurately, networks of distributed intelligence, will allow us to share information, to connect, and to communicate as a global community. From these connections we will derive robust and sustainable economic progress, strong democracies, better solutions to global and local environmental challenges, improved health care, and – ultimately – a greater sense of shared stewardship of our small planet. [...] Let us build a global community in which the people of neighbouring countries view each other not as potential enemies, but as potential partners, as members of the same family in the vast, increasingly interconnected human family¹.” (*web3*)

By expressing oneself in this rather ethnocentric way, there is no doubt regression will appear and it has. Who doesn't want to participate in this 'Global Village', and can really “all members of the human family” travel on these “information superhighways”? The answer is obviously no.

Clearly, the Internet is in many ways fulfilling the demand for positive forms of control and is helping individuals, organisations and nation-states to cope with the consequences of intensified globalisation, something I will get back to and reflect on further on in this study. The Internet gives new opportunities for responsive action by allowing people to display their integrity and it opens up new possibilities for dialogue and deliberation thus being a tool for empowerment. The Internet also offers new ways of accessing information anywhere and at any time and when Thaís Aguilar Zúñiga and I were discussing the subject she expressed a scrap of euphoria.

“Now it is very easy, very fast. It is wonderful! (laughs) Because, before we needed to buy the service from other agencies. For example, we were with IPS – International Press Service. They sell the service by percent, by telecom lines. That was very expensive then. Now it is better though. It is possible to access these kinds of services, and this kind of communication in any place in this country, it is very easy, like in the beach and in the mountains. If you have line-phones, it is very easy for us. In other places, in other countries, it is easy for us... it is very fast and our work is really actual. It is easy, it is very fast and very effective, you can just write and send immediately. It was very different ten years ago, the same work was so complicated and especially the access

¹ The whole speech is published on < <http://www.goelzer.net/telecom/al-gore.html> >

*of communication and to get information. It was difficult for us. Now it is very easy
very cheap and now it is possible to send and transfer photographs...”
(interview SEM)*

Even though there is an announcement of happiness in this statement the conceptualisation differs. During the G8 summit (The G8, representing some of the most powerful and wealthiest nations in the world) in Okinawa they claimed to tackle poverty by providing Internet connections and computers “but what they forgot to include is the plug and the power” said Giulio Volpi, WWF climate officer. (*web4*) At the same meeting while darkness fell, the beach of Nago was lit up as protesters ceremonially set fire to a lap top computer. The dramatic action was taken to express campaigners’ disgust at the G7 failure to produce a new deal on debt. Instead the G7 has trumpeted a new IT initiative that it claims will help bridge the ‘digital divide’. Tomoo Machiba, the Japanese activist who sacrificed his laptop for the protest said: “I was willing to do this to show my anger at the G8 leaders who have been blind to the needs of the poor.” (*web5*)

In a speech at Telecom 99 in Geneva UN Secretary General Kofi Anan warned of the danger of excluding the developing countries from the information revolution. “People lack many things: jobs, shelter, food, health care and drinkable water. Today, being cut off from basic telecommunications services is a hardship almost as acute as these other deprivations, and may indeed reduce the chances of finding remedies to them.” (*web6*). With this new divide – the digital divide - The fear that the gap between North and South only would widen was put on the agenda again.

3.2.2 the conception of a digital divide

The digital divide has led to concepts like ‘information rich’ and ‘information poor’. Seen out of an anthropological perspective, the conception that people’s informational resources exclusively are depending on technology is rather indefensible. But this doesn’t eliminate the fact that it does affect their cognitive and communicative patterns (Hakken 1999:20)

The concept of digital divide carries deep political implications. By representing this antithesis to the global information society, digital divide becomes “an important means by which the hegemonic claims of the informational development paradigm are asserted” (Uimonen 2001:96). In this context could ‘access’ to information technology be ranked equal to ‘social inclusion’ and non-access to information technology to ‘social exclusion’. This is precisely how development discourses develops into a “hegemonic form of representation”, (Escobar 1995:53) this when projecting on development as a universally enviable goal.

If we are looking at social inclusion and exclusion connected to Information Technology, out of an economical development perspective, a clear picture stands out; those developing countries that can’t keep up with the pace of its improvement may not fully be able to participate in the information society and economy.

Through my experience from the fieldwork in Costa Rica and through literature I’ve been taking part of, there is a strong connection between Internet development and economical development. Internet is seen as a tool for national development and

modernisation and by participating in the technological revolution some countries are leap-frogging different stages in the process of development. I believe this shows that the concept of digital divide sometimes is quite misinterpreted. Yes, there are existing asymmetries within and between societies but I wouldn't say the division between them are that absolute, were no overlap exists between them.

Concerning Information Communication Technologies (ICT), what could be done to overcome these asymmetries that are present in the world today? It is a broad question with an indefinite answer but still important in the context if looking from the perspective of a social organisation or NGO in the south working for a 'better world'. This is something I will leave for now and get back to later in the chapter: *obstacles for making the web world wide*.

We can from this draw the conclusion and establish the fact that the conceptualisation of the Internet differs from one extreme to the other. It is a technique that uncovers various different feelings that often originates in people's fundamental social context, under different conditions. However, it is important to recognise that Internet applications, whether directed to enhancing democracy or not, emerge out of the "dialectical interaction between technology and society". (Castells 1997:5) The last two hundred years have been very turbulent, both concerning the dramatic development that technology has undergone as well as big changes in society as a whole. The latter is one topic among others that I will discuss in the next chapter.

4 an ever-changing world

As I just said, Internet applications, whether directed at enhancing democracy or not, emerge out of the dialectical interaction between technology and society. When the aim with this study is to elucidate *the use of the Internet in social organisations in developing countries working for political action* it is required that relevant theories are presented. The aim in this chapter is to sketch out a theoretical framework to prepare the reader for the forthcoming discussion. By way of introduction the theory is aiming at drawing up the landscape where we are at present, to give a general knowledge about the domain, and further will relevant theories about new social movements be presented as well as the tendency of a globalisation from below.

4.1 affecting forces

Concepts like globalisation, capitalism, Americanisation, modernity, post-modernity and “the new world order” are definitely of current interest among many different scholars of today like they are in this context. The Internet – a network of networks – is a non-territorial network par excellence, to many, the single most important symbol of deterritorialisation. Although it has its ideological central point in California, which is a place in physical terms, it is integrated in a system of network nodes rather than in hierarchies and leaders. It is unbounded, transnational and fluid, a transient form of organisation, which is completely dependent on the persons who are reproducing it, and thus quite diverse from the stable, structured societies envisioned as typical in much 20th century social science. It is indeed a transnational phenomenon, but what do I mean with that? To make it clearer I would like to use a definition made by Hannerz: These phenomena are of quite variable scale and distinction and they share the distinction of not being contained within a state and the actors may be individuals, groups, movements and business enterprises. (Hannerz 1996:46-47, 68-75) Does this development contribute to the creation of a global culture?

The fact that a global culture some time would appear was nevertheless some people’s hope, and something that re-emerged out of a divided Europe and world after 1945. Prior to 1945 it was still possible to believe that the medium-sized nation-state was the norm for human organisation and that a national culture was the ultimate goal of humanity. (Smith 1990:172) – A world of independent, homogenous nations all cooperating with one and another and thereto a guarantee of political justice through diversity and pluralism. World War II destroyed this ‘utopian’ vision; it demonstrated the hold of ‘supranational’ ideologies such as capitalism, communism and racism to a large segment of humanity. The war ended and the world consisted of different ideological camps and power blocks and humanity was re-divided. In the development of the capitalist world-economy the nation-states that were developing were a very special kind of state. They had clear, fixed boundaries and defined themselves in function of other states. This is of course only formal political geography, but it does nevertheless constitute a pressure.

The history of the world has rather been the very opposite of a trend towards a global culture, seen as cultural homogenisation, the trend has somewhat been towards differentiation. In our capitalist world-economy a world-wide division of labour is necessary and that requires flows – flows of labour, commodities and capital. These flows are slowly breaking down the national distinctions and a diffusion process is taking place.

Postmodernism is a swing away from the conceptualisation of a global culture in terms of homogenising processes, such as cultural imperialism, Americanisation, or mass consumer culture, all riding on the back of western political and economical domination. Featherstone sees the concept of a global culture more in terms of “diversity, variety and richness of popular and local discourses”. (Featherstone 1990:2) This is in line with another author, Ulf Hannerz, who states “A total homogenisation of systems of meanings hasn’t occurred and there are no tendency it will appear soon”. (Hannerz 1990:237) He means there is now world culture marked by an organisation of diversity, rather than uniformity, and the world has become one network of social relationships and in-between the different nodes (here regions) there is a constant flow of meanings, people and goods.

According to Smith, nations and nationalism surely could have worked, in the sense of being functional, in a world of competing industrial states, but now in the ‘service society’, in this interdependent world that is based upon technological knowledge, they are out of date. (Smith 1990:175) He states “It is not capitalism and its transnational corporations which have eroded the power of nation states, but the possibilities of constructing much larger institutional units on the basis of vast telecommunications systems and computerised networks of information”. (Smith 1990:175) If this is the case it could be seen as doomed to failure once trying to limit these networks within the national borders of a state. Looking from this perspective culture can only be global, but in the recent years we have been witnessing the re-emergence of submerged ethnic communities and their nationalism. Putting this in relation to the capacity of the Internet, it gives a possibility to a denser and more intense contact between members of certain communities who share common cultural characteristics. This is something very well documented in the extensive ethnography *The Internet – an Ethnographic Approach* written by Miller and Slater, where ‘being Trini’ refers to the nationalistic and patriotic sense Trinidadians are encountering others online.

Social analysts agree that globalisation is accelerating, not least as a result of advances in information technology (IT). It is a close connection between the two and it is rather more evident when looking at how the early internet pioneers saw the Internet as something that is “Free and are participating to a interconnectedness of the world”

Globalisation is one of the primary consequences of modernity, according to Giddens. With this is not just meant a great dissemination of western institutions and values around the world, under which local cultures are crushed. “Globalisation – which is a process of uneven development that fragments as it coordinates – introduces new forms of world interdependence, in which there are no others”. (1990:175) The spread of industrialism has created a sense of a ‘one world’ in many different ways. Not just the discussions of the potential risk of ecological catastrophes, but also the great awareness of a ‘one world’ through the way it has transformed the technologies of communication. (Giddens 1990:65)

But, globalisation processes produce firstly both cultural homogeneity and cultural disorder, this in the way it is linking together previously far away 'isolated' areas of a relatively uniform culture, which in turn produces more complex images of the other as well as generating identity reinforcing reactions. Secondly it produces transnational cultures, 'third cultures', which are orientated beyond national borders. (Featherstone 1990) The multiplicity of response to the globalisation process clearly shows that there is little prospect of a unified global culture, rather there are global cultures in the plural.

I would like to agree with Featherstone when he states that it is the intensity and the rapidity of today's global cultural flows that have contributed to the sense of the world as one singular place (Featherstone 1990:10), where I believe the Internet partly contributes to intensify these processes, which is something I share with Appadurai.

Appadurai has built up an elementary framework for exploring the disjuncture between culture, politics and economy in the world, this by looking at five different dimensions of cultural flows that move in "non-isomorphic paths", not as in "centre-periphery flows" which Jonathan Friedman among others advocates. These flows are; ethnoscaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, mediascaples and ideoscaples and are not to be seen as fixed objects, but rather as perspectival constructs (as in theoretical perspectives). Like 'imagined worlds' constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the world. (Appadurai 1990:297)

In this context I would like to concentrate on two of these 'landscapes'; Mediascaples and Ideoscaples. Mediascaples refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and spread information, as well as to the images of the world that is created of the media, while Ideoscaples could be seen as concatenations of images, but they are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements that clearly are oriented to capture state power, or at least a piece of it. These 'scapes' are composed of elements that come from the 'enlightened world-view'; ideas, terms and images such as 'democracy', 'welfare', 'freedom' and 'rights'. (Appadurai 1990:299)

So, what are so special about these flows? Looking back historically naturally, people money, machinery, ideas, and images have been flowing and there have been some disjunctures between them then as well, but the *speed*, *extent* and *volume* of each of these flows is now so enormous that the disjunctures have become central to the politics of global culture. (Appadurai 1990:301) It is in the fertile ground of deterritorialization in which money, commodities and persons are involved in ceaselessly chasing each other around the world, that the mediascaples and ideoscaples of the modern world find their fractured and fragmented counterpart. Because the ideas and images produced by mass media are often only partial guides to the goods and experiences that deterritorialized populations transfer to one another. (Appadurai 1990:301)

What is remarkable about the political history of the modern world-system is "the ever more frequent and ever more efficacious utilization by oppressed elements of what might generally be called cultural resistance", says Wallerstein. (1991:99) Of course cultural resistance has existed for centuries, but the difference in the resistance of today is the idea that it must be *organized*, if it is going to success in its aim to transform the world.

4.2 new movements are starting to appear

As noted above, a paradigm shift has occurred and this concerns social movements and social organisations as well, partly as a reaction to the threatening forces that i.e. capitalism and Americanisation constitute. Several attempts have been made to theoretize the change of which one worth mentioning is the 'identity-oriented', new social movements (NSM) perspective, originated in Europe.

Tourine, one among the first advocates of the NSM paradigm asserts there has been a shift of the 'central conflict' in society. By basing his thoughts on Marx's theories, he argues that now in the 'post-industrial' society, the struggle between labour and capital has subsided and that other social cleavages have become more prominent. Exercising of power is not taking place as much in the realm of work, but rather in "the setting of a way of life, forms, behaviour and needs" (1988:25 here Edelman 2001:288) Melucci, one of Tourine's students, is instead using one of Habermas's terms and is arguing for how the state and market has rationalized the private sphere, which has generated new social groupings and collective action.

Friedman argues that the new identity movements are a "part of the decline of the hierarchical structure of modern identity space, part of the decline of the hegemony of modernist identity", (1994:737) while advocates of the NSM-theory mean that the new social movements emerge out of the crisis of modernity and focus on "struggle over symbolic, informational, and cultural resources and rights to specify and difference". (Edelman 2001:289) The theory has been used to a big extent by intellectuals particularly in the Latin Americas and the 1994 Zapatista uprising in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas has inspired to an extraordinary outpouring of academic work. Harvey has been analysing the Zapatista struggle on behalf of the Chiapas Indians and other poor in general in today's Mexico, and he argues that the construction of democracy in Mexico often depends on local and regional informal processes, rather than formal, on a national level. (Edelman 2001:193) It has been said that the Zapatista case figures as a prototype for a new period of 'informational' guerrillas, because most of their Internet activity is carried out by a small number of supporting individuals and NGOs. Their presence on the net though, has allowed them to communicate demands, foster alliances and to present themselves as a part of a global struggle against neoliberal capitalism.

It has been recognized in Latin America that economic and power inequalities have been the key dimensions of political action. Ironically the newness of the emerging movements of women, oppressed minorities, environmentalists as well as anticolonial forces in the third world want to uncover hidden histories of their political ancestors in order to strengthen their legitimacy. Are there invented traditions designated for the construction of pasts for political purposes in the present? Friedman would rather argue for a "continuity of cultural forms in transformation". (Friedman 1994:749)

On October the 2nd 1968, the military opened fire straight into a student demonstration in the Tlatelolco Plaza in Mexico. Three hundred to five hundred people were feared to be dead, though the official number was only 43, 2000 were wounded and around 1500 to 2000 were taken to prison. Surprisingly, the massacre (a 1968 version of China's 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre) got little attention. Why wasn't the world reacting? Despite the very fact that the pressure on China, one of the last, powerful totalitarian regimes, put the country more in focus, the international human rights network, and the human

rights consciousness and practices that it created did not exist in 1968. (Keck & Sikkink 1998:ix)

Has the emergence of transnational advocacy networks helped in these circumstances? Keck and Sikkink argue in their book *Activists Beyond Borders* that they have, and I definitely agree. Although these networks dramatically differ concerning their demands, there are a number of similarities they do share: "The centrality of values, or principal ideas, the belief that individuals can make a difference, the creative use of information, and the employment by nongovernmental actors of sophisticated political strategies in targeting their campaigns". (Keck & Sikkink 1998:2) The networks can act like channels for communication. By opening up channels for bringing in alternative visions and information into the international debate, transnational networks can multiply voices.

The anti-globalisation movement is a well-recognised example and its influence has made significant changes in institutions as the World Bank. Castells sees this movement among others to be so related to the Internet that they would barely be capable to survive without it. It is Internet-based and their networking via the Internet allows them to be "diverse and coordinated at the same time, to engage in a continuing debate, and yet not paralysed by it, since each one of these nodes can reconfigure a network of its affinities and objectives, with partial overlappings and multiple connections." (Castells 2001a:142) The movement is very loosely bound in its structure and it consists of thousands of organisations and individuals scattered all around the world where the informational backbone could be seen to be different 'independent media centres'.

Thousands of protesters, peasant and farmers organisations, workers, environmentalists, trade unionists and many other groups opposing the World Trade Organisation, corporate globalisation and militarism from all around the world had gathered to the recent WTO summit that was held in Cancun, Mexico, from the 10th to the 15th of September 2003. The meeting ended in collapse due to the developing countries' members of the WTO refused to accept the EU's demand to expand the WTO by including negotiations on new issues including investment, government procurement, trade facilitation and competition. Delegates from both developing countries and NGO representatives are regarding this as a victory for the developing world. (*web7*)

At the same time it should be mentioned that the ideas that are flourishing in these networks **don't** produce any changes by themselves. Networks frequently fail to achieve their goals, but when they succeed they are among the most important sources of new ideas, norms and identities and the Cancun example is a fairly good example of what impact movements of this kind could have.

4.3 globalisation from below

So, what is happening? Transnational organisations are popping up around the globe, opponents of inequalities in the world and opponents to the development in the shade of globalising processes. But by organising them selves in that way, simultaneously the organisation will integrate itself and its followers into the very system it is opposing. "It is utilizing the structures of the system to oppose the system", (Wallerstein 1990:100) doesn't this action, in a way, legitimise the structures? This is a contradiction that

movements of political and cultural resistance cannot escape. But I would rather see it as a globalisation from bellow.

Globalisation-from-bellow, a term Falk introduced 1993 refers to a multistranded opposition that involves diverse sectors organized across borders, explicitly directed against the elite and the commercial-led 'globalisation from above'. They are "transnational social forces animated by environmental concerns, human rights, hostility to patriarchy, and a vision of human community, based on the unity of diverse cultures seeking an end to poverty, oppression, humiliation and collective violence." (1993:39, Edelman 2001:304)

A big number of events worldwide have connected issues and activists in postmaterialist and identity- and class-based movements as never before. The global women's meetings sponsored by the UN in the 1980s and in the 1990s (Alvarez 1998), G7 meetings, forums held by the World Bank, IMF, and the WTO summit that was held in Cancun this year, to mention just a few.

However, the number of transnational organisations has clearly increased and they are unique by their 'nodal' organisation and their use of information. They could be seen as parts of networks, including social movements, media and unions as well as NGOs. As Edelman says "The new anticorporate activism, for example, employs an action repertoire that combines decidedly post-modern elements (informational politics, cyber attacks, and 'swarming') with others", how can the Internet be a useful tool in the context? What could the affects be when fusing this network [of networks] with its social counterpart? I have touched the subject above but will in the following chapters deepen my arguments and reflections about the impact Internet could have in social organisations in developing countries working for a change of the current social, political order.

5 the Internet - a tool that is rendering a possibility to challenge?

Does the use of the Internet as a tool provide a challenge to the prevailing social order? In what way could the Internet provide the material basis for movements in their aim to change society? There is an impossibility to in detail summarise all positive effects an utilisation of the Internet could result in. A lot has already been mentioned. What I want to do is to raise it to another level and emphasise more general aspects of the possibility with the medium. I will thus in this chapter elucidate how the Internet has contributed in an altered conception of time and space and what that might result in. I will briefly mention how the possibility to network with other organisations has changed and finally indicate that the Internet might function as a channel for communication where social actors are allowed to share their common political interests.

5.1 *time and space*

“Distances and boundaries are not what they used to be” (Hannerz 1996:3), something I believe the Internet partly has contributed to. The Internet has affected traditional NGOs in the way that organisations that previously were working very far apart have by going on line been able to widen their networks in an extent that wasn’t possible before.

The separation of time and space are very crucial to the dynamism of modernity. By disembedding social systems, Giddens means: ‘lifting out’ social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restricting across imprecise distance of time and space. He distinguishes two types of disembedding-mechanisms essentially involved in the development of modern social institutions; the creation of *symbolic tokens* and the establishment of *expert systems*. Expert systems are Systems of technical accomplishment or professional expertise that organise large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today. (Giddens 1990) Couldn’t the Internet be seen to be a part of expert systems? I believe it could.

In the modern era, the level of time and space distinction is much higher than in any previous period, and the relations between local and distant social forms and events become correspondingly ‘stretched’. (Giddens 1990:64) This stretching process is something one could say the Internet fundamentally refers to, especially in the way it has contributed to increase the connection between different social contexts and geographical regions in a network that are stretching around the surface of the world.

It is an “intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa”. (Giddens 1990:64) People are constantly aware of many events, from all over the world, of which they previously would have remained ignorant. “A high street retailer in a provincial Trinidad town knows that the very idea of ‘local price’ is coming to an end; her customers are encountering in the Internet a single marketplace in which they can compare prices and order goods from anywhere in the world”. (Miller & Slater 2000:19)

Organisations can now to a bigger extent report from their local environment and they can horizontally exchange information. It is not a one-way flow from the centre to the periphery. The national centre could be viewed upon as mostly absent in the webs of interaction and there is definitely room for reciprocity. Paula Uimonen says in her book: "The fact that one of the worlds most popular travel sites originated in the back of a restaurant on a beach in southern Thailand is an example of how the peripheries interact with, and even influence, the centres of the world". (Uimonen 2001:141)

5.2 networking in between social nodes within the Internet

Political parties of all sizes and ideological shades, voluntary organisations, pressure groups and other organisations are today exploring computer- mediated communication as a means not only to reach potential supporters and bypass the traditional media filters, but also to network with others, being able to share both information and resources.

Castells (1999:6) has argued that though there are shifting asymmetries between the social nodes within the network, the most critical distinction is "to be or not to be" in the network, which is exactly those totalising tendencies that are underlying the question of a universal applicability of Internet-use, as mentioned above. But, of course social organisations before the technological revolution and the upcoming of the Internet were networking. The difference lies in to what extent the ease and the possibility has increased.

When FIRE in 1998 transitioned to become a web radio station, broadcasting through the Internet was still fairly uncommon among NGOs in developing countries and one factor that made the project become reality was the connection with the Dutch organisation HIVOS (*web28*), that had been supporting them in earlier stages of there work. They supported the idea, which could be seen as representing the transfer of technology, or rather a technological possibility, from the developed world to the developing one. Here we have two representatives for a two-way flow of information between centre and periphery.

One World is according to Lena Zúñiga, Acceso, one of the pioneering organisations involved in the issue of knowledge transferring between the north and the south. (interview Acceso) One World is also involved in the DOT Force -Digital Opportunity Task Force (*web8*) - which aim is to create what they call *the open knowledge network*. When I spoke to Lena Zúñiga in 2002 they were still analysing if they were going to participate in this project or not, I don't know what the outcome was.

5.3 a contingency to escape prevailing power structures?

So what is the problem of today's media, why are certain groups of people putting a great deal of trust in this new technology? Perhaps the reason most commonly heard is the lack of proper public spaces that aren't a subject for commercialisation, a sphere not

colonised either by the state, political parties or other authorities. Generations of political thinkers have identified these trends; Habermas, Adorno, and others have articulated the commercialization, commodification, trivialization, and state colonisation of public spaces. (Tsagarousianou et al. 1998:4) Two very contrasting approaches of libertarianism has closely been linked to the Internet; it has both produced new freedoms, of speech and of information, as well as it has come to stand as a symbol of potential freedoms. (Ross 1998)

The Civic Networking Movement put big hopes in the Internet and is expecting to reverse the decline of public communication that has occurred lately as a result of bias and commercialisation. It is predicted that new public spaces will open up and the technology will allow social actors to share their common political interests. "People will actively access information from an infinite, free, virtual library rather than receiving half-digested "programming", and interactive media will institutionalise a right to reply". (Tsagarousianou et al. 1998:5)

But, to put such hopes in a new media isn't that to put the media in an abstract sense divorced from its socio-political and economical context? Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas (2003) who have done an systematic examination of evidence from eight cases — China, Cuba, Singapore, Vietnam, Burma, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt — argue that the Internet is not necessarily a threat to authoritarian regimes, where media usually is controlled. Certain types of Internet use reinforce authoritarian rule, and many authoritarian regimes are proactively promoting the development of an Internet that serves state-defined interests rather than challenging them. Still other uses of the Internet do indeed pose political challenges to authoritarian governments, and such use may contribute to political change in the future.

The www.vientianetimes.com is a characteristic example on how the state has lost some control. This site is used as a political platform for Vietnamese dissidents, and posted on the site is the message 'Gateway to Democracy'. (*web21*)

The interconnectedness and the flow of information afforded by the Internet gave new power and authority to FIRE as well, on totally different basis. Something I found interesting concerning power-relations in the context of media is that I have practically always put that on a high political level for some reason, nearly on a governmental level, where political statements or messages would immediately get banned on political/ideological basis. The women working at FIRE did not (in the early phase of FIRE's existence) and do not have these struggles, they did not fight high intellectuals who discarded their political message, it was rather a matter of avariciousness, a power that was exercised to get full control of the radio-program itself. Being a woman wanting to produce radio, is surrounded by difficulties in today's Costa Rica, says María.

"What radio stations tell the women doing the programmes, is that those programmes don't have a lot of audience because it is too oriented to women and the women are not very good producers and that the programs are boring and the audience doesn't really like it. And it doesn't produce revenues for the stations because they don't have good ratings and therefore they don't bring in ads." (interview FIRE)

In the beginning of their activity FIRE was co-working with an organisation called *Radio for Peace* but the dean of the University of Peace couldn't take their success and they believe he wanted the program to be his, she told me, but says they don't have any proof of it.

"When we became rich and famous, he wanted to keep FIRE to himself. He convinced us to a meeting of the director of RFPI. FIRE is ours and you have to claim it and legalize it as a program for University of Peace. That's when we realized that we have to legalize it cause otherwise we would risk losing it. He couldn't win that, cause we had founded it and created it, we had ran it. He couldn't keep it so he shut it off the air." She continues: "So what really happened is that when we became very well known and had received a few awards, and people used to call in and we were even more well known in the UN than the University of Peace, then they wanted to keep the program, and take it away from the women who had built it." (interview FIRE)

The possibility to find a new radio-station was constantly present, she says, this because of the determination of the staff of FIRE, their connection to the international women's movement as well as international funding, but they chose a new way to communicate their message - the Internet. I found their way of acting to be the line to follow to be able to escape the ongoing power game. Though they weren't constrained of governmental power, they were definitely prevented in their way of working by some sort of authority and power. The transition was a way to escape the humiliation they constantly were exposed to. María says:

"We chose the Internet for very concrete reasons. First of all, it was the new technology that was being developed. It was already international. It allowed for no censorship. And it allowed, first of all, to have a radio station owned by women. Where women don't have to be knocking on the door and ask to speak or have their programmes heard. And if they are shut out from their local radio station they can always have their voice heard here." (interview FIRE)

Uimonen mentions in her ethnography (2001) an example of political gathering on Bali, which shows what impact Internet could have in the fight for justice. The *Bali@Cyber Café & Restaurant* has now developed into a connectivity hub and information centre of international reach, this as a result of the crisis on East Timor and some political consequences related to that. Faced with despotic authorities, a great number of Timorese students left Jakarta for Bali in May 1999. While there, they continued their pro-independence activities, heavily relied on email-communication, but suspected that the Indonesian establishment was cutting off their communications. By turning to Harris, the founder of the café, they were helped to encrypt the information and thus being able to continue.

The Digital City of Amsterdam (*web9*), one of the first and most successful attempts to exercise free flow of information and an increased democracy through the web (at least

in the Netherlands), is another example of how the Internet has been used for political action. This portal was growing bigger by the day based on number of users but “the enthusiasm of the initiators runs the risk of turning the city into a playground for software developers who spend more time behind their electronic drawing boards than they do listening to users needs and technical limitations ”. (Tsagarousianou et al. 1998:35). A case where the success didn't meet the expectations.

But, I certainly want to agree with Tsagarousianou concerning the fact it is important to acknowledge that all mentioned above only contribute to one more means of political action in modern hierarchical societies. (1998:57) Neither NGOs nor individuals can by themselves make up for the prevailing social inequalities in societies and nor can they by themselves democratise the communities they serve. The success of these projects depends on the capacity to support and enable this new form of ‘publicness’ within a sphere that is both controlled and privately owned.

There are many factors that need to be considered if the Internet is to be a part of NGOs in the south's fight for equality, and be moulded into their organisations as another technological tool, no matter to what extent. In the next chapter I will elucidate a number of different factors that were discerned after a lot of analysis both during my field study as well as of interpreting my interview material from Costa Rica.

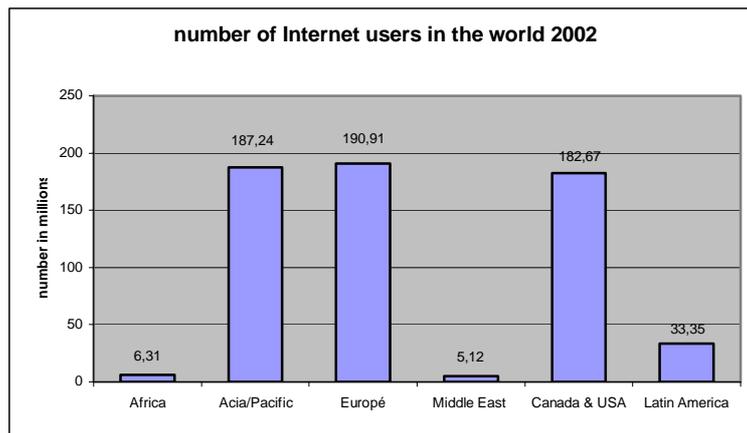
6 obstacles for making the web worldwide

If it wasn't for the Internet I would never had got in touch with neither FIRE, where I mainly spent my time, nor the other organisations I was in contact with in Costa Rica. The Internet to me is more or less a matter of course, something I use on daily basis, but my way of using the net is far from typical, looking from a macro perspective.

As mentioned in the previous chapter there are a number of factors that support an utilisation of the Internet in NGOs, but what is required to make it possible to use the Internet as a useful tool in social organisations in developing countries? What are the basic prerequisites? I am here, below, attempting to dissect different factors that are complicating the issue. These factors gradually developed when I was participating in FIRE's daily work in their buzzing office in Ciudad Colón, through the interviews I conducted in Costa Rica and after the process of interpreting transcripts, memories and thoughts. Firstly I will illustrate the risks with conceptualising the Internet as a mass-medium, followed by a discussion of a *meaningful* use of the web and educational needs. I will treat the reaching out problem with thereto connected strategies and finally discuss prevailing power structures control of internet use and content.

6.1 *connectivity and cost*

Consideration of the potential of the Internet to facilitate the creation of 'a better world' inevitably raises concerns over access. While it is true that there has been an exponential increase of Internet use, as in the increase of number of people that access it on a regular basis, number of web-pages and the amount of internet traffic, I would like to agree with Locke that it still couldn't be considered to be a mass-medium: it is limited to social, educational and economic elites. (1999:215) According NUA (www.nua.ie), the world's leading resource for Internet trends and statistics, used by the United Nations among others, there were 605.60 million users online in September 2002, and only 33,35 million or 5,5% of these were in Latin America. This could be compared with 373,58 millions of users in Europe, United States and Canada that are holding as much as 61,7% of the Internet users of the world. (*web10*)



source: NUA publish 2002

Initially Internet use has its roots in the academic world and it is still here around Universities and schools, especially in developing countries, that the main access is provided. Public spaces like libraries and tele-centres are usually locations where access is possible, as well as in the ever-increasing number of Internet cafés that are popping up everywhere around the globe. Even though Costa Rica is a very small country, there is a huge difference both in connection speed, number of places where access is possible and in price differences.

The users of the Internet are dependent not only on connectivity, but also on the quality of the connection. Standard telephone lines are not sufficient to carry the vast amount of information communicated. The deregulation and privatisation of the telecommunication sector across the world has led to the upcoming of many new telephony providers as well as broadcasters. Some argue this new situation will promote a reduction of costs for everyone thanks to competition, while others argue it rather produces a two-tier system. Even the Internet has a fast and a slow lane and companies are offering better connectivity and faster connection to a higher rate, which is a really central question in this context. Some groups are, because of this, not able to participate in this electronic public sphere and usually, in many societies, these groups are already marginalized and excluded in some way, i.e. women and poor.

Close to everywhere the pattern is equal, key urban centres, globalised activities, and the higher-educated social groups are being included in the Internet-based global networks, while most people and regions are switched off. The further away you get out of the city, the less is the possibility to find somewhere to use the Internet, the worse is the speed and the dearer it gets. In my local Internet café the Y2K café, located in San Pedro, one of the student districts in the capital close to La Universidad Latina, did it cost \$2 per hour for using fast computers with big screens and here they had services like scanner, printer, webcams and free net2phone. In WebSurfers Internet Café, another café located in San José, the cost was the same and the services were equal. This comparing to up in the Mountains at Monte Verde, which is a well visited place by both “Ticos” as well as tourists, where an hour at the Pension Santa Elena & resto costed \$10 and where one single webpage sometimes took several minutes to download.

Thaís Aguilar Zúñiga, co-ordinator at Servicio de Noticias de la Mujer (SEM), confirms what a big difference Internet-use in their organisation resulted in.

“In 1999, the cost for the service by Servtel who transfers information was very, very expensive. I remember that the cost for distributing the material, news, and features, especially, was \$10 000 per month. Now the cost is very much cheaper, \$70 per month. Very fast and very easy, for all people.” (interview SEM)

There are ways of using the Internet though without being able to be online and *community radio* is a well used solution world-wide, where AMARC could be seen as an organisational base for a lot of the activity. Their goal is to support and contribute to the development of community and participatory radio along the principals of solidarity and international co-operation. It is an international non-governmental organisation that is serving the community radio movement, with almost 3 000 members and associates in 106 countries. (*web11*) Besides, the vice president for Latin America and the Caribbean is María Suárez from FIRE. Another is OneWorld Radio that also offers services and networking for broadcasters and civil society organisations who are using radio for human rights, sustainable development and democracy. (*web12*) One example of a community radio station is the *Radio Sagarmatha* - An independent public community radio in Nepal. (*web13*)

Since radio is the technology mostly used in developing countries people have started to combine the two to let populations in poor rural areas take part of the information boom on the Internet as well. - A solution that could be favourable especially in parts where literacy is low. Surely many of the advantages with the media are then lost, foremost the possibility for interactivity.

As I have shown connectivity per se is important, but it is not sufficient to contribute to development and change. ICTs alone do not result in the generation of knowledge or the redress of social inequalities. This is something Lena Zúñiga, the project co-ordinator for the project *southern voices online*, from Acceso also is well aware of. She says they are very exposed to the vision of the market:

“The market says to us that we all need to be connected and very individually use our own computer to do our own stuff. But in the south, and I have talked about this with my colleagues in Africa and India, we need to promote another vision of the Internet. Especially a vision that is based on communities because our structures, our social structures, are based pretty much on communities. So, why should the use of technology be different?” (interview Acceso)

She says that many projects, in Latin America at least, are very oriented to connectivity, *“It’s a very northern vision especially from the United States where every kid has to have their own computer and it’s cool to be connected...”* (ibid.) In Latin America is a strengthening of public access to Internet resources highly prioritised. They are working for equitable access, the ability to connect at a reasonable price and to provide basic training in the use of the tools, so that an increasing number of people can use the resources, regardless of sex, class, religion, language, or race. (Gómez & Martínez 2001:9) Are they succeeding? Lena asserts that they are putting tele-centres everywhere without considering that people in general don’t know what they are going to do with the connectivity.

If the Internet is to promote democratisation processes, we have to go beyond connectivity, the attention must be paid to providing “relevant information, in a user friendly format, at times, in locations and at costs that do not present barriers to access.” (Hauge & Loader 1999:11) The initial focus should not lie on Information Communication Technologies, as it often is as we have seen (in the section: *from utopia to digital divide*), but rather on existing information needs, how the information is retrieved and what the barriers are to access information. Information is not knowledge until it is processed and applied. If communities are armed with the knowledge how to use the Internet and the potential of it to meet their informational needs, they will be empowered to apply pressure on the authorities and information providers.

6.2 comprehension and understanding

One of the biggest barriers of being able to use the Internet in a meaningful way, to be able to effectively use ICT resources and combine them with other appropriate forms of communication, is the language. According to Global Reach as much as 63,5% (in March 2003) of the worlds population has not got English as their native language², but still 78% of all webpages were in English in 2001. (Castells 2001a) Global Reach estimates that there are 619 million online language populations in total, and 63, 5% is then equivalent to 393.1 million non-native-English speaking Internet users. (*web14*) These numbers clearly show comprehension problem.

Lena Zúñiga from Acceso agrees with the difficulties that occur because of language barriers but is hoping “*that many of our initiatives are going to accomplish the exchange of knowledge and resources between organisations facing the same challenges in Africa and South East Asia with the organisations in Latin America*”. (interview Acceso) She means they want to produce their own information in their own language, from their point of view, and then put it on the web. “*...we don't want to receive all the information already packed and digested by the north*”. (ibid.) She exemplifies the issue with another example:

“Let us say my organisation is an environmental organisation and decide that the Internet is a very good tool. We can afford the dial-up and one Internet account. We check our e-mail once a week. We surf the web once every two weeks. It's very, very difficult to participate. For example, let's say the World Wildlife Fund organises a world forum about conservation, on the Internet. That's great and we say – “Wow, what an opportunity!” because the Internet is so democratic that you can post there, and a big organisation can post there, and our posts are the same. It's the same! But – it's not true, cause I can only log in, in the forum, once a week. And I can only write a couple of paragraphs because I don't speak English. It's not as democratic as we tend to think.” (interview Acceso)

Theis Aguilar Zúñiga at SEM says they have received many mails and letters congratulating them for being on the web producing material in Spanish: “*I found your*

² For more precise statistics see: <http://global-reach.biz/globstats/refs.php3>

homepage and congratulations for writing in Spanish, very important with this kind of homepage for me, to get information from Latin America in Spanish.” (interview SEM) I believe this clearly shows that it is important not to consider the Internet as an end in itself, rather to conceptualise it as a medium that is used and moulded like all other media to suit the ends of the users.

Lena also says it is difficult to convince people what advantages this tool could produce, in a broader perspective, to make people understand what the possibilities are. She exemplifies it with putting a computer with Internet access in a rural school in a very, very isolated community. The outcome has often been that people start looking at porn and entertainment, start downloading mp3s and do not really understand the possibilities of doing other things. It is a strategic use and appropriation that is missing. Is this because of the Internet has such a commercial force behind it? How is this strategic use and appropriation to become reality? Lena Zúñiga asserts:

“It is basically – what is the web? Not technically but what is the web to us? How do we understand it? Why should we know about the web? You know, I studied sociology, why would I learn how this server work? It is not my job. Many people think like that. But when they see that it is not difficult, they want to learn. What I do is try to bring all these technical words and lingo and put it in their realities. In their own world. Make them explain to themselves – what is this stuff? What can we do with it? And one very important thing we do in our workshop is trying to make them understand that technology is not a blessing. It’s not great, it is not going to save us. It is not going to make the world wonderful and perfect. It is going to give us a lot of trouble, a lot of trouble, especially in the beginning. We need to invest money and we need to learn. There is a curve of learning that cannot overcome so easily. But in the end it is going to bring some advantages to your organisation that you may consider”
(interview Acceso)

What we also have to keep in mind is that it is an advanced technology that is behind this network of networks. Most software products are developed in the north, usually designed to meet the needs of them. It is necessary that this trend is broken, system developers have to start keeping in mind who the intended users are for the products, the end users have to be in focus to a bigger extent. Another issue that has been mentioned as a rather big problem in the aim to spread the tool globally is the keyboard. (speech by Madan Mohan Rao 2003, Locke 1999:220) Close to all keyboards are adjusted to the Latin alphabet, excluding for example Hebrew, Arabic, Thai and the Greek alphabet (Ilshammar & Larsmo 1997) The metaphor behind the Windows software, with the desktop, trashcan, maps and folders, is another very northern conceptualisation.

People has to be able to produce their own content as well as they have to have access to useful content in their own language. The only way to be able to use the Internet in a meaningful way is when people “know how to combine Internet resources with community radio, face-to-face meetings, printed materials, and video, among others”. (Gómez & Martínez 2001:9) Technical development in developing countries has to be rooted in the region if the pattern is to be broken.

6.3 opportunities of education

As I have tried to show above, language barriers are common and a deeper understanding of both the information that is distributed on the Internet as well as of the technology itself is essentially if it actually is to be used as a useful tool. – Be the means to meet their goals. We have to overcome these obstacles if we are to make the Internet a diverse, democratic arena where the entire global society and not only a few interest groups can express themselves. Many different initiatives have been taken world-wide to provide education, to be able to fill the gap that is only widening.

The African Virtual University (AVU) is a World Bank sponsored initiative, which is part of an attempt to bridge the digital divide by “aiding the digital have-nots, and broaden access to higher education, particularly in science and technology”. (*web15*) They have among other created a network of partner institutions in 17 francophone, anglophone, and lusophone African countries with learning centres hosted mainly in public universities. They have affiliated to a global network of leading universities, established 31 sites in 17 African countries, delivered 3 000 hours of instructional programs, sourced from leading universities in North America and Europe and provided 1,000 PCs to learning centres. (*ibid.*)

Critics claim that web-based courses will not reach the ones that are most in need and that the 13 million US dollar that initially was spent should have been spent on other issues. High-tech education - available only to a select elite - is not worth it when so many places on the continent are still without electricity and running water. “Our priorities are hygiene, sanitation, safe drinking water”, said Supatra Koirala who works at a private nursing home in Kathmandu. “How is having access to the Internet going to change that?” (*web16*) As a student in Lund, Sweden, using the Internet for learning could sometimes be viewed on as preferable, an opinion that naturally couldn’t be applied universally. This emphasises:

“The people in Latin America prefer to learn with another people. We are friendly people, you know. And for us, it is difficult for our mentality – Latinos people – It is difficult... Well, not impossible but we prefer direct contact with the people. I think it is possible to offer workshops by the Internet. It is possible. But I think that not yet!”
(*interview SEM*)

One major problem with a project like the African Virtual University is that it originally was a World Bank driven project. More than often is just the word [The World Bank] met with negativity and an unwillingness to collaborate, something I will get back to later concerning the *Global Development Gateway*.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, there are a number of examples where the use and appropriation of the Internet as a tool has been used for self-expression to the rest of the world. Examples range from a local association of peasant women in Colombia, to an international coalition that develops communication and citizenship strategies for a global forum. The Web Community of Social Movements (*web17*) has been designed to be a common reference point of selected social organisations of Latin America on the

Internet. They seek to strengthen the ability of Latin American social movements to appropriate the Internet as a tool for self-affirmation and for solving problems.

Acceso's is committing them selves to provide education as well. Their budget was very limited for year 2002 and 2003 but it allowed them to have at least two workshops a year in every country in central America, excluding Panama, where they invited a few organisations, about 20-25 per workshop. The organisations are from a number of different sectors; from environmentalists to alternative theatre groups, from women groups to "good old development groups".

"I get them together and try to make them share their experience of what the Internet has meant to their organisation and if they have not incorporated Internet, I really want them to share why not? What are the limitations they have? It is usually time and resources such as human, monetary and technological resources. There is also a lack of knowledge about the technologies and the possibilities the technology has. So, maybe I can make time for them, or give them money or computers. At least I try to widen their knowledge of the possibilities that the web has to share, knowledge and content." (interview Acceso)

FIRE has also been asked to do a training workshop with 40-50 women from all over the world, but funding is needed to accomplish it *"we are not going to have them sleeping in the park."* (interview FIRE) They have also a vision of establishing "the first Internet women's laboratory in Latin America", something that is going to be realised thanks to funds from the Dutch organisation HIVOS that has been sponsoring them for the last three years. Here they will train women in the same way they were trained themselves. *"Trial and error. You break the computer – so what?"* (interview FIRE) They will build up a centre (a room in the same house with five computers connected to the Internet) that is there for experimentation, a place where women can come and be trained.

*"We don't want to go to events and have a one-day workshop on how to upload sound files, or how to do a webpage, because you create more frustration. We want to train women the same way that we have been trained. We would put you in a webcast to do the control and then we get in to the machines, to learn how to do it – you already have done it! Good or bad, but you have the feeling, the **passion**. You know? Nobody is going to have to motivate you. Nobody! And we work here by self-motivation. It's not really self because it is a motivation that comes from listening to so many women all the time."* (interview FIRE)

In the end of my visit in June, when the rainy season had made itself present, some newly painted furniture in bright lilac was put to dry out in the garden outside the office. You had to hurry the drying process in-between the cloudbursts. Everybody was content with the choice of colour, it was *"full of energy"*. Nancy Vargas Sanabria was dedicated to get the lab ready, it was kind of her project, and all that was missing then was *just* the five computers.

My intention with this section was to elucidate that enormous ICT investments not always is something worth striving for. More local projects among NGOs do exist in an environment full of visions and a persistency to succeed with a task they once decided to deal with themselves. Both Acceso and FIRE are good representatives for this.

6.4 how to get your voice heard – the reaching out problem

Technology is evolving by the minute, webpages are more and more containing multi-media software such as Shock Wave and Flash, browsers are needed to be updated once in a while and all this in a pace many countries can not really keep up with. Necessary knowledge about the software as well as hardware with the right technological performance is required. There were many different occasions in Costa Rica when I had to download the right version of a program to be able to access different webpages, something I have to do here at home as well more than often. This is certainly an issue that works against NGOs in the south possibility to reach out with their message. But once the technical problems are solved other strategies must be set up in order to succeed in their activities.

One morning when Tove, my dear friend and fellow companion, and I had just passed the photo copy place on the corner, on our way to the office, I saw a young western-looking woman going from one of FIRE's offices to another. (I was always wondering why they didn't cut out any doors between the L-shaped office constituted of four different rooms. You entered every room from the garden?!). María was quick to introduce us and was thrilled over the way Susanna had found her way there. *"She found us on the Internet!!! She just typed **feminist, woman and Costa Rica** on the Google search engine, and there she found us!"*. Susanna was from Germany, had a break from her studies at University and had been travelling in the region for seven months (if my memory is not at fault). She was really excited by what they were doing and wanted to achieve, and after her first day there she decided to stay for a few months to help them in their work. Thanks to her good knowledge in Spanish she was going to translate material from Spanish into German and English, voluntary. Ana offered her a bed in her house while she was working for them, in that way she didn't need any money to survive.

When it comes to search-engines, like Google, FIRE hopes to be able to use them in a better way in the future, at the moment everything else is too time consuming. They have certain strategies, she says, but believes they have to develop them to make sure they are in every engine. María told me very proudly one day:

"If you search in Spanish, this is very interesting, if you search in Spanish for the women's organisations in Latin America, they come out first in the FIRE webpage. And they love that! They all want to be in the FIRE webpage because they don't understand how we do that. But people find them through us. If you put down

SIPAM³, they first appear in the search list in the Fire web page, before their own page!" (interview FIRE)

Another strategy they have to 'reach out' is to work more systematically with hypertext linking from other women's and organisations' pages. To network *per se* is of course very important in the aim to reach out and they do another kind of networking too: "*the activist networking and the use of the Internet for that but the Internet as a network itself, we don't do that very much. We should, it's just a matter of... It's taking up most of our energy to do web casts.*" (*ibid.*) When I asked María if she believes that they are reaching out to the north part of the world she explained:

"A lot, a lot, a lot! You look at the letters [...] The last two or three years there are many articles written in US papers and in European papers about FIRE and what FIRE does, by journalists from those countries. They are the ones that put us on the agenda, maybe because people find us on the Internet" (ibid.)

FIRE was eager to start logging the number of users that visited their site, in order to get some sort of knowledge about how they reach out and where to. They wanted to know from what parts of the world people are that take interest in their work, a project that was a collaboration study with the University of Denver and something she wanted Tove and I to be a part of. Due to time limitations, as more so often, we were never able to incorporate her wishes, but she still knew their audience definitely had changed from the day they started doing Internet radio, but was unsure how? Of course it has limited some groups to take part of their message because they don't have access to the Internet, she said, but put forth their multiplying strategy. She still believes the audience has expanded looking at the number of letters and the amount of feedback they get today. Now they distribute their programs freely, which allows any webradio station, fm station and short-wave station to take part of, and retransmit the material, thereby widening their audience.

If you are searching the net today you get shocked over how many portals for umbrella organisations and social organisations in the south that are represented in this muddle of sites. There are probably millions of sites that no one ever will get to (apart from the creator and hopefully her closest friends). The fact that the amount is so big makes it essential that the problem of succeeding should be brought to the fore. Several organisations are seeing it as their mission to filter and structure the myriad of webpages, forums, portals and search engines that constitutes the Internet, in order to make certain information more accessible.

One ambitious project is the 60 million US dollar web portal the *Global Development Gateway* (GDG) (*web18*) which was launched by the World Bank in September 2000. It allows users to share information, resources and tools on development challenges from the grassroots up. Critics have been raised world wide and the project is accused of out-conquering similar more local projects when portals usually are functioning as a one-stop shop for their large target audiences, something Lena doesn't agree upon. "*I don't think we compete on the same level! [...] We concluded that the Gateway was not going to affect us very much*

³ SIPAM – Sistema de Proteção da Amazônia

because, even though they have a lot of backup, we are really based in civil society and we think that that is a big difference." (interview Acceso) The Watchdog Coalition, which monitors the World Bank and International Monetary Fund projects, questions the portal's objectivity and independence. The co-ordinator of the Bretton Woods Project in the UK, Alex Wilks, says that to create such a global supersite that claims to include all views is neither feasible nor desirable. (*web19*)

The design of the site is another issue that has been questioned. Lena Zúñiga strongly expressed that there are some major failures in the strategic design of the portal. The gateway sometimes assumes that you have a 24-hour access to the Internet and another thing is the language problem. When you register as a user you do it with a language and then you can only access information in your own language. *"So if nothing is written in Spanish, why would I want to participate?!"* (interview Acceso) She says that what she wants is *"the whole thing in my own language"*. Once again we return to the problem that occurs with a technological tool that is not properly designed for its target group. It doesn't meet the needs of its users.

Organisations and the civil society in the south aren't generally consulted in these kinds of development processes, according to Lena. (interview Acceso) They were never consulted themselves in the GDG project. One reason to the gap between producers and end-users, could be the different views of relationships between sectors. The relationship between Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the government in the south is totally different from the relation between the two in the north. *"It's funny, I met this guy from England and I said <<I work for non-profit>> and he said <<Oh really, we work for the same sector. I work for the government>>. I was like...in Latin America that is totally different."* (interview Acceso) In developing countries you are more than often opposed to the government when you work for CSOs, she says. Maybe the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund did consult governments or organisations that are sponsored by or related, or closely developed, to governments but they didn't apparently reach her conception of the civil society. But why?, when this really is something focus should be put on. Lena Zúñiga says: *"It's a very difficult and challenging thing to do and it costs a lot of money. So, many people just don't do it."*(*ibid.*)

As mentioned earlier the World Bank is sometimes conceptualised as a political force that isn't accepted everywhere or by everyone, something that could, and has resulted in an unwillingness to collaborate with the organ. Many organisations in Latin America that say no to the GDG are working with Acceso, according to them due to the fact that they are already based in civil society. Acceso has recognised that these organisations are willing to share their information with them. They are willing to share it with the world, with the civil society but not exactly with the Bank.

"I don't think I can approach many organisations in Central America and tell them – Hey, look, there is a great project and it's lead by the World Bank, it's got 60 million dollars behind it! People will not participate." (interview Acceso)

Acceso does not see any benefit from being a part of the Global Development Gateway. But despite this huge investment that the GDG constitutes, it is nothing neither SEM nor Incorporate know anything about and within SEM is the concentrate on Internet seen as problematic even though she believe they have benefited from it. Thaís told me that it is difficult to find an ideal person who can work with their kind of marketing on the

Internet. She does, as Lena Zúñiga, assert that it is hard to find someone with the 'right mix', in this case someone with technical knowledge as well as a journalistic. (interview SEM) The Lack of time, the right knowledge and funds has limited their possibility to reach out appreciably.

Even though Thaís Aguilar Zúñiga believes it is considerably simpler to distribute their material today she doesn't think they reach out to as many people as they did before. Then they were working with an International Press Service (IPS) agency that had lots of clients all around the world. The agency that had these important connections was translating their material into different languages and sold them to well-known newspapers in Europe and the US. When SEM became independent 13 years ago they lost their clients and because of lack of funds they can't afford to do it themselves, but it doesn't make them want to use IPSs' again. I asked her if they get any response today from the north and after a lot of thinking she said no. *"No, no the problem is it is in Spanish"* (interview SEM)

To summarize the section above one can discern that it clearly seems to be a problem for my respondents and their organisations to reach out, to be able to mediate their message. This dilemma could be seen being based on a number of different factors such as technical and strategic, and on the fact that language barriers are a problem in the process. Another problematic issue, and not of minor importance, is the somewhere present willingness and aim to control the actual use of the Internet and the information it provides.

6.5 controlling the Internet – power structures of today

When political decision-makers are discussing ICT their statements are usually in line with progress and empowerment while their actions are rather orientated to a process of modifying the Internet in order to gain social control as well as ensure it. To some extent I think I could agree with Uimonen and Shapiro (1999:62) that "they are creating an illusion of personal control" while they actually are undermining it.

In the previous chapter I mentioned that the Internet surely could give an opportunity for bypassing existing authorities and being a venue where 'anybody' may be able to make themselves heard, but there are still people that are trying to control the dissemination of information and the media. Since the Internet effectively can be used to access uncensored information from all parts of the world, it surely is something totalitarian regimes find alarming and necessary to have control of.

6.5.1 governments and other authorities

Lao is a good example when discussing authorities exercising control over media. One of the most noticeable effects of the state's monopoly of information processing is the complete absence of printed material. In totalitarian communist regimes information processing becomes a particularly important tool with which to exercise control. In Lao 'control of information' has represented one of the main factors through which the elite

have exercised its 'monopoly of power'. (Uimonen 2001:187) *Reporters Without Borders* is publishing for the first time a world-wide index of countries according to their respect for press freedom and here Lao is ranked 163rd out of 166 countries. (*web20*) The index was drawn up by asking journalists, researchers and legal experts to answer 50 questions about the whole range of press freedom violations (such as murders or arrests of journalists, censorship, pressure, state monopolies in various fields, punishment of press law offences and regulation of the media). The final list includes 166 countries, the others were not included in the absence of reliable information.

In China the Chinese authorities have chosen "to encourage mass Internet usage and education in an environment that it is able to shape if not wholly control." (Kalathil, Boas 2003) As a step towards full control of the usage, the Chinese authorities were in spring 2001 closing down more than 17,000 Internet cafes as part of a sustained campaign to tighten controls on the Internet. The authorities also wanted to prevent access to political and dissident websites as well as those belonging to some foreign media organisations. Thus, the government ordered 28,000 Internet cafes to install special monitoring security software, which blocked access to such sites, and kept a record of which web pages a user had visited. (*web30*)

According to Kalathil and Boas, Saudi Arabia uses perhaps the most extensive Internet filtering mechanisms, an "attempt to access a forbidden site are greeted with a message that all access attempts are logged, which is certain to encourage self-censorship". (Kalathil, Boas 2003) In Cuba, the government "has taken a more active role in controlling unauthorised access to the Internet and are reacting strongly against any attempt to communicate outside official channels". (*ibid.*) Cuba is in the 165th position, second from last, on the list *Reporters Without Borders* worked out. Twenty-six independent journalists were arrested in the spring of 2003, accused of writing articles for publication abroad that played into the hands of 'imperialist interests'. The sentences to prison terms were ranging from 14 to 27 years, making Cuba the world's biggest prison for journalists. (*web20*)

6.5.2 commercial factors

However it is not only authoritative regimes that are trying to control Internet use and content, another concern is when private, economical interests are taking control over connections and wires. Internet Service Providers owned by a few private companies have an extensive possibility to control which services and what content that is allowed to pass through their cables.

We have to take into consideration that in democratic countries like Costa Rica there are no oppressive regimes that are restricting the freedom of speech. Instead, the threat might be from institutions with more capitalistic interests that are trying to regulate the Internet to be more profitable.

This is a problem SEM often has been faced with and something that really has constrained them in their work in spreading their message. By offering articles with very specific issues like social issues, development issues and gender issues you don't reach the 'right' target group, these sort of subjects don't "*produce the very big agencies, magazines, and newspapers*" (interview SEM). Supporting social organisations have never been very lucrative, they usually don't come with those profitable shocking press releases that are

needed (if having a capitalistic point of view). This is something SEM has been fighting since the day they became independent from the International Press Agency 13 years ago.

We have now reached a satisfactory overview regarding the field of study, its objects and all its problems, factors and implications. It is time for analysis and discussion.

7 an analysis and discussion

I started my more theoretical parts of this thesis with a discussion of globalisation. Why? Global processes are linking together previously far away 'isolated' areas of relatively uniform culture and as shown in earlier sections I believe the Internet partly has contributed to intensify these processes. The speed, the extent and the volume of the flows of information contribute to strengthen the sense of the world as one singular place. Because of an increased global interconnectedness have concepts like 'development', 'equality', 'democracy' and 'welfare' been even more established in developing countries. I believe this has led to that a new different form of cultural resistance has grown stronger and it is *organised* - often beyond national borders. It is a resistance that takes on a more political agenda. There are social forces that are living by hostility to patriarchy, environmental concerns, and human rights and are often seeking an end to oppression and poverty. FIRE even believes themselves to have a shared history with the development of a kind of this organised resistance. *"The history of FIRE is a big portion of the history of the globalisation of the International Women's Movement"* (interview María Suárez)

Information and research seem to have a central role in these transnational networks that have emerged as a counter-reaction to increased global interconnectedness. Information, that isn't politically coloured, controlled or manipulated by any external parties, irrespective of gender, race, class or power. Information, that isn't *"already packed and digested by the north"* as Lena Zúñiga expressed herself. This is important both when it comes to the ability to obtain it as well as to produce it under their own management, to produce their own information about different topics. UN, by many others, has recognised there is an injustice of the flow of information in the world today. Most of the information comes from the north to the south, this because the north has the resources for distribution and the resources to research. But the Internet has given many a new possibility for information processing.

It is often said that information does empower people which isn't anything I want to deny, but it is not information *per se*. There is a relationship between information and knowledge. Knowledge consists of generalised conceptual statements that are produced by our critical reasoning and have been developed through the analysis of information and we judge its validity with the help of social dialogue. Knowledge is then always more than small pieces of information that are distributed in computer networks and the media. But, as an ultimate carrier of information the Internet could be to some help in the production of knowledge. Something all my respondents in Costa Rica wanted to do was to communicate their knowledge from the perspective of being a woman from the south, from Costa Rica in the Latin Americas.

Because of the usefulness and the influence it has for us, knowledge is often considered equal to social power. With the 'right' knowledge we can control not only our own but other people's lives and we can get authority over those who know less, an authority that can be used either to dominate or to serve our social connections. Knowledge as power does often project a very positive charged word but this power could be used either in a positive and constructive way or in a negative and destructive way in regards to our ideals. Power could be used to suppress and control others, or we can use it to further

pass on and share information to promote individual freedom and democratic practices. This shows that if and when information is turned into knowledge and this knowledge into power we still do not have any guarantees for equality and a democratic political order. This is because democracy can only work if people use their personal social power with wisdom.

As Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. argue in their book (2003), the Internet with all the information it provides is not necessarily a threat to authoritarian regimes. Some use of the Internet reinforces authoritarian rule and many authoritarian regimes are proactively promoting the development of an Internet that serves state-defined interests rather than challenging them. Certain types of Internet use do indeed pose political challenges to authoritarian governments, and such use may contribute to political change *in the future*. But, it is very important to recognise that the ideas that are flourishing in these transnational movements, organisations and networks **don't** produce any changes by them selves. I believe Giddens has caught something good in one sentence: "Social movements provide glimpses of possible futures and are in some part vehicles for their realisation". (Giddens 1990:161) But it is very important to recognise that they do not provide the only basis for change.

I will exemplify this with something taken from my reality. I believe that an outrageous overflow of information has emerged in the shade of Internets development. Surely, one can tribute the efficiency, the speed and the spread of information, but it was not the vast amount of chain letters, protest lists and news group circulars that could stop Saddam Hussein's terror and oppression. We can not put too much trust into a technology and with that forget the social actors behind the tool. I can admit I did not sign all letters that were circling around the globe, I honestly got too many and did not put so much trust in them, I basically did not believe my signature on one of them would make any change, and of course it wouldn't have! This *trust* is something Anthony Giddens discusses in his work *The consequences of modernity*. (1990) Surely you can create a public opinion thanks to the Internet but there is a big gap form there to actually be able to *change*. Because 'to change' must be the actual goal for all organisations, and we can't forget this, the most elementary they are attempting achieve.

Thus, uses of the Internet cannot in itself produce democracies, the Internet does not decrease global inequality, and my intention was never to prove it. It would be pretty naive to argue that it does, to suggest that globally inclusive cosmopolitan society can rest on the enthusiasm of self-help groups of their own, but I have still shown in this paper that it could produce a challenge to the prevailing social order. There is a big difference between conceptualising the Internet as something that could in itself make changes towards democracy and when you discuss it as a tool for organisations that work for more democratic ideals. I connect myself with the latter. What sorts of change can an utilisation of the technological tool Internet lead to when used in NGOs in the south? What actual changes can it and has it concluded in? To approach the domain we have to conceptualise it out of a micro perspective where my fieldwork constitutes the basis for my arguments.

As I said, I won't argue for that an utilisation of the Internet will produce democracies, but a concept that is heavily related to the thought of democracy is the *freedom of speech*. Because democracy has at its hart "self determination, participation, voice and anatomy. It is a political culture that includes a wide range of realms for self development and mutual collective expression" to use some of Hauge and Loaders words. (1999:7)

Concerning this matter of fact all my respondents were unanimous. The Internet has constituted a new communicative freedom in their organisations, in one way or the other. This could be understood from different points of view. Both to have the ability to express whatever opinion you have concerning different issues without being constrained by any authorities as well as having the possibility to have a communication channel where you can get your voice heard and being able to express yourself.

Could the Internet be a platform for solidarity? If you are not limited by non access or the knowledge of internet use, in one way or the other, the Internet could be a place where people proportionately easy can encounter others with similar interests and believes. One can present attitudes and opinions without being constrained by a third part that might prevent a persons aim to express oneself because of a certain political stand or shade. A feeling of collaboration can be present and the actors do not need to be restricted by distance over time and space. By an ease to create networks, equally minded can come closer to each other around different topics.

The use of the Internet has provided a possibility for both FIRE and SEM to change the flow of information. They are being able to produce their own content seen out of the objectives of the south and further transfer it to the north in a simple and less expensive way. The possibility of independence has been offered, which means they are not really constrained by any external forces. The Internet has provided FIRE with the possibility to broadcast their material at a lower price with an increased way of interactivity. They have been able to be more mobile in the way they can set up a radio station everywhere in the world as long as there are telephone lines. Today they only need to bring a mixer, a minidisc player, a couple of microphones and a laptop, but the most important is that they have become the owners of their own communication channel. As long as they can raise enough money to be able to connect to the World Wide Web they will always be able to continue in their work to connect voices world-wide. Something that has fascinated me a lot when it comes to FIRE is the amazing and constantly present spirit to fight among these women, how dedicated they are in keeping on *connecting voices, technologies and action and amplifying voices world-wide*, which also is their slogan. One can still not ignore the fact that the transition to broadcast over the Internet has limited some of their audience to take part of their ideas even though they believe themselves to multiply voices by using the media.

A decisive factor that has to be considered in the discussion concerning the fact if the Internet is a good tool in the work to empower marginalized groups, is if they are constrained to use it by external parties. The Internet cannot necessarily be put on an equal footing with 'the freedom of speech', as I mentioned above there has been many attempts in different oppressive regimes to constrain the use of, as well as the content on the Internet. But, capitalistic interests are also present, which we have seen in the case of SEM. They offer articles with very specific issues like social issues, development issues and gender issues and these sort of subjects don't "*produce the very big agencies, magazines, and newspapers*" (interview SEM). Supporting social organisations have never been very profitable. They usually do not come with shocking press releases every now and then and as we can recall this has really constrained SEM in their work of spreading their ideas.

I like the conception of looking at the Internet as a *Kula Ring* of today. Much of the concern is to amplify the fame and name of those who place themselves in this expanded sphere. A movement's or social organisation's website could be seen as a trap, a point or

node in a network that provides a potential flow of surfers to entrap. The more linked the site is the more it provides a channel for a flow of people, who can stop and enter into one's symbolic space and move on to spread one's name and fame. The creation of networks objectified in hyperlinked websites take on eminently efficient functions in reproducing and expanding social organisations willingness to fight inequalities in the world, whether local or potentially global. The webpage of FIRE is a medium for communication and connection, it is a communication channel for people in the south to have a voice, but the webpage also gives them an identity on the web. Even though we are talking about social networks that seem to work horizontally I believe myself to see a tendency to compete for supporters, political access and as might be expected for funding, money that is needed for their survival. A strategic use of the Internet for this actual purpose can be crystallised. The more you can make yourself heard, the more effortless you are to find in cyberspace, the easier it gets to catch the attention of the donors and with that comes often an interest in what the organisations are trying to achieve and a willingness to support it. A dangerous side-effect that this could result in is that too much focus is put on making oneself easily accessible and visible on the web so the actual goal for the organisation sinks into oblivion.

We can recall that FIRE has managed pretty well concerning this, both in the way they have focused on networking as well on hyperlinking their site. HIVOS put a lot of trust in their project 'the Internet women's laboratory' and are still going to support their projects as well as looking for further funding and international connections. Another transnational network-organisation is Casa Alianza (www.casa-alianza.org), which is an organisation Lena Zúñiga mentioned as an organisation whose Internet investment has given profitable dividends. Lena says that they have for example created awareness in the north about the problem of street children and child prostitution in Central America. But, they have not only reached awareness, they have also hit the media and they have accomplished to raise funds through their web site, which is really difficult for their organisations. They have received many nominations for their work with the Internet and media and even received the 1996 Olof Palme Award during a prize ceremony in Stockholm on January 30, 1997. (*web22*)

You cannot deny that we, as social human beings, seem to care more about things that are close to us than far away, irrespective of physical distance or emotional distance. Through the Internet and different organisations websites do issues like the ones mentioned above face the whole world in a new way. These problems are made topical, they could be sensed lying closer to people's realities, which physically are placed on the other side of this globe and thus get their attention. Even though it is far away from an actual change of conditions, from getting things done, I believe it has shown that a public opinion easier is created both locally as well as globally, which in the end can result in these coveted changes. But we still have to pay attention to how many people that in reality would leave what they have in hands to go out in the streets demonstrating and proclaiming their political opinions, all this in the strive for a change of the prevailing social order.

Could this sort of creation of a public opinion be viewed upon as fictive? I believe it could. It is definitely easier to put attention to a problem, be touched by it and make the decision to support it when your participation is only a mouse-click away. There are many occasions when you only have to sign your name on a document (see **Appendix B**), or click the button for a commercial led fundraising. 'The Hunger Site' (*web23*) is one example and another is 'The Rainforest Site' (*web24*). On the Casa Alianza site there is

even an option to donate money right there on the site by just leaving your credit card number. But, having said that, it is not necessarily a sort of public opinion that has to have any negative consequences, as long as there is a strong core of social actors in the movement or organisation that physically and actively act to obtain a change of conditions.

While nothing may come out of these websites that can be seen as changing the world dramatically, they do reflect in a fundamental way the fact that organisations and movements are trying to use the Internet to achieve greater control over inequalities, poverty and oppression, and they demonstrate that it is not utopian to suppose that the internet can be used to decrease global inequality.

8 conclusion

The general conclusions I can draw from my fieldwork in Costa Rica is that the web has just created a new *arena* for individuals and groups to represent themselves; it has helped in the process to change the power dynamics of representation for traditionally marginalized groups (within my discourse). Because one of the Internet's most significant contributions to human development is its ability to strengthen the voices of sectors excluded from the dominant centres of information and decision-making.

The possibility to escape prevailing power structures was given both FIRE and SEM. Thanks to the medium they became independent, they became their own bosses. It has facilitated communication, networking, and information gathering for these organisations. The web allows them to publish their point of view to a wider public, their voices get multiplied. I also believe the web has strengthened the development of local knowledge and it has given new opportunities to systematise it. By having a site on the web these organisations have been able to spread their name and fame in a totally new manner. Their ability to catch the attention of donors as well as people that support their willingness to change has been multiplied. Obviously there is a flipside to it. As with any other media it reflects the reality it is a part of. Out of the fieldwork I conducted in Costa Rica I discerned different obstacles that prevent NGOs in the south to be able to use this arena for representation and take part of and spread their different ideals, which has to be overcome if they are going to succeed.

The digital divide in the world today is a fact. A lot of effort has naturally to be put on equitable access. People must have the ability to connect at a reasonable price and basic training in the use of the tools has to be available, so that an increasing number of people can use the resources, regardless of their sex, class, religion, language, or race. Connectivity *per se* does not produce any change. Information is not knowledge until it is processed and applied. Escobar asks himself in the article *Welcome to Cyberia: Notes on the Anthropology of Cyberspace* if there are different possibilities for Third World societies to participate in the technocultural conversations and processes that are reshaping the world. (1994:220) To facilitate developing countries, and their organisations and movements, participation in those technology revolution processes that are at current, I believe social movements in these parts of the world have to develop their own strategies for Internet use. – Strategies that solve the problem how to participate without submitting to the rules of the game by the west. There has to be a strategic and an appropriate use of the medium. If communities are armed with the knowledge how to use the Internet and the potential of it to meet their informational needs they will be empowered to apply pressure on the authorities and information providers.

One of the biggest barriers for connecting voices, being able to use the Internet in a meaningful way, to be able to effectively use ICT resources and combine them with other appropriate forms of communication is the language. English – the language of the Internet - is not enough. By producing and spreading material in Spanish all my respondents have reached people that otherwise would have remained in the distance.

If we are to make the Internet a diverse, democratic arena where the entire global society and not only a few interest groups can express themselves, education is needed both

concerning the tools as well as how the information is retrieved. I have shown that there are many different initiatives by NGOs both in the south as well as in the north that has been taken, but I believe their capacity has been undermined. We have to start taking advantage of their local knowledge and their possibilities for action. These sectors have to be strengthened! All the organisations I spoke to pointed out that it is important to create their own Internet and the World Bank driven project the *Global Development Gateway* clearly shows a problem that can appear when an external party (from the north) is involved. They want it to be more rooted in the region. One major problem is when it comes to the actual presentation of webbased material on the net, the actual design of it. There are few people that have the right knowledge how to create an application that is understood and easy to use for the end-user, especially when the creator and the receiver is based, living and working in two far away situated social and cultural contexts.

There is a big gap between the ones making the websites and the actual users, an issue that stretches to our society as well. The focus when creating webbased applications must be on the end user, something courses aimed at increasing technological knowledge in ICT or in general, don't seem to take into consideration. - At least not in Costa Rica. This is something that is manifested by Lena Zúñiga. She means that people studying Informatics in Costa Rica and Central America seem to loose their sense of what is going on in the world, an object of matter that could be discerned in 'technology rich' Sweden as well. *"It's very difficult to find someone who has a background in computer science who is actually able to work with NGO's and CSO's and get involved in these issues."* She finds the technical training in the region be to focused on hard knowledge when the conditions in developing countries rather require strategic than technical skills. *"Maybe we are trying to reach certain people in certain countries with this web site. They didn't tell you that in the web master training course."*(interview Acceso)

Strategies have to be drawn up and a focus must be set on how to reach out, how to distribute the information through networking, collaboration, hyperlinking and a creative use of portals.

If organisations manage to work up and find solutions to the prerequisites mentioned above I believe the Internet generally, with exception from in some totalitarian regimes, effectively could be used as a new platform for solidarity where social actors can get together, create knowledge, organise themselves and collectively be able to create a public opinion, which in a close future might contribute to a political or social change of conditions.

"When you discard all technologies, you are not discarding machines, what you are discarding is the voices of the south." (María Suárez Toro - FIRE)

Appendix A - organisations

FIRE

Feminist International Radio Endeavour, FIRE, (*web25*) was founded in 1991 in Costa Rica and is a non-profit, Non Governmental Organisation. Their office is situated in Ciudad Colón, a rural village outside San José and it was here that I had the chance to participate in their daily work. FIRE's aim is to *give a voice to the voiceless* and to provide non-sexist information about various topics including women's human rights, the environment, racism, arts and culture. María Suárez Toro, Katerina Anfossi Gomez and Nancy Vargas Sanabria were the first to join FIRE and soon they were broadcasting their first programs at Radio for Peace International (RFPI). FIRE was created in order to use the fullest potential of radio as a resource to strengthen the voices of the women worldwide. In 1995 they wanted to create a two-way communication to Beijing to allow listeners to interact with them while broadcasting, and their first e-mail account was created. From that day the Internet took up more and more of their time. Katarina Anfossi: *"In the course of the development of our Web radio in cyberspace gave us account that to the same as the radio, we realized that the transience that characterized radio repeated itself in this new venue. However, our web radio provided infinite possibilities for information and sound file storage that counteracted the apparent characteristics of immediacy, making interactivity an essential element where the news and information can be heard and heard."*

Today they are an accomplished Internet radio station that is keeping on connecting voices worldwide.

Acceso

Acceso (*web26*) is a non-profit organisation that is based in Costa Rica but is working in all of Central America. They started 11 years ago as a strategic communications program that was introducing Internet-technology to non governmental organisations and civil society organisations in Central America. When the Internet came to Central America around 1994 it was very limited to academic environments and they decided to introduce it as a way to collaborate in networks. They were then installing modems in to organisations and were providing basic training in the use of the Internet. It was only e-mails and newsgroups because nothing else was really available then. Acceso were also focusing on web development for civil society organisations and made websites for CSOs to provide a tool for research, communication and advocacy. After the web started to develop in such an incredible way, Acceso started focusing on other aspects of institutional strength and today they have three programmes;

One is the *strategic communications program* which still is the biggest program in Acceso. Here they are focusing on strategic issues and communication in organisations. They are not only focusing on the Internet, but are also working on learning network, learning communities, communities around content and content on the web.

The *planning monetary and evaluation program*, supports organisations to make strategic planning and to look at their work in a more strategic way. They believe this to be very important because in the eighties organisations were popping up everywhere and they were very activistic, didn't have much structure, financial planning or proposal writings.

The newest program is the *strategic leadership program*. Leadership is one of the biggest questions in civil society organisations in Central America, sometimes because it is very rigid, hierarchic and formal and sometimes because there is none. Lena Zúñiga, who I met, is working on a project called *Southern voices online*, which is a joint project with One World International in London and HIVOS Netherlands, which also are the donors in this particular project. Amongst other activities are they managing the partnership-base of One World in Latin America. They develop the One World Latin-American edition and are developing training for Central-American partners so they can appropriate the internet-tools and be able to put their content on the web. They are also trying to inculcate, to make these organisations network with others in other parts of the world.

SEM - Servicio Especial de la Mujer

Thaís Aguilar describes SEM as a 25 years old, alternative, international news agency staffed by women journalists from all over Latin America who write news articles and features with a gender perspective. They are a Non Governmental Organisation that focuses on Latin America and people who speak Spanish. They consist of a network of organisations and their offices are located in Asia, Africa, Europe, the United States and Latin America and the Caribbean. Each office is independent from the head office, which is located in India, but the one in Costa Rica was the first one in the network. They started using the Internet in year 1999 and are today selling and distributing their material mainly over the net. SEM seeks to give women greater visibility and present a more positive image of them in the mass media.

SEM/WFS was launched in 1978 as a special project of Inter Press Service, a Third World news agency based in Rome, and as an initiative of the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO), which spearheaded the creation of women's communications networks. SEM established itself as an independent international news agency in 1990 and in 1992 became a non-profit association based in San Jose, Costa Rica, from where it administers and oversees the production of journalistic material for Central America and South America. They produce around 150 reports annually, written by 25 women journalists from 15 Latin American countries. They cover a broad range of issues and topics from a gender perspective, including economic, political, cultural, social and health issues, as well as entertainment and daily life. (*web 26*)

Appendix B – an e-mail

an e-mail received from my friend Richard Symes – 23rd Oct 2003

The Brazilian congress is now voting on a project that will reduce the Amazon forest to 50% of its size. It will take 1 MINUTE to read this, PLEASE put your names on the list and forward this on as instructed below. The area to be deforested is 4 times the size of Portugal and would be mainly used for agriculture and pastures for livestock. All the wood is to be sold to international markets in the form of wood chips, by large multinational companies. The truth is that the soil in the Amazon forest is useless without the forest itself. Its quality is very acidic and the region is prone to constant floods. At this time more than 160,000 square kilometres deforested with the same purpose are abandoned and in the process of becoming deserts, meaning that this proposal is in the short-term interests of a few, and in the long term interests if none. Please copy the text into a new e-mail by highlighting the relevant text, selecting 'edit', 'cut', going to 'compose', putting icon in new page and selecting 'paste' from the 'edit' box again. Put your complete name in the list below, and send to everyone you know. (DON'T JUST FORWARD IT AS IT WILL THEN END UP WITH ROWS AND ROWS of '>'s) If you are the 500th person to sign please send a copy to: fsaviolo@openlink.com.br
Tank you for your help:

01 - Fernanda de Souza Saviolo - Rio de Janeiro - RJ
02 - Nara Maria de Souza - Rio de Janeiro - RJ
03 - Julio Cesar Fraga Viana - Rio de Janeiro - RJ
04 - Monica Grotkowsky Brotto -Sao Paulo - SP
05 - Mauricio Grotkowsky Brotto - Sao Paulo
06 - Ricardo A.Corrallo - SP
07 - Sunny Jonathan - SP
08 - Leonardo Larsen Rocha - SP
09 - Evandro Sestrem - SP
10 - Marco Aurlio Wehrmeister Blumenau - SP
11 - Angela Maria Gonalves - Blumenau - SP
12 - Alessandra Bernardino- Blumenau - SP
13 - Pedro Carstens Penfold - Rio de Janeiro - RJ
14 - Annelena Porto Delgado - Sao Paulo - SP
15 - Erica Couto -Sao Paulo - SP
16 - Elaine Couto- Sao Paulo - SP
17 - Tatiana de Almeida Voivodic - Sao Paulo - SP
18 - Solange B Furlanetto - Sao Paulo - SP
19 - Marcos deSouza Mello - Sao Paulo - SP
20 - Eliane Santiago - Sao Paulo - SP
21 - Francisca J. Bezerra Alves Arajo - Sao Paulo - SP
22 - Carlos Alberto Dantas Junior - Rio de Janeiro - RJ
23 - Daniel Rodrigues da Cruz - Rio de Janeiro - RJ
24 - Gabriella Gaida - Rio de Janeiro - RJ
25 - Cecilia Silva Teixe ira Pinto - RJ - 03/06/75
26 - Tania Santos Miguel
27 - Celso Henrique Diniz Valente de Figueiredo -RJ
28 - Marcelo Lopes Rheingantz - Rio de Janeiro - RJ
29 - Rodrigo Tassinari de Oliveira - Rio de Janeiro
30 - Andr Lobato Pinheiro - Rio deJaneiro - RJ
31 - Ismael dos Santos Silva - RJ
32 - Gustavo Alexandre Caetano Correa - RJ
33 - Juana Varella Barca de Amorim - Rio de Janeiro
34 - Nara Faria Silva Rio de Janeiro - RJ
35 - Isabella Jaggi Sao Paulo - SP
36 - Diana de Andrade Freitas - Rio de Janeiro - RJ
37 - Karina Do! urad! o - Sao Paulo - SP
38 - Pablo Genuncio Garcia - Rio de Janeiro
39 - Fabola Moraes de Lucca - Sao Paulo -
40 - Alexei Moraes de Lucca - S*o Paulo - SP
41 - Renata Regina Roxo - S*o Paulo - SP
42 - Fernanda Teixeira - S*o Paulo - SP
43 - Patricia Freitas - S*o Paulo - SP
44 - Cintia Regina K*rner -Alemanha - DE
45 - Wolfgang K*rner - Alemanha - DE
46 - Roseani Vieira Roch a - San Francisco - CA
47 - Angela Ichimura - S*o Paulo - SP
48 - Assunta Viola - Sao Paulo - SP
50 - Marina Amaral - Alemanha - DE
51 - Fabian Rodrigues Caetano - Sao Paulo - SP

- 52 - Luciana Cabrera- Santa Barbara- Ca
- 53 - Andrea Torres- Lahaina, Hawaii
- 54 - Carla Duarte- New York, NY
- 55 - Sergio Goes - New York, NY
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