

*THIS IS NOT THEIR AIR*

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using paper*

INTERVIEW WITH KIKA AND 'GROENTE'  
ABOUT *OPEN RADIO GROUP*

– A RADIO SITE (IN PROGRESS) WHERE PEOPLE CANNOT ONLY  
DOWNLOAD, BUT ALSO UPLOAD THEIR OWN PROGRAMS.

LOCATION: THE GIVE AWAY SHOP, UTRECHT.

DATE: FEBRUARY 7, 2006.

*Could you explain the project please?*

K (Kika): The idea is to set up a twenty-four hour, seven day a week, free internet radio stream. In the Netherlands there are lots of pirate radio projects and they manage to stream around two hours a day, or a week, or something. It's a shame because they are so small that only a few people can hear them and they don't reach out to that many people. So we will collect all of the good radio programs and put them together on the Internet so that everybody can listen to them. Small radio projects can also use them to fill up their own programs.

The idea is based on how I listen to radio: if I know a good station I switch it on, but you then have to know details such as, the third Tuesday a month at seven o'clock etc, and then it gets complicated. You might easily miss the program. So we want to collect good programs and put them together on the Internet.

G ('Groente'): Yeah, my interpretation of the project is slightly different. I see it more like an Indy media, but in audio. The idea is to have a system where everyone can make a radio program for an hour or so, then up-load it to a website, creating an open contact system.

K: Yeah, there is a very cool Linux program for audio and it gets better and better because people can just download it to their computers and really easily work with sound. One can save it, click on a website, and upload it into a free space.

*So, this makes it very easy for people to send radio. How will you manage to fill all the airtime?*

K: Of course there will be hours of just music, but this will still be different music to Britney Spears. You can repeat the programs as well, however, with all of the programs that people make all over the Netherlands, there is already a lot of material.

G: It can also function as a platform for small non-commercial bands to upload their music. It will be part of a random play list that will fill the blank space.

*So it is technically possible to make a timetable and for anyone to upload?*

K: 'Groente' is working on that. We will make a calendar-system so that people can see where the blank spaces are and upload their material themselves. We will write a text in which we explain the basic rules and what we definitely do not want, like in the Indy media. If you then see that someone made a lot of shit, you don't allow this person to post anything in the future.

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*How did you get the idea?*

K: My idea came from different places. I recently moved here and I wanted to listen to radio to learn Dutch, but I couldn't find a good station to listen to. It was all commercial shit! I used to make radio in Germany, but people here told me lots of different things, like, "No, it's impossible, because it is so illegal to make pirate radio, don't even think about doing that!" "You can do it, you just have to throw a benefit party once in a while, as they will destroy your equipment every half-year."; and, "Well, nothing will really change." Lots of people told me that they would not work with me because they thought it was not possible to make a pirate radio station in Utrecht, so I thought about doing it on the internet instead. This way, anyone in any little village, can pick it up and send stuff to it, and that's cool.

G: Providing that they have Internet access...

G: There was a large police action in the Netherlands against pirate radio stations a couple of years ago and almost all of the pirate radios were shut down, so my guess is that people are still quite paranoid about that. There is one station that broadcasts every Sunday who has not had problems so far; I think they have been broadcasting for one-and-a-half years.

*So, pirate radio is, or used to be, very big in the Netherlands?*

G: Yeah, the stations were also very apolitical. There were lots of commercial pirate radios because the general Dutch mainstream radio mainly offers MTV hits. So there were really a lot of other stations... mostly farmers that set up their own transmitters playing Dutch music, like la la la la... which isn't really my cup of tea, but it's fair enough. They also played commercials, such as adverts for the local supermarket, so that they could pay the bills when the police raided their studio.

*Kika, you worked with radio in Germany?*

K: Yeah, there the whole radio system is completely different. Like in Hamburg for example, there is an independent radio station. I made programs for a local commercial radio station that are forced to give two hours a day to non-commercial groups and to give them good slots. I think the state even pays for it. What you can do depends on the program director. There was one who just refused to play some things and he was taken to court and was then forced to play the programs, but this was two months after the programs were made, so it was very funny. In the station where I was working somebody played an hour of war notices during the Iraq war and the program director decided to have a session about how to make our programs more popular. (Laugh)

*How will your project be financed?*

K: Ha! That's a good question... We don't need that much money to start.

G: No, not really. There's already an infrastructure here from PUSCII for a simple website. If it grows out of hand then that won't do any more. But, there's also a project in Amsterdam, called the Free Team. They generally support Internet radios by relying them, which basically means that we have our own little studio or website that makes one radio stream, and this is sent over to the free team. They have a big fat server with lots of really good Internet connections and they send it out to all of the listeners. So for us it is just one stream and they send it through the Internet.

*Does this kind of free Internet radio already exist?*

K: I guess, somewhere.

G: Not as far as I know.

K: I'm sure it does. It is such a simple idea.

G: I've searched everywhere for existing software to be able to set it up, and I haven't found anything. Of course there are lots of Internet radios but I don't think there is one with an open contact system.

*Who are your users or listeners?*

K: Everybody!!

*But how are you reaching out to people? How will you make people aware that the site is there?*

G: Spam!! (Laugh)

K: Telling everybody through papers and the Indy media. Hopefully people will like it and spread the word.

K: I guess you don't reach the mainstream, but I hope that it goes further than just the squatting scene. You are right about that it is important to think about the distribution, because if you are on air then people accidentally tune in, but if you are online you must inform people about the location.

G: Yeah, I think the diversity in music can also mean a lot. In general the Dutch radio is really crappy, unless you want to hear news or classical music all day long.

*Do you see your project as being a counter image? Would you say that the participatory form is a critique in itself?*

K: It definitely is, just by being there, but we don't have to tell people every fifth minute that this is better than the commercial radio; it is independent from it. We show that it works to make a difference, and of course it will be used for critique as well. I hope people will not only play their favourite tapes, but will make projects about things they have done, i.e. if have been at a EU meeting or something.

G: I think it is a critique in itself...

K: Yeah, but that sound as if the main purpose is to be against, but it is more the case that this is missing, and people need to be able to spread their own information and to get access to different information. It would be necessary even if there were no commercial radio. Of course one way to keep people dependent is to cut off information and education. So even if our project will not work, the idea is still very important: people need free information. Making radio is such a cool thing, and it is not difficult to do it. Some commercial stations just take it and the state protects them, giving them the right to fill the air and our ears. Why? This is not their air. They didn't even invent radio. It is just like paper, you know, one-way of submitting information. It is as if all the newspapers would have the monopoly on using paper. I think it is absurd.

*How does your project function to economic structures?*

K: The commercial studios are financed through advertising and therefore they feature mainstream programs so that as many people as possible will listen to it. They don't take risks. They wouldn't feature anything longer than around 2,50 minutes. There are rules for everything.

G: I think our idea is kind of comparable to the commercial radio stations but with the whole cash flow ripped out of it. There is no money going around.

K: But also on the commercial radio stations there are people deciding what is to be featured. I mean I could never go to a radio station and say I want to make a one and a half hour program about the G8. It is just not possible.

G: I was thinking in economical terms rather than social. Normally at radio stations the artist gets paid via the record label and the record labels pay the radio to promote the stuff, the radio gets money through advertising, and bla bla bla ... But in our project the cash flow is just non-existent.

K: But the social stuff is connected to the economic stuff, because they have to get advertisers and therefore they have to make a program that is easy to listen to. That's why it's so directed. They cannot even play the music that they like themselves.

*Do you reflect over sustainability when planning your project?*

G: I think any source of free information is sustainable. It might change shape over time, for instance, I couldn't imagine today's Internet without Indy media, and it is here to stay. Even when servers are shut down, it turns up somewhere else, simply because there's a need for it.

*What are your thoughts on the exchange of ideas...?*

K: The only thing people will get through working for the project is fame or blame. No, actually you get a good Internet radio, but you get that even if you don't post anything.

G: But someone has to give something, otherwise there won't be a program.

G: I think we have got our first program...

K: We will try to make the project as open as possible. I guess 'Groente's' will also be open source...

G: If I am not to embarrassed about it.

K: You have some ambitions, so I'm sure it will be good. With open source if the listeners don't like our project they can just start their own by downloading it and making their own site. Then there can be 3000 Internet radios!

G: You still have to have a working system, a server etc.

*Most of all you must have listeners and people that want to participate...Have you thought about connecting it to a physical space so that people for example could come here to PUSCII and be assisted in how to make radio programs?*

K: We will definitely provide that here. We have a computer that is set up so that one can do audio editing.

K: I'm already thinking about writing letters to projects to offer them support to make programs about their own projects.

*Finally, can you suggest another group for us to interview?*

K: You can talk to somebody that I just met. She lives around the corner here and just came back from building a radio station in East Timor. She originally went there with the same idea, that people need information. It was just after the war so her organisation wanted to collect money and hand out free radios. When she arrived there people said: well, we don't need radios as there is no radio station, so she read a lot and started to build up this radio station. It is actually the same idea but from a totally different perspective.

*What's her name?*

K: (Looks in her address book) Endie! I can give her a call now and ask her...

*Is there anything in particular we should ask her?*

K: You should ask her how it worked with the people there, because it is so different from here. They are farmers and cannot just make radio all day long; they have to work on their farms. What I would be really interested in is how they deal with hierarchical structures there?