



The North South digital divide in transnational grassroots networks: Open publishing and the Indymedia network.

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1. Introduction

Globalizing grassroots movements have used new information and communication technologies to organise themselves in lively transnational networks. On the one hand communication among individuals and groups in different places is highly facilitated by these new media. On the other hand new organizational problems arise. The North-South digital divide affects the access of individuals and groups in different parts of the world to these networks, hereby reproducing and strengthening existing inequalities in terms of access to information and power and generating new ones.

The paper explores these issues and challenges with a case study: the Indymedia network. Indymedia is a global network of about 140 local Independent Media Centers (IMCs) locating mainly in North America, Europe and Oceania, but also in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. They provide grassroots activists over the world with alternative media. They use the Internet both as a medium for their media activism and as a medium to organise their network. The main tool on Indymedia websites is the open publishing software enabling any participant to post news on their newswire. The IMCs run a global news website and about 140 local websites in different languages.

The paper analyses differences in use of the tool in different societal contexts, differentiated primarily according to access to the internet. It also deals with the specific problems of the global Indymedia site, the issues of linguistic diversity combined with the different contribution of local centres to the maintenance of the global network. Section 2 presents the main characteristics of the open publishing software; section 3 discusses its potential for global grassroots mobilisations and limitations imposed by the global digital divide and linguistic diversity. Section 4 introduces the Indymedia network and its geography, Section 5 deals with differences between the articulation of online and offline activism of local IMCs between locales with low and high thresholds to access the internet. Section 6 discusses linguistic issues and examines how Indymedia deals with multilingualism on the global and on selected local sites. The efforts to overcome the North South divide are quite impressive, but the network remains dominated by Northern geeks and English as language of global communication.



2. Internet: Potential and limitations for global grassroots movements

New potential for collective action at the global scale

It is nowadays customary to acknowledge the potential of Internet for global collective action (Castells 2001, Norris 2001), the ways grassroots groups and organisations actually use Internet are still rarely scrutinised (for recent exceptions see: McCaughley & Ayers 2003, Mamadouh 2004). How does Internet influence the nature and shape of political organizing? How do social-movement groups use the Internet and how does it affect their geographies and more specifically the ways they organise and mobilise at different scales? Does the Internet indeed empower global grassroots and how is it used to navigate between places and between scales?

New ICTs enable individual to individual contacts over long distance and facilitate collaborative projects between individuals or groups in different localities. The Internet offers new avenues to organise (through emails, mailing lists and chats), to mobilise (through electronic newsletters and websites) and to campaign (through electronic petitions, hacking, rogue sites, flaming on forums, email bombing, electronic blockades, hacking and cracking, etc.). These new opportunities prompted alarming analyses about the advent of ‘Netwar’ or digital terrorism announced by Rand-researchers (Arquilla & Ronfeldt 1999 see also Whine 1999, Conway 2002). In the information age, information is not only a key commodity, it makes communication the key subversive strategy (Lucas & Tiffreau 2001; but also Cleaver 1998, 1999; Walch 1999; Hamelink 1995, Schwartz 1996).

Internet uses by grassroots organisation have been documented as being crucial in several information and leverage campaigns. In 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation from Chiapas used the Internet to mobilise international and transnational support in the Zapatistas’ struggle against the Mexican government. Interestingly enough, Chiapas is one of the poorest regions of Mexico; many villages have no telephone lines, let alone a modem and a PC. Likewise Indians had relatively few rights as marginal citizens of the Mexican state. The transnational campaign rested on the connectivity and citizenship of the online-Zapastistas that were neither Mexicans nor Indians (Cleaver 1998; 1999, Froehling 1997; Routledge 1998, Bob 2001, Villarreal Ford and Gil 2001). In 1997 online information campaigns of Burma activists abroad resulted in US legislation banning new US investment in Burma (Danitz and Stobel 1999). Another example is the online disclosure of secret negotiations for a Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI) that brought about the demise of the negotiations in the Organisation For Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (Kobrin 1998).

Limitations to online communication: the digital and the linguistic divides

Obviously this potential is severely hampered by certain constraints. Apart from state policies controlling the infrastructure and the use of new media, online communication is limited by two major thresholds for individuals or groups in any specific place: their ability to access the Internet and their ability to communicate in a language of wider communication.

The main limitation to global communication is mundane and concerns the access to the Internet. It encompasses basic skills (being able to read and write, being able to use hardware



and software, being able to orient oneself on the web) and economic and political aspects (availability depending on the existing ICT infrastructure, costs of hardware and communication, regulations regarding access to Internet etc.). Differences in access are known as the digital divide. Originally a social divide based on gender, age and social class (with young highly educated white young men being the first online in Western countries) that has been closed to a large extent, the digital divide is now mostly a geographical divide between rich countries with a good infrastructure and relatively low threshold for individual access, and poor countries with a poor infrastructure and relatively high access costs. In these poor countries, access is generally limited to well off groups in urban areas. At the national level, notwithstanding differences between places, social-economic groups, etc within each country, interconnectivity varies immensely ranging in 2002 between 647.9 per 1000 inhabitants in Iceland to 0.5 in Tajikistan and Myanmar, from 450.5 in high income OECD countries to 9.6 in Sub-Saharan Africa (Table 1). Disparities are larger between countries of different income groups than when they are grouped according to the human development index. Table 1 shows huge changes since 1999 when the world average was the score of the access poorest countries in 2002 (it is 200 times higher three years later).

Table 1

Another aspect complicates global interaction online: this is the linguistic diversity. Estimates of the number of existing languages vary between five and six thousands, and it is widely appreciated that the vast majority of these languages are spoken by very small numbers of people. A small group of languages has a strong presence both in numbers and in institutional strength because they are state languages: they are used by at least one state to perform bureaucratic functions and/or as the language of communication in the public sphere. These languages are as unequal as the states that support them: some are spoken by a large population (Mandarin Chinese, Urdu and Hindi, Russian) others are not (Danish, Finnish).

In addition, certain languages are used languages in transnational communication (such as Swahili, Arabic or English). Among these languages, one can distinguish languages of regional communication (such as Spanish in Latin America, French in West Africa, German in Central Europe, Arabic in North Africa) and English as the language of global communication. Since the Paris Peace Conference following the Great War, English is a language of international diplomacy; it is the language of international trade and finance; and since World War 2 the language of international science. Still, despite the impressive spread of English as language of wider communication (see De Swaan 2001 vs. Phillipson 2003), English is not accessible to the large majority of the world population. It is even the case in the countries where it has a formal status such as India, South Africa, and many former colonies where it has been institutionalised as state language. In total, it is estimated that about 375 million people have English as first language, another 375 million as second language (because it is the language of administration in their country) and about 750 million knows English as foreign language (Graddol 2000:10-11) , amounting altogether for about one sixth of the world population.



Linguistic diversity is a practical problem but also a political problem, due to the historical and ideological ties between languages and national identities. In most nationalist ideologies nation state and language are intertwined and monolingualism of the state is a given. In the process of state building and nation building, the state language has often been promoted and even imposed by force on citizens at the expense of other regional or minority languages. As a result, monolingualism is often seen a norm for individuals too in nationalist ideologies, as they are members of a national community. Fortunately however, many individuals are of course able to speak more than one language and to function as mediator between languages and language groups. Communication between language groups depends on these mediators.

Because of the connection between language and identity, language choice for interlinguistic communication is a power issue. Native speakers of the language chosen for interlinguistic communication are seen as benefiting from extra status, power and influence. For that very reason, many projects have emerged for neutral, constructed languages as alternative to the natural language of the powerful, Esperanto being the most successful one over the past century.

With globalisation, problems of intercultural communication seem more urgent than ever, concerning not only the limited circles of diplomats and long distance traders or specific localities where language groups coexist. There are several strategies to deal with interlinguistic communication: you can rely on the mediation of translators and interpreters, you can learn a foreign language, you can rely on technical solutions (such as automatic translation) or you can withdraw from interaction (Mamadouh 2002). This is true too of interactions through the new ICTs: while confronting with a webpage in a language you don't know, you can ask someone to translate the text on the page for you, you can learn the language, you can process the text through an automatic translation site, or you can close the page. Originally Internet emerged and developed in the United States and was an English medium. Increasingly other languages became more and more visible online, especially after technical improvements made it possible to deal with diacritic signs (ñ ç é etc), non-Latin alphabets and non alphabetic languages. URL can now be transcribed in other alphabets too.

The relative strength of languages is still much different online than offline. According to a Global Reach data from September 2003, the main language online is by far English with 43% of the world online population, followed by Chinese (11%), Japanese (10%), Spanish (8%), German (7%), Korean and French (4% each), Italian , Portuguese and Russia (3% each) and Dutch (2%)¹ The predominance of English is even more overwhelming when one looks at web content: 68.3% web pages world wide in English, followed by 5.9% in Japanese, 5.8% in German , 3.9% in Chinese, 3.0% in French and 2.4% in Russian.²

¹ The remaining world population is labelled as 2% ‘Scandinavian’(sic!) and 8% other. Source: Global Reach September 2003, as reported at

<http://www.gemeinsamlernen.de/euconet/background/statistic?language=en&part=2> (last accessed October 2004).

² The remaining languages scoring above 1% were Russian, Italian Portuguese and Korean, with 4.6% others. Source: Global Reach September 2003, as reported at

<http://www.gemeinsamlernen.de/euconet/background/statistic?language=en&part=2> (last accessed October 2004)



The issue at stake in this paper is whether and how a grassroots network ambitioning a global scope copes with difficulties linked to the digital divide and to the linguistic diversity.

3. Open publishing at Indymedia

Indymedia is short for independent media, the Indymedia network consists of a global network of alternative and independent media centres that provide a platform for local and global news that might be neglected by mainstream media dominated by state and commercial interests. Internet as a new medium is central to the grievances articulated by Indymedia activists. Their main concern can be described as the closure of the communication commons (Kitt 2003). They are upset about the commercialisation of the Internet. While mass media systems are predominantly national, and therefore difficulties to maintain independent or alternative media vary nationally, the Internet, framed as a global common, refers to global grievances common to all IMCs. Internet related grievances address the power of corporations controlling software packages, and states enforcing copyright laws for both software and contents.

The solution put forward by Indymedia and likeminded media activists, encompasses free software, copyleft, and open publishing. All websites are run with open source software, hence the expression ‘Reclaim the streets, reclaim the code’ putting the reclaiming of the digital code by media activists on a par with the reclaiming of the streets by urban protesters. Free software (such as Linux and the GNU projects) is their response to the privatisation of information by multinational corporations. With open source software, the code is public; it can be improved by anyone, but further developments have to be made public. The code is the collective good of those willing to use and improve it. Copyleft is a procedure to protect software or content as public goods: copyrights laws are used to prevent privatisation

Open publishing is the key technological innovation that characterises Indymedia websites. This innovation originates from the wish to publicise global protests in alternative ways and goes back to June 1999, when the Peoples’ Global Action (PGA) organised its second Global Action Day on June 18 (J18) the day a G8 meeting was held in Cologne. To cover J18 activities in Sydney, the Australian action group CAT (CAT for ‘community activist technology’ also known as [Cat@lyst](http://www.cat.org.au)³) experimented with software that enables people to put their reports online without the mediation of an editing team. This software, known as open publishing, was further developed by Australian and American techies (i.e. technical activists) to cover the protests against the third ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle six months later and put into practice in the first Indymedia IMC established for that occasion.⁴ Over time, different versions of open publishing software (active, sf-active, DadaIMC, MIR, IMCslash...) have been developed in the Indymedia network and customised for numerous languages (including Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, Russian and Japanese), and are in use on different websites.

³ ‘Low tech grass roots net access for real people. Pedestrians, public transport and pushbikes on the information super hypeway’ <http://www.cat.org.au> .

⁴ <http://www.cat.org.au/cat/webcast-nuggets.html>; <http://www.cat.org.au/maffew/cat/madhava-maffew.html> <http://www.cat.org.au/maffew/cat/imc-rave.html> (all consulted in March 2003).



The main characteristics of open publishing is that volunteers maintain the software and the public act as publishers, while media producers might take care of editorial parts, the editing of the newswire and the producing of other media products. The visitors of the websites are encouraged to write their own news as demonstrate slogans often found on Indymedia sites: ‘don’t hate the media, be the media’⁵ ‘don’t hate the media, become the media’ ‘everyone is a witness, everyone is a journalist’. In short: DIY (do it yourself).

The open publishing websites have run into several problems. The misuse of open publishing has prompted the need for editing/moderating the newswire despite the fact that it is conflicting with the open publishing philosophy. The newswires and the many websites have also produced an overwhelming quantity of information, causing information overload. Both problems are addressed with editorial policies developed by each local website. Generally there is some control afterwards: irrelevant messages (geographically or linguistically), test messages, duplicates, commercial messages, spam and obviously incorrect messages are removed, as well as contributions that transgress certain rules (racism, antisemitism, homophobia, sexism, ageism...). On many websites, posts are visible before they are ‘validated’ by the gatekeepers (it can take several days as the organisation depends on volunteers) but they are identifiable as such. On most websites, rejected messages remain available in a special section ‘hidden articles’. Most editing teams aim at taking decision by consensus, which is generally done pragmatically by putting a short deadline (48 hours for example) to protest against the decision of an individual.

To address the information overkill, editorial policies discourage double posts, including the posting of the same message on different websites (links can be used to draw the attention of visitors of one local site to a relevant post on another site) and there have been experiments with selecting mechanisms, allowing the readers to rate the posts and using these appreciations to rank the messages on the newswire, putting the most valued messages at the top, instead of in order of posting. To tackle the practical and democratic problems involved in the editing of the newswire, techies are now advocating open editing⁶: software that enable the public to carry the editing tasks as hiding inappropriate messages and categorizing, prioritizing relevant messages, and even editing and improving contents.

The websites generally consist of three frames. The left frame consists of a list of links, sometime local links sorting features according to topics, but also links to other activists’ sites and other Indymedia sites. Typically this frame provides a worldwide list of Indymedia sites⁷. The right frame consists of the newswire. On the global site it is available in two versions, one with features posted by any contributors and one with features posted by the local IMCs. On local sites they are often two newswires: ‘local interest’ and ‘elsewhere’. The main frame, the middle column, consists of posted features selected by the responsible IMC for their informational appeal (topic, relevance, research done, style, etc.). Indymedia doesn’t keep

⁵ A saying attributed to Jello Biafra, the former lead instigator of the American punk band The Dead Kennedys and media activist.

⁶ Arnison, M., 2002, *Open publishing is the same as free software*, (March 2001, revised December 2002), <http://www.cat.org.au/maffew/cat/openpub.html> (consulted March 23, 2003).

⁷ Although these lists are not always an exact copy of the one provided on the global site (see below).



track of visitors but does publish estimates of traffic: about 100,000 page views a day for the global site (as of April 2003), between 500,000 and 2 million page views a day for the network (and an estimated 5 million page views during key events, such as the Genoa G8 protests in summer 2001).⁸

4 A geography of the Indymedia network: North/South

The Indymedia network consists in September 2004 of one global website and 140 local sites. The first Indymedia website was established in Seattle in november 1999 to cover the protests at he upcoming ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Although subsequent websites were also established to cover exceptional events such as meetings of the Worldbank, party conventions and the like, most local websites emerged from local initiatives, without waiting for such an occasion and their main objective is to serve their local community.

By the end of 2000, one year after the creation of the first site for ‘the battle for Seattle’ in November 1999, , there were over 30 Indymedia local websites. That number grew further to 60 by the end of 2001 (Hyde 2002); over hundred by the end of 2002, about 125 by the end of 2003 (Mamadouh 2004) and about 140 at the end of 2004. This expansion is not linear, as some local sites sometimes terminated their activities, for various organisational reasons, for example in summer 2003 Finland disappear from the map. Prague was established first to cover the World Bank in September 2000, disappeared later and was re-established in 2002 as a local website, but was ‘frozen from 1 July 2004 because no collective seemed to exist anymore’⁹.

The present situation (September 2004) is described in Table 2, using the Indymedia labelling of sites and regions. This table features the sites acknowledged on the global site. A few are not functioning anymore (for example in September 2004 Nigeria and Ottawa), others sites do exist but are not acknowledged on this global list: they have been removed from the list because they are not updated any more (Finland since summer 2003, Prague since summer 2004) or they are not included yet because they have not completed the procedure to become part of the network, for example the Iraqi site *Al Muajaha* (literally The Witness).¹⁰

Local sites are named after a place: a locality, framing the local scale as the scale of territorial communities of very various size, ranging from places as large as Russia to cities as small as Danbury, Connecticut. Half of the local websites are named after a city or an urban agglomeration such as the San Francisco Bay Area. This is true of all sites in Australia, many sites in Northern America, and one third of the European sites. Others are named after a country, a Member State of the European Union, an American state or a Canadian province. Few are named after regions, sometime transnational ones, or after contested territories such as Euskal Herria or Palestine (Mamadouh 2004).

⁸ Estimates in Indymedia FAQ in Indymedia 2004: p 21.

⁹ <http://prague.indymedia.org/> (last accessed October 2004).

¹⁰ at <http://www.almuajaha.com/> (last accessed October 2004).



Table 2

The 140 local websites are unevenly distributed across the world.

The vast majority of the websites (113/140 = 81%) are located in the global North

53 websites represent localities in the United States (38% of the total or 47% of the northern websites)

12 in Canada

7 in Australia and New Zealand

40 in Europe (29%)

1 in Japan

The 27 websites (19%) in the global South include:

15 websites representing localities in South America (including Puerto Rico which is part of the United States) (11% of the total and 56% of the southern websites).

4 in Africa (including Canarias, which is part of Spain)

3 in West Asia (Lebanon, Palestine, Israel),

5 in Asia (2 Indian, 2 Filipino and 1 Indonesian websites).

The online geography of the Indymedia network can be compared to the geography of Internet access. If we assume that a Indymedia website needs a certain amount of potential users, we should look at the size of the population online in each country, considering access to Internet and the absolute size of the population online. The first indicator (the number of Internet users per 1,000 inhabitants in 2002) pertains to the idea that the more common access to Internet is, the more likely the presence of an Indymedia site, the second (the online population in 2004) to the idea that a minimum audience is needed for a site.¹¹

Table 3 and 4

Table 3 shows the number of Indymedia sites in each state,¹² the number of Internet users per 1,000 inhabitants in 2002 and the size of the online population in 2004.¹³ Table 4 provides the same information for states with two or more websites, ranked by the number of websites. The top state, the US, has both the largest number of sites (by far, almost four times more than number 2: Canada), the largest online population (by far, twice as big as number 2: China) and a high Internet access though not the highest in the world (it scores fourth behind Iceland, Sweden and South Korea). Still, wiredness doesn't explain disparities. Canada, Spain and Australia score high with numerous Indymedia sites, while they have a middle-size online population, combined for Spain with a moderate access to Internet. Most surprising is the presence of Bolivia with two sites (Qollasuyu is counted here as a Bolivian site) with a small

¹¹ Sources: Internet users per 1000 inhabitant: UNDP statistics, available at http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/indic/indic_115_1_1.html (accessed October 2004); Online population 2004: Computer Industry Almanac or CIA's World Factbook, available on http://www.clickz.com/stats/big_picture/geographics/print.php/5911_151151 (last accessed 23 September 2004).

¹² For the purpose of this table, certain crossborder sites have been arbitrarily ranked under one state and not the other: Euskal Herria and Estecho/Madiaq as Spanish sites, Qollasuyu under Peruvian site. Canarias is counted as a Spanish site; Puerto Rico is counted separately.

¹³ See note 10.



online population (78,000!) and a very limited access to Internet (32.4 per 1,000 inhabitants in 2002, well below the world average of 99.4).

Among the countries with only one website (see Table 3), diversity is great too, with some national website serving a very small online population (Andorra with 24,500 and Cameroon with 45,000 are the smallest) or functioning in states with limited access to Internet (3.5 internet users per 1000 inhabitants in Nigeria, 3.8 in Cameroon, 30.4 in Palestine).

Table 5a, 5b

Table 5a and 5b include countries with a large online population and/or high interconnectivity but no Indymedia site. 52 states have an online population of one million or more: 16 have no Indymedia site (Table 5a), 36 others do (= 69%). States with a very large population online (more than 10 millions) but no site are China, South Korea, and Malaysia. Further large online population not served by a site include other Asian countries (Taiwan, Thailand, and Hong Kong), Muslim countries (Saudi-Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan), one Latin American country (Venezuela) and no less than five European countries (Ukraine, Denmark, Czech Republic, Finland, and Slovakia). In the Czech Republic and Finland, Indymedia sites have existed in the past.

31 states have a high access to Internet: 250 internet users or more per 1,000 habitants, 12 have no indymedia site (Table 5b), the others do (= 61%). Five states with more than half the population using Internet (a score of 500 or more) have no site: there are two Asian countries (Korea and Singapore) and three Nordic countries (Iceland, Denmark and Finland). Further states with a high Internet access but no site include other Asian countries (Hong Kong, Malaysia, and most likely Taiwan although no data is available in our source), smaller European countries (Slovenia, Luxembourg, Estonia, and Malta) and the United Arab Emirates.

Table 6a, 6b

The presence of a large online population and/or a high access to Internet is a good predictor of the presence of one or more Indymedia sites (Table 6a and 6b). Still this geography is only partly explained by differential access to the Internet. There is no need for a large online population to warrant a website (Andorra has one) and a large online population does not guarantee online visibility (China has no website). The factor of crucial importance is the political opportunity structure, especially political freedoms (freedom of speech, freedom of association) and political culture. Political culture pertains to the strength and style of collective actions, and also includes the scale at which activists organise themselves: local activism is more developed in North America and in Australia, than in Europe where IMC are often organised nationally (which does not preclude of the existence of local IMCs, but those cooperate to operate one national website). Because of the presence of local sites for different urban or regional areas, Northern American sites are numerous and therefore Northern American states are over-represented, as is Australia, when their share of sites is compared to their estimated share in the world population of internet users. The same is true of Bolivia, Spain, Mexico and South Africa (Table 7).



Table 7

The lack of political freedoms and of social movement traditions explains the absence of China in Indymedia, despite the huge presence of that country online (an estimated 11% of the online population) and the poor representation of Japan. Considering the vivacity of the Indian grassroots movement, including media activism such as Sarai, the poor representation of India is the most surprising result that might be best explained by a poor access to Internet. Also surprising is the poor record of Indymedia in Nordic countries, despite the combination of high access (and therefore sizeable online population) and an established democratic political culture: Sweden and Norway have a site, Denmark, Finland and Iceland don't..

The geography of the Indymedia network shows a strong overrepresentation of the North, and as such it mirrors the global digital divide between North and South. Nevertheless there is a significant numbers of websites run by and for activists in the South. This allows us to scrutinise how Indymedia deals both globally and locally with two barriers to global communication: digital divide and linguistic diversity, and to assess differences between local sites in the North and those in the South.

5. The North/South divide: Configurations between online and offline activism

Online activism is evidently severely curtailed where access to the Internet is limited. As a result one might expect IMCs to develop different strategies for their website in countries where many have access to Internet than in countries where access is limited. In countries where freedoms of expression and organisation are heavily limited, media activists won't even be able to establish and maintain local IMCs.

The expansion to the South has been seen as a test for the network (Halleck 2003). Some Indymedia volunteers have tried to promote the Indymedia model in the Southern hemisphere by being actively involved in the establishment of local IMCs and the transfer of skills and of hardware. Caravans with representatives from Argentina, Peru, Brazil, USA Germany and Italy went through Latin America in winter 2002, visiting the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in January, Buenos Aires, AND Bolivia.¹⁴ In 2004, a workshop was organised in Dakar by the IGAP (= the Indymedia Growth in Africa Project) funded by Urbana-Champaign IMC in Illinois, USA. The project also included the printing of an *Indymedia Handbook in Spring 2004* to communicate tips and experiences with the Indymedia 'method' to activists in Internet poor environment. The Handbook, entitled *The IMC; A New model* is available online too, as a pdf file.¹⁵

¹⁴ The idea of a caravan is not specific to Indymedia: the Peoples Global Action (PGA) network has formed a peoples caravan crossing the Latin American continent in 2001, starting in Cochabamba, Bolivia, it brought together people from 15 countries (including South Africa, New Zealand, Germany India Nepal etc.) and visited Peru and Ecuador (see also Featherstone 2003).

¹⁵ See http://print.indymedia.org/news/2004/02/1729_comment.php (accessed in October 2004).



The dependence of local IMCs on Western IMCs (especially on American ones) for technical matters has been a hot issue inside Indymedia. While it makes it possible to evade local limitations (in terms of the skills of volunteers, hardware and Internet control) it also makes the network vulnerable, as showed the seizure of a server in the UK in October 2004 that paralysed more than twenty websites all over the world (ranging from Ambazonia to Uruguay, including Belgium, some of the French and Spanish sites and some US sites, as well as the radio website, hampering the retransmission of interventions to the European Social Forum in London).

The different context in terms of access has consequences for the ways local IMCs use the Internet. For IMCs set up to cover global events, such as the original website in Seattle in 1999, the Internet is crucial to cover the events and counter events, for a global audience. Hundreds of volunteers from all over the world are gathering in that locality are gathering and producing news, feeding the site with features (text, pictures, videos, sounds). Apart from the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (2001, 2002, 2003) and Mumbai (2004) and the WTO ministerial Cancun (2003), most events occasioning intense Indymedia coverage (G8, WTO, World Bank, IMF, FTAA, EU, both summits and counter manifestations) are organised in the North.

IMCs set up to service local communities in the North tend to use Internet extensively both to organise themselves and to circulate alternative news. By contrast, IMCs set up to service local communities in the South can't count on easy access to Internet of their audience. Their main activities are offline media (print, radio, video), they run the local organisation through meetings (meetings in physical space) and use Internet to communicate with other IMCs and to inform the rest of the world about local issues and conflicts: their websites are windows to the world to transfer information about local issues to the rest of the world.¹⁶ Indeed while the hardware software e-skill and donations are transferred from North to South, Southern activists have transferred from Latin America and South Africa have transferred collective action skills and much content (for example putting land evictions, water privatisation and IMF policies on the agenda) to the North.

In conclusion, the internet divide between the North, where the infrastructure is satisfactory and the threshold to access the Internet is relatively low for individuals and the South where the infrastructure is implies different uses of the Internet. While in the North, Internet is used to connect individuals in the same or different localities; it is in the South mainly used to connect collectives in different localities.

¹⁶ The most extreme case is probably the Ambazonian site at <http://ambazonia.indymedia.org>



6. Another North/South divide: linguistic diversity on Indymedia websites

To operate a global network Indymedia has to deal with linguistic diversity. This section analyses the linguistic diversity on Indymedia websites and the strategies developed to accommodate it. It considers first the global site and the Indymedia translation project, then it turns to local sites.

Linguistic diversity on the global site

Generally speaking, the global site of Indymedia expresses a strong sense of linguistic diversity. To analyse it, one needs to distinguish between different forms of linguistic diversity: the interface and the content (e.g. the features).

The global site presently offers an interface in eight languages:

- Deutsch (German)
- (Greek)
- english
- español (Spanish)
- français (French)
- italiano (Italian)
- nederlands (Dutch)
- português (Portuguese)

All are European languages. Greek is the most recent addition (summer 2004) and the only language not using the Latin script. The seven other languages are all European languages with a colonial past, but some of them are not widely assessed as language of transnational communication: German and Italian are currently learnt as foreign language in other European countries (especially German) but much less than English French and even Spanish, but they are hardly known in former German or Italian colonies. Dutch is spoken in the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles, Belgium and Surinam (a former colony) and is related to Afrikaans (South Africa), but is hardly learnt as foreign language in European countries (except in neighbouring German Länder) and is hardly spoken in its largest former colony Indonesia; Portuguese is more transnational, considering the relations between lusophone countries (Portugal and its former colonies). Finally Spanish, French and English can be seen as language of wider communication, although the spread of English is much more global than the spread of France and Spanish.

Table 8, 9, 10, 11

Table 8 mentions the most spoken languages as first language and Table 9 the same information taking other speakers into account. Both shows that most of the largest mother tongues (Mandarin, Bengali, Hindi, Russian, Japanese, Wu, Javanese...) are ignored by Indymedia, the same it true for important second languages like Arabic and Punjabi. By contrast, three Indymedia global languages are not on that list (Italian, Dutch and Greek). Similarly three of the six official languages of the United Nations and on the global site, three are not (Table 10) confirming the Western bias (European and Americas) of Indymedia.



Compared to the online presence of languages (Table 11), Indymedia is using all European languages representing 2% of the online population or more of the webpages, but none of the Asian languages: Japanese, Chinese and Korean.

Multilingualism at Indymedia is more than an interface in different languages; it also applies to the content. The url of each linguistic version is a sublevel of the global url <http://www.indymedia.org/> for example <http://www.indymedia.org/fr/> for French and <http://www.indymedia.org/de/> for German. At <http://www.indymedia.org/> the interface is in English but each feature is visible in the original language in which it has been posted. For each feature, it is possible to click on translations, or to add a translation. So each user is a potential translator. Once a language for the interface is selected (English included) the navigation bars are translated in that language, and features are provided in their translation in the selected language – or in the original language if no translation is available.

Still the diverse languages are not equally represented. Most features were post originally in English, but some features have other languages as original language, especially one of the seven other ‘global languages’: Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese or Spanish. The number of translations available online is highly variable, but often rises to five or six within a couple of days after the original post.

Apart from the eight ‘global’ languages, languages encountered in summer 2004 (as language either of the original post or of an available translation) include:

- Türkçe (Turkish)
- Suomi (Finnish)
- Bulgarian
- Srpsko-hrvatski (Servo-Croatian)
- Esperanto
- Asturiano (Asturian)
- Euskera (Basque)
- Català (Catalan)
- Castellano (Castilian, this label is often used for post from Spain, as opposed to Spanish used by Latin American posters).

It is important to note the presence of two languages using another script than the Latin one (Bulgarian), of an international language (Esperanto) and of regional languages (all from Spain).

Next to the main feature articles, the main page of the global site consists of a newswire in the right hand frame. There are actually two newswires on the global site: one with features posted by the local IMCs and the open newswire with features posted by individuals. The feature newswire is linguistically more diverse. English is dominant but the other seven ‘global’ languages are present as well as Serbo-Croat. Their presence depends mainly of the activism of local sites. In the open newswire, English is predominant but the seven other ‘global’ languages are represented too, especially Spanish, German and Italian. Linguistic patterns on the global website appear to be somewhat cyclical (for example a couple of translation in Asturiano in a row), indicating the temporary strong input of one or two



activists in certain period ebbing away when this person is unable to maintain her or his translation input.

The linguistic diversity on the global site is the result of a sustained effort to enable multilingual inputs. While translation is depending as much on volunteer contributions as the original postings themselves, one has to acknowledge the efforts of the Indymedia network to enhance multilingualism and to facilitate it. This is visible in the development of interface in different languages and in the development of software that enable the posting of translations. In addition, Indymedia started in 2003 a translation project, with its own website at <http://translations.indymedia.org/>.

The translation project aimed at easing the management of the translation needs. Software has been developed to enable contributors to post a feature in need of a translation and to announce their translation needs (form which language to which language(s)). The software makes it possible for volunteers to claim a translation (to avoid double work), to post it when ready and to revise translations done by others. While on the global site translation depends on the volunteers that browse the site, the translation project aims at bringing translation needs to the attention of potential translators.

The interface of the translation site is available in nine languages¹⁷: English, German, Spanish, French, Norwegian, Portuguese, Polish, Russian and Catalan. Translations can be searched in 17 languages.¹⁸ This list includes four languages using another script than the Latin one (Russian, Greek, Arabic, and Korean), one regional language (Catalan) and two South American indigenous languages (Aymara Quechua). This list suggests however much more linguistic diversity than there is in on the site. Searching features by languages gives a less diverse picture (table 12). The ‘European’ languages are in used, and four major languages are clearly predominant: French, German, Spanish, and above all English. Next to that top group, Italian and Portuguese are used moderately; Dutch is rare, and Greek even more, surprisingly if you consider they are among the interface languages of the global site.

In conclusion, the global website and the network demonstrate a strong commitment to linguistic diversity, but the factual linguistic diversity is limited to a small number of languages and biased towards European languages. English is largely predominant, with Spanish as second world language (as ‘third-world language’ as Catalans sometimes jest)¹⁹ due to a strong Latin American input. Therefore the global website is of limited use for the five billions peoples who do not read English, even if English only speakers might feel frustrating at the rare occasions when they encounters posts not available in an English translation.

¹⁷ Situation in September 2004.

¹⁸ This was the situation in September 2004; in June the choice was limited to the seven ‘global’ languages (by then Greek was not an interface language on the global site yet).

¹⁹ I am thankful to my colleague Jan Mansvelt Beck for drawing my attention to such anecdotes.



Linguistic diversity on selected local sites

By contrast, the linguistic diversity is more limited on local sites and it depends largely on the local linguistic situation. It is not surprising as the local sites are mainly targeting a local audience. Nevertheless, considering the scope of transnational migration and the huge linguistic diversity in metropolitan areas across the world, one could expect multilingualism on most local sites. One possible reason for this absence is that migrants are not much mobilised in Indymedia circles.

At the local scale, one has again to distinguish between different forms of linguistic diversity: the interface and the content (.eg. the features). A local site might offer several linguistic versions for the interface. The linguistic diversity in the content might be sequential or synchronous. The first mean that different linguistic versions (featuring either different items or translated items) are available, the second that contributions in different languages are juxtaposed. In that case linguistic diversity is more visible.

In the North, the differences are is important between local websites.

- North American sites are generally monolingual: English is hegemonic. By contrast the Puerto Rico website (here counted in the South) uses Spanish only. Noticeable exceptions are the Quebec website²⁰ and the website for the San Francisco Bay Area. The Quebec site exists in three versions: English, French and Spanish. The contents of three versions are different. English and French are the official language of Canada but the addition of Spanish is likely to be linked to NAFTA more than to the strong presence of a Spanish speaking immigrant communities. The Indybay site features a Spanish section (presented as a section among thematic sections) which contains articles in Spanish, mainly about Latin American issues (when on that page, the newswire also provides items in Spanish). The site for New York City offers an interface in Spanish that it didn't work during our digital fieldwork. Spanish is surprisingly absent on websites of southern states characterised by a large presence of Spanish in public life.
- The Australian and the New-Zealandish sites are monolingual in English. The site for Adelaide offers a selection of languages (Japanese, Norwegian, Swedish and Taiwanese Chinese) suggesting linguistic diversity, but selected another language than English has no effect on the interface or the content. The features are all in English.
- On the Japanese site the interface is English Japanese or Chinese (Taiwanese script) mixed together, and so is the content. This points at the input of expatriates in the Japanese IMC.
- In Europe, linguistic diversity consists of juxtaposed monolingualism. Most site are monolingual, but in different languages (Catalan for Andorra and La Plana, Bulgarian for Bulgaria, Serbo-Croatian²¹ for Croatia and Belgrade, French for the French²² sites,

²⁰ The Montreal website was referring to the Quebec website. (September 2004).

²¹ Despite the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the subsequent claim of the existence of two separate languages Croatian and Serbian, the term Serbo-Croatian is in use in Indymedia. Both the Croatian and the Belgrade site use the Latin script.

²² The newswire of the site for Paris includes news items in English, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and German)



Italian for Italy, English for Ireland²³ and for British sites, Polish for Poland²⁴, Portuguese for Portugal Russian for Russia, Swedish for Sweden). Some sites provide an interface in English, next to the national language, and English translation of the features (Germany, Athens and Thessaloniki, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Galicia, Turkey). The site for Belgium is available in English, Dutch and French (but not in German, the third national language) but most features are in Dutch²⁵ The site for Cyprus is available in Turkish²⁶, Greek and English, and features are translated.²⁷ The site for Barcelona offers an interface in three languages: Catalan, Castilian, and English (and features translated in all three languages), the site for Euskal Herria in three languages: Basque, Castilian, and French; and the site for Estrecho Madiaq in four languages: English, French, Spanish, and Arabic (but the Arabic interface did not function and most features were in Spanish). The most multilingual is the site for Switzerland with a choice between three (national) languages for the interface (Italian, French and German) and two versions in each language: features in the selected language only (including translations of features originally posted in another language) or features in all languages mixed together.

In the South, the findings are contrasted too.

- The Indian site (the Indian url leads to the Mumbai site, so there is actually one site) is in English. There were not features in Hindi or another Indian language. The Filipino sites have an interface in English and most features are in English. The Indonesian site was out of order at the time of the survey: a message announcing a restart was post in Indonesian and English.²⁸ Whether this points at the input of expatriates (as in Japan) or at local activists with an English orientation is difficult to tell²⁹.
- The African sites are monolingual, in English for South Africa and Ambazonia,³⁰ in Spanish for the Canarias. The site for Ambazonia (or South Cameroons, a former German then British colony, now incorporated in a state with French as official language) offer an interface in German and French, but they didn't work.
- The majority of the Latin American sites are monolingual in Spanish, but others express a linguistic diversity related to the acknowledgement of indigenous cultures or of transnational communication. The sites for Qollasuyu, Ecuador and Chile offer an interface in English. The site for Chiapas has a bilingual interface Spanish / English and contain features in Spanish or in both languages. The Bolivian site offers an interface in no less than five languages: Aymara, English, Spanish, Guarani and Quechua, three of them indigenous languages, but only few items are translated into other languages than Spanish. Finally the last exception is the Brazilian site with an interface in Portuguese, Spanish, English and Esperanto, and does provide features

²³ It is possible to search for features in Irish on the Irish site, but none was found when this search system was used.

²⁴ On the Polish site, some items are available with a translation into English.

²⁵ The site for West-Vlaanderen is all Dutch.

²⁶ The interface of the Turkish language site is English.

²⁷ Apart from the function of English as an international language, it also reflect the fact that the former colonial power, the UK is with Greece and Turkey a guaranteeing power.

²⁸ <http://jakarta.indymedia.org/> (October 2004).

²⁹ A small proportion of well off Indians has English as first language.

³⁰ The link to the site for Nigeria was a dead link in summer 2004, but it functioned in English.



translated in these languages. It is possible to connect this external orientation to the role of Brazilian activists in the global grassroots as exemplified in the organisation of the World Social Forum in January 2001, and since then every year except in 2004 when it was in India).

- Last but not least, the sites for the Middle East are the most multilingual: the site for Lebanon with English, Arabic and French (but the French interface didn't work and there are hardly any features in French); the site for Palestine operates with an English and an Arabic version, the site for Israel with an English and a Hebrew version.

In conclusion, most local websites are monolingual, except where multilingualism is locally important (see the illustrations for the splash pages of certain multilingual pages), while some local sites include languages of wider communication as a sign of transnational orientation (mostly English, sometime Spanish, and only once Esperanto). In some cases the local languages are poorly represented (Japan, Philippines, Indonesia, India, South Africa). The survey reveals also some technical limitations; in other words there is more linguistic diversity promised, than delivered. On the whole, collectively, the local sites represent a much wider palette of languages than the global site (see Table 8-11) although all Asian languages (except Japanese and Mandarin on the Japanese site, and Arabic and Hebrew in West Asia) are neglected, even those with a large online population and formal status at the UN. Still the linguistic diversity is quite impressive with the presence of many smaller languages.

7. Conclusion

The Indymedia network demonstrates many efforts to overcome the digital and linguistic divide between North and South. It has developed the most successfully in Latin America where Internet access is not that limited, with Spanish and Portuguese, and where collective action and social movements are strong, and with some success in South Africa, but remains quite foreign in Asia, with a poor record for Asian languages on the global site and even on the few local sites in Asia. In India, limited Internet access seems to hamper the connections of an active social movement sector to the global grassroots online, while in other Asian states (especially in China, South Korea, Malaysia) the political opportunity structure constraints political mobilisation in the first place.

Among the many challenges the network faces at the beginning of the sixth year of its existence (sustainability of the consensus seeking procedures in an expanding network, of the volunteer model, NGO-isation, technical problems linked to increasing state control and increasing size and traffic, ...), the divide between North and South remains an important test for Indymedia: supporting initiatives in the South without succumbing to the aid donor syndrome and encouraging global communication without promoting English are here the main aspects of its quandary.



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Tables

Table 1: Internet users (per 1,000 people): Disparities in Internet access across the world (UN categorization):

	1999	2002
All developing countries	(.)	40.9
Least developed countries	0	2.8
Arab States	0	28.0
East Asia and the Pacific	(.)	60.9
Latin America and the Caribbean	0	81.2
South Asia	0	14.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	0	9.6
Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS	0	71.8
OECD	2.6	383.1
High-income OECD	3.2	450.5
High human development	2.5	382.6
Medium human development	0	37.3
Low human development	0	5.9
High income	3.1	445.8
Middle income	0	59.5
Low income	0	13.0
World	0.5	99.4

Source: UNDP statistics, available at http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/indic/indic_115_1_1.html (accessed October 2004).



Table 2: Local sites mentioned on the global site (situation September 2004)

[africa]	nice	buffalo
ambazonia	norway	charlottesville
canarias	oost-vlaanderen	chicago
estrechio / madiaq	paris	cleveland
nigeria	poland	colorado
south Africa	portugal	danbury, ct
	romania	dc
[canada]	russia	hawaii
alberta	scotland	houston
hamilton	switzerland	hudson mohawk
maritimes	thessaloniki	idaho
montreal	united kingdom	ithaca
ontario	west vlaanderen	kansas city
ottawa		la
quebec	[latin america]	madison
thunder bay	argentina	maine
vancouver	bolivia	michigan
victoria	brasil	milwaukee
windsor	chiapas	minneapolis/st. paul
winnipeg	chile	new hampshire
	colombia	new jersey
[east asia]	ecuador	new mexico
japan	mexico	new orleans
manila	peru	north carolina
qc	puerto rico	north texas
	qollasuyu	nyc
[europe]	rosario	oklahoma
andorra	sonora	philadelphia
antwerpen	tijuana	pittsburgh
athens	uruguay	portland
austria		richmond
barcelona	[oceania]	rochester
belgium	adelaide	rogue valley
belgrade	aotearoa	san diego
bristol	brisbane	san francisco
bulgaria	darwin	san francisco bay area
croatia	jakarta	santa barbara imc
cyprus	manila	santa cruz, ca
estrecho / madiaq	melbourne	seattle
euskal herria	perth	st louis
galiza	qc	tallahassee-red hills
germany	sydney	tennessee
hungary		urbana-champaign
imc sverige	[south asia]	utah
ireland	india	vermont
istanbul	mumbai	western mass
italy		worcester
la plana	[united states]	
liege	arizona	[west asia]
lille	arkansas	beirut
madrid	atlanta	israel
marseille	austin	palestine
nantes	baltimore	
netherlands	boston	

Source: www.indymedia.org (September 2004)



Table 3: Number of Indymedia sites and internet users, by country

Region	State	Internet users per 1000 inhabitants, 2002	Online Population 2004
Africa	Nigeria	3.5	100,000
	South Africa	68.2	4,780,000
	Cameroon	3.8	45,000
Canada	Canada (12)	512.8	20,450,000
East Asia	Japan	448.9	78,050,000
Europe	Andorra	n.d.	24,500
	Austria	409.4	4,650,000
	Belgium (5)	328.3	4,870,000
	Bulgaria	80.8	1,610,000
	Croatia	180.4	480,000
	Cyprus	293.7	154,000
	France (5)	313.8	25,470,000
	Germany	411.9	41,880,000
	Greece (2)	157.7	2,710,000
	Hungary	157.6	2,940,000
	Ireland	270.9	1,810,000
	Italy	352.4	25,530,000
	Netherlands	506.3	9,790,000
	Norway	502.6	3,030,000
	Poland	230.0	10,040,000
	Portugal	193.5	6,090,000
	Romania	101.5	4,940,000
	Russia	40.9	21,230,000
	Serbia	n.d.	n.d.
	Spain (7 including Canarias)	156.3	13,440,000
	Sweden	573.1	6,120,000
Switzerland	351.0	4,600,000	
Turkey	72.8	7,270,000	
UK (3)	423.1	33,110,000	
Latin America	Argentina (2)	112.0	4,650,000
	Bolivia (2)	32.4	78,000
	Brazil	82.2	22,320,000
	Chile	237.5	5,040,000
	Colombia	46.2	1,870,000
	Ecuador	41.6	328,000
	Mexico (4)	98.5	13,880,000
	Peru	93.5	4,570,000
	Uruguay	119.0	600,000
	Puerto Rico (USA)	n.d.	600,000
Oceania	Australia (6)	481.7	13,010,000
	New Zealand	484.4	2,340,000
	Indonesia	37.7	12,860,000
	Philippines (2)	44.0	5,960,000
South Asia	India (2)	15.9	36,970,000
US	US (53)	551.4	185,550,000
West Asia	Israel	301.4	3,130,000



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	Palestine	30.4	n.d.
	Lebanon	117.1	300,000
WORLD	Global	99.4	934,000,000

Sources: See note 11.

Table 4: Countries with two or more websites: online population (absolute and relative)

		Internet users per 1000 inhabitants (2002)	Online Population Abs. in 2004
53 sites	US (53)	551.4	185,550,000
12	Canada (12)	512.8	20,450,000
7	Spain (7 including Canarias)	156.3	13,440,000
6	Australia	481.7	13,010,000
5	Belgium	328.3	4,870,000
	France	313.8	25,470,000
4	Mexico	98.5	13,880,000
3	UK	423.1	33,110,000
2 sites	Greece	157.7	2,710,000
	Argentina	112.0	4,650,000
	Philippines	44.0	5,960,000
	Bolivia	32.4	78,000
	India	15.9	36,970,000

Sources: See Table 3.

Table 5a: Country with a sizeable online population (1 million or more) but no Indymedia site (rest in top 52 has at least one Indymedia site).

Rank	State	Internet users per 1,000 inhabitants (2002)	Online Population Abs. in 2004
2	China	46.0	99,800,000
5	South Korea	551.9	31,670,000
18	Malaysia	319.7	10,040,000
20	Taiwan	n.d.	9,520,000
21	Thailand	77.6	7,570,000
26	Ukraine	18.0	5,270,000
34	Hong Kong	430.1	4,580,000
36	Denmark	512.8	3,720,000
37	Czech Republic	256.3	3,530,000
38	Finland	508.9	3,270,000
40	Singapore	504.4	2,750,000
44	Saudi Arabia	64.6	2,540,000
45	Egypt	28.2	2,420,000
46	Venezuela	50.6	2,310,000
50	Slovakia	160.4	1,610,000
52	Pakistan	10.3	1,200,000

Sources: See Table 3.



Table 5b Country with a high level of connectivity (more than 250 internet users per 1,000 inhabitants) but no Indymedia site (all others in top 31 have at least one Indymedia site)

Rank	State	Internet users per 1,000 inhabitants (2002)	Online Population Abs. in 2004
1	Iceland	647.9	198,000
3	South Korea	551.9	31,670,000
5	Denmark	512.8	3,720,000
7	Finland	508.9	3,270,000
9	Singapore	504.4	2,750,000
14	Hong Kong	430.1	4,580,000
18	Slovenia	375.8	930,000
19	Luxembourg	370.0	100,000
23	Estonia	327.7	620,000
24	Malaysia	319.7	10,040,000
26	UAE	313.2	900,000
27	Malta	303.0	59,000
31	Czech Republic	256.3	3,530,000

Sources: See Table 3. (no data for Taiwan, probably about 400 per 1,000 inhabitants).

Table 6a: Summary: A typology of states: relative population online and Indymedia sites

	< 250 per 1,000 inhabitants	250-500 per 1,000 inhabitants	500 per 1,000 or more	Total
No site	About 120	8	5	About 130
One site	20	9	3	32
Two or more sites	7	4	2	13
Total	About 150	21	10	About 180

NB: no data for Serbia and Puerto Rico.

Table 6b: A typology of states: absolute population online and Indymedia sites

	Less than 1 million online	1-10 million online	10-100 million online	More than 100 million online	Total
No site	About 120	13	3	0	About 130
One site	8	17	7	0	32
Two or more sites	1	4	7	1	13
Total	About 130	34	13	1	About 180

NB: no data for Palestine and Serbia.

Table 7: Over representation online

Country	% online population	% Indymedia sites	Ratio
US	19.9%	37.9%	1:2
Canada	2.2%	8.6%	1:4
Spain	1.4%	5.0%	1:3
Australia	1.4%	4.3%	1:3
Mexico	1.5%	2.9%	1:2



Bolivia	0.01%	1.4%	1:140
South Africa	0.5%	0.7%	1:1.4

Table 8: Main languages of the world (est. number of speakers as first language in 1996)

Rank	Language	1 st language speakers (mio)	On global site	On local sites
1	Mandarin Chinese	890	No	(Yes)*
2	Spanish	330	Yes	Yes
3	English	320	Yes	Yes
4	Bengali	190	No	No
5	Hindi	180	No	No
6	Portuguese	170	Yes	Yes
7	Russian	170	No	Yes
8	Japanese	125	No	Yes
9	German	120	Yes	Yes
10	Wu (Shanghaiese)	77	No	No
11	Javanese	75	No	No
12	Korean	75	No	No
13	French	72	Yes	Yes
14	Vietnamese	68	No	No
15	Telugu	66	No	No
16	Yue (Cantonese)	66	No	No

* Chinese is marginally used on the Japanese site.

Source: Ethnologue, quoted on

<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/List%20of%20languages%20by%20total%20speakers> or on

<http://www.geobop.com/world/Facts/Languages/Languages/>

Table 9: Main languages of the world (est. number of speakers as first language in 1996)

Rank	Language	Speakers (mio)	On global site	On local sites
1	English	1,000	Yes	Yes
	Mandarin Chinese	1,000	No	(yes)
3	Hindi + Urdu	900	No	No
4	Spanish	450	Yes	Yes
5	Russian	320	No	Yes
6	Arabic	250	No	Yes
	Bengali	250	No	No
8	Portuguese	200	Yes	Yes
9	Malay + Indonesian	160	No	No
10	Japanese	130	No	Yes
11	German	125	Yes	Yes
	French	125	Yes	Yes
13	Punjabi	85	No	No
	Yue (Cantonese)	85	No	No

Source: British council, quoted on <http://www.the-bag-lady.co.uk/wct/wf/index.asp?cont=worldlanguages>



Table 10: The six official languages of the UNO

Rank	Language	Speakers (mio)	On global site	On local sites
Since 1945	English	1,000	Yes	Yes
Since 1945	Chinese (Mandarin)	1,000	No	(Yes)
Since 1973	Spanish	450	Yes	Yes
Since 1945	Russian	320	No	Yes
Since 1973	Arabic	250	No	Yes
Since 1945	French	125	Yes	Yes

Table 11: Main languages online (at least 2% webpages or 2% online population)

Rank (webpages)	Language	% online population	% webpages	On global site	On local sites
1	English	43%	68.3%	Yes	Yes
2	Japanese	10%	5.9%	No	Yes
3	German	7%	5.8%	Yes	Yes
4	Chinese	11%	3.9%	No	(Yes)
5	French	4%	3.0%	Yes	Yes
6	Russian	3%	2.4%	Yes	Yes
	Korean	4%		No	No
	Italian	3%		Yes	Yes
	Portuguese	3%		Yes	Yes

Source: <http://www.gemeinsamlernen.de/euconet/background/statistic?language=en&part=2>

Table 12: Features on Translation.indymedia.org searching by language, September 30, 2004

No occurrence	Arabic, Aymara, Korean, Polish Qn ³¹ , Quechua, Turkish
1 occurrence	Greek
2 occurrences	Russian
4	Dutch
5	Catalan
34	Italian
37	Portuguese
62	French
64	German
64	Spanish
86	English

NB: the oldest feature returned by these searches was posted February 2004.

<http://translations.indymedia.org/News/1066178210/index.html>

³¹ Although Qn is noted as one language, it does not refer to a common code for a language. the code is not allocated to any language in ISO 639. Searching the site for posts in Qn does not produce any items, that would give us a clue of the language meant under that label. <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/ISO%20639>