

Digital Solidarity Networks #1, with Dušan Barok

How can we reconfigure digital networks across timelines and communities?

15:00 - 15:15 Welcome

15:15 - 15:45 Dušan Barok's presentation

15:45 - 16:00 Q&A

16:15 - 16:30 BREAK

16:30 - 17:15 Collective Relearning

17:15 - 17:30 BREAK

17:30 - 18:00 Conversation and Wrap-Up

Varia's code of conduct

<http://varia.zone/en/pages/code-of-conduct.html>

Conversation + Wrap Up

(partial notes)

<https://pad.vvvvvvaria.org/dsn1-breakoutroom-1>

<https://pad.vvvvvvaria.org/dsn1-breakoutroom-2>

<https://pad.vvvvvvaria.org/dsn1-breakoutroom-3>

"access for all"

Servus as an example that started in 1996 and are still around. They appeared around the same time as XS4ALL, but took different routes.

Another example is mur.at, a professional hosting service for artists. They have an interesting business model where they work with a budget each year for all the costs that they need to cover, and then they do a head round. If they have reached their goals, they do another round, and another one if needed.

interesting to think about business models

"how not to get bought by KPN"

intimacy & radio

radio as a listening only medium, being off screen creates intimacy. But also chatrooms can bring some sense of intimacy and togetherness, while being in a network that is quite brought. Many access/axes to different things.

BoekieWoekie (book store since the 70s in Amsterdam), mainly running on a single spreadsheet and a very diy website, they recently started an instagram account

It's not only about making your work public (which is important for small organisations), because for individuals instagram is a way to reach out to many people, skipping the role of institutions as platforms. But it is also about being aware of what other people do. Not being able to visit art book fairs now raises the question: how to stay in touch with what people are doing?

Calling, emails, work. But how to bump into surprises?

But then again, it's perhaps not only about changing platforms. It's also attitudes.

Dusan started a Twitter account for Monoskop in 2009, posting the different books that were uploaded to Monoskop (<https://monoskop.org/Monoskop>).

After a while... it became clearer and clearer, that everything started become quantified: 10 likes and 15 retweets. In the timeline "view" it started to become a ranking interface almost, where the quality and richness of the material is flattened to numbers and fake popularity rankings.

Notes from the talk

Start with elephant in the room - Big Tech: addictive, ecologically unsustainable, hard to do without, especially if you're an organization

Google ditched its motto "don't be evil" already years ago

Despite all these aspects, it's difficult to disentangle from Big Tech

The question for today, is there a way out of our relations with Big Tech without losing audience

This brings us to federated spaces and tools, such as the fediverse.

On these federated networks, alternatives that are responsible infrastructures already exist.

in theory, you could cut all your ties to Big Tech, bc technically alternatives exist - but what about socially?

These alternatives have already been here since the early 2000s. How did they operate in the social domain and how did they engage broad publics_

We should keep historical differences in mind.

A spatial metaphor, cyberspace, which is how the internet was referred to in the 90s.

90's - cyberspace, different identities, different lives, things have changed since then

Two kinds of people those living in reality and those living in reality and cyberspace.

Big Tech is responsible for making this distinction disappear.

Now there is only social media space which we are told is our reality.

Social media platforms nowadays are like urban areas, cities with crime, living in a sublet, maybe you have a studio, but the thing you have: hope for oppertunities

Fediverse is the countryside, life is slower, more real - no escape from prejudices however, bc everyone knows each other, so when you feel down you travel to the chaos again where you also don't last too long

When you feel claustrophobic you travel to the chaos and anonymity of the city. And you're very happy to not live there anymore.

Does this metaphor even hold in some places like the NL

Today we don't have the choice to not have social media.

The choice today is about the quality of this kind of life. Respectful and sustainable_

How to make alternative space more varied, not only something for people who are "techy"?

Providing and maintaining digital access was a major subject in the 90s.

XS4ALL internet provider in NL. It was one of the first companies to make it possible for people to connect to the internet from their homes.

But that didn't mean that people would actually use it. They offered support for people who struggled to set up a modem.

Their stance of censorship. They resisted taking websites down.

They streamed Radio B92, a radio station that was taken down in Yugoslavia.

De Digitale Stad (The Digital City)

affiliated with XS4All

1st access to internet for many people: city councils, individuals, and others

90% of the users were men

it didn't help that the project was run by a woman: Marleen Stikker, who also designed it.

they decided to redesign, to involve more women in the design process.

the numbers started to change eventually

the project led to the making of Waag which still exists today.

Netbase

www.netbase.org/t0/intro

We can't afford armies of lawyers, which Big Tech can.

Running alternative networks is a more vulnerable business which makes solidarity between

organisations even more crucial.
same time as digital city, but out of Vienna.

At one point they had about 15 people working there.
Towards late 90s, far right was rising in Austria, they were critical of this.
very critical

A far right party accused netbase of hosting child pornography. There were cases elsewhere in Europe and it dominated the media.
In a speech they conflated an existing sex site with a project that was done by one of the members.
Forced to close down to 2006 because they didn't get funded anymore.

The reliance on one source of funding is also a vulnerability.

There is a need to build alliances with other organisations and also with visitors and users.

servus.at

Linz, Austria (since 96 until today)
co.op since 1996
financed through members fees + local funding
for artists and cultural workers

it has been organising the festival **Art Meets Radical Openness** for over a decade

Genderchangers Academy

started etc (**Eclectic Tech Carnival**)
they started **syssterserver** a place to learn sysadmin skills
sysster server: "emails and mailinglist are still best the social media out there"

other feminist servers Anarchaserver, Vedetas (more links in the Digital Solidarity Network pad, such as Servers: From autonomous servers to feminist servers
[https://gendersec.tacticaltech.org/wiki/index.php/Servers: From autonomous servers to feminist servers](https://gendersec.tacticaltech.org/wiki/index.php/Servers:_From_autonomous_servers_to_feminist_servers)
s)

Feminist Server Summit organized by Constant, where they wrote **Feminist Server Manifesto**:
[https://hub.xpub.nl/systers/mediawiki/index.php?title=A Feminist Server Manifesto](https://hub.xpub.nl/systers/mediawiki/index.php?title=A_Feminist_Server_Manifesto) //
https://areyoubeingserved.constantvzw.org/Summit_afterlife.xhtml

not hiding behind smooth functionality

technological activism and social activism as **ONE** thing

One question for today: providing access and bringing people in is not such a burning question in the

end?

Many ppl in the 90s also realised this. Cyberspace was so different but it did not automatically mean it was a paradise like providers wanted us to think. A critical attitude towards our digital encounters.

This is a strong aspect of the fediverse at the moment.

>> varia gives hope that this tech/soc activism is possible as a physical space

The examples from the 90s sound obvious today.

There is no divide between life and networks anymore.

What do we do by inhating these networks?

What kind of relations are we implicated in and

What kind of relations do we reproduce?

how do we practice our politics in these networks?

There has been recently emphasis on CoC, respect for diversity and community guidelines, but the CoCs we're working on are not in line with the terms of service what big tech companies use.

We may think we reach more people but we leave cultural work at the mercy of Big Tech terms of service.

Seductive aspect of big platforms that they let you know your audience better — to know more about your audience to "reach them better"

This is incentivised by funds.

How do stop reenacting this data extractivist attitudes in the way funds quantify audiences

Seeing audience as peer group rather than target group

How to treat the social and technical space as one thing?

Q&A

What has shifted between the 90s and now

Back in the days there were different forms of alliances

expectations changed?

smoothness, product based (you don't want a car that breaks down every so many times)

wanting something that works, but what does it mean to make that decision?

Small radio station in Rotterdam
looking at pirate radio and how they are ran
radio from a boat in the North Sea
"Big Radio"

examples in the presentation were very local

tension between "local/intimate" and "accessibility"
FB is very accessible, but not intimate (not in the same way as the examples were intimate)

"intimacy" as interesting angle to further explore
What forms of intimacy are we looking for? Alliances between organisations are one form of intimate work. Individual experiences with certain specific digital tools?

personal example: minecraft

mailinglists

Varia also have an active mailinglist for announcing events and activities
does not really use social media to communicate to audience - just individual members
How are cultural organisation be shaped by digital infrastructures, but also, how are their publics be shaped by it?

mailinglists are used for newsletters, these are one-direction channels.
Some are very fun to read, the newsletter becomes a medium to engage with a public