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MANIFESTO OF URBAN TELEVISIONS

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For a participative democracy of mass media (and the realisation of the first Italian open access television)!

1. Scenario: independent communication and media monopoly

A new kind of media culture is spreading worldwide: next to the traditional means of independent communication, such as radio and Internet, today we find hundreds of experiments involving an "old" medium like TV: independent televisions, street and satellite video channels, web TVs and community channels. This video activism wave targeting TV was born as an alternative to a worldwide corporate and public television monopoly.

We believe that today society has acquired the democratic maturity and the cultural and technical know-how to self-organize its own media in the form of Urban Televisions - open access television channels rooted in city life.

2. New rights: the right to self-organize communication

During the last decades society has developed a new consciousness about communication rights. Today such rights are claimed together with all the other universal and citizenship rights. See for instance the People's Communication Charter (http://www.pccharter.net).

This new consciousness needs to grow further: within the frame of a new public domain of media, society must recognize its active right to self-organize communication, and not only the simple passive right to access communication.

3. New spaces: the Public Domain of media

The culture of independent communication in any form, from video activism to free radios to Free Software, has opened a new space among common media and technologies, a space whose political and cultural citizenship must now be recognized.

The cultural, political and legal frame of this movement is a space that we call the Public Domain of communication. We understand the Public Domain as a sphere which belongs neither to the State nor to the Market, but to the whole society, as a sphere managed and controlled by society itself (not to be confused with the public service performed by the State).

The actors who have contributed most to the extension of the Public Domain must now work on their internal self-organization and external visibility. See the Dutch campaign "Public Domain 2.0" (http://www.waag.org).

The new autonomous public domain of communication must be recognized by institutions as a means of participative democracy and a new municipalism. Institutions must finally support the instruments and solutions to transform the fordist society into a post-fordist society.

4. New policies: the culture of new media

Institutional policies on new media only consider the question of access (often in a market-oriented perspective) and do not understand their value as means of democratic participation and as catalysts of culture and innovation.

During the last years, thanks to new spontaneous practices coming from society, a new media culture was able to grow. The delay of institutions has allowed the independent communication movement to reach a critical mass and start to self-organize into autonomous entities.

Italian cultural policies invest only in the preservation of cultural heritage and not in innovation, as it happens in the north of Europe. This intellectual gap only considers new media as new containers for old contents. New media need to be recognized as autonomous forms of culture and social experimentation.

5. Tactical media: television meets the net

The net has represented the moment of discovery and training for participative media. But it is still television that maintains a central role in society, culture and politics. For this reason, it is necessary to deconstruct it in a real and democratic way, and to let the television medium meet the internet medium. Television must be considered a new prosthesis and an extension of the net: but to avoid another alternative "ghetto", the horizontality of the net must meet the "socializing" power of television.

The strategies of independent communication are: gaining access to channels and technologies, proliferation of broadcasters, production of alternative contents. For Urban Television the nodal point is not only the simple control of channels or contents, but the re-conquest of the collective enunciation of the message. That is, the re-conquest of the public and collective role represented by television.

Working with the television medium today can be interesting only if it is transformed into a new participative, transparent and ethical medium: in order to address its power to the cultural and economical development of society itself, and not only to support market or political consensus.

6. Tactical television: public access channels

For this reason it is necessary to create Urban Televisions in the form of open access television channels and to promote a social and communitarian participation.

"Public access" means a TV channel not only accessible, but managed by the communities that make up the social life of a city. Public access has a meaning if it is used for a collective content sphere, and not for a top-down programming.

"Community television" means a television that is not only a simple public access and a rhetorical exercise of free speech (open publishing) but is also able to "make society" and build social texture (community access and not simply open access).

Urban Televisions are based on a wide social participation and does not only involve media activists and practitioners (as often happens in many independent projects).

Urban Televisions have a social mission and status safeguarded by an Ethical Chart that recognizes all the rights, duties and pleasures of a participative communication.

The Italian delay in public access media must encounter those European experiences that show the possibility to create televisions managed by society itself.

7. Tactical contents: from national programming to urban programming

Urban Televisions are televisions that make information, entertainment and culture and are able to construct a daily narration where the whole society recognizes and confronts itself. Urban televisions re-conquest programming as a genre of collective narration. Instead of a national programming, the backbone of political consensus and of social biorhythms, an urban programming should be built from the bottom up.

The heart of Urban Televisions is a Community Programming which mirrors the whole social mosaic and leaves its spaces to self-organization of communities and single citizens. Community Programming also organizes democratic spaces of confrontation and respects the most radical and anti-conformist styles and contents.

8. The urban model: television rooted in the urban life

Independent communication must discover the city again as a new dimension of action, because the city is the first and elective ground of making society. A public access city television can root easily into any sector of civil, cultural and economical life. Urban Television turns out to be a precious means and a model of participative municipalism.

The movement must not only defend free communication but be prepared to make society and conquer the spaces of everyday life. The aim of Urban Televisions is to transform an international technical innovation movement into a movement that actually builds up society.

9. The economical model: non-profit cooperative media

New models of social communication are only credible and alternative to monopoly if they are economically autonomous. Media-activism must avoid some of the errors made in the past: in its history it has created ruptures and invented practices that the market has promptly colonized (e.g. Italian free radio movement of the 1970s which paved the way for commercial radios).

Urban Televisions are based on a model of non-profit social cooperation, where profits are re-invested into new productions and projects for the communities. In a postfordist context, Urban Televisions trigger the multi-media economy, valorize

bottom-up productions and realize a content economy with social aims.

10. The political model: the autonomy of society

Urban Televisions are born out of the initiatives of society and not out of state institutions or the market. Institutional policies must recognize self-organization in the field of culture and media, and must avoid the simulations of "civil society" and "social communication" for political or commercial purposes.

Urban Televisions inaugurate a new relationship between the society and the economical and institutional subjects. This way they overcome the old vertical structures of mediation and political representation to give room to new horizontal and autonomous networks.

ACTIONS

Bologna Urban TV:

The first Italian open access television channel is going to be launched in Bologna, with the name of Urban TV. Citizens from other cities are invited to develop Urban Televisions to transform media-activism and independent communication in a constituent and lasting process, with the aim to build up an Italian and European network. The project based in Bologna represents a prototype for all Italian cities. Bologna Urban TV becomes effective through the following steps: creation of a non-profit association, launch of a development website (http://www.urbantv.it), and the launch of a social campaign for a new civic culture of media and
television.

Public Domain 2.0 Campaign:

Public Domain 2.0 is an international concept to introduce new ideas and instruments for a modern media culture. Bologna Urban TV wants to focus particularly on the following three points: a new debate on public domain of communication, bandwidth access for a civic and social use of communication, a social economy based on new media.

This manifesto first appeared on [Urban TV](#) on February 17, 2003 and was later posted to [nettime](#).

about Matteo Pasquinelli >>