



THE REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER
for Central and Eastern Europe



Networking for peace, the environment,
gender equality and social justice,
using communication
technologies

**Online Content and Communications Training for electronic
networks of south Eastern Europe's Environmental NGOs.**

FINAL REPORT

The workshop took place on October 12 – 15, 2005 in Rome. It aimed at improving the electronic networking and content development skills of environmental networkers in the Balkan region. Two trainers conducted the workshop: Pavel Antonov, Editor of REC's Green Horizon magazine, and Anna Felman, content manager at GreenNet, UK.

The curriculum was framed to enable each new communication concept to be explored from the perspective of content development, and information dissemination. For the sake of clarity and structure we maintained a helpful dichotomy of conventional media versus new electronic media. We adopted the terms *hard* and *soft* to characterise this distinction.

The participants all had a background in content development for their networks from a variety of angles – research, media (public) relations, community outreach, and education. But most lacked any formal training in the area of content development. For this reason we maintained a *Jargon Sheet* throughout the training – listing the terms and concepts that were unfamiliar to people in the group. As these were raised, they were unpacked and defined through discussion.

The workshop started by establishing the expectations of the group:

The responses were clustered as follows:

Networking: exchanging, sharing experiences, to understand the broader work of the environmental movement better

Developing Web/Online skills: Learning how to craft content for different media, building an online media strategy, website management

Content: Sourcing more content from other networks and organisations, developing better writing skills

Media: Understanding content needs of different audiences, working well with the media, engaging the media better in campaign work

Pavel Antonov brought his extensive experience in broadcast and print media, as well as an expertise in content development for a range of platforms, to the training. Anna Feldman's focus included ways of exploiting information communication technologies (ICTs) for content development and dissemination.

Participants identified the following sessions as being particularly useful –

- Identifying networks – mapping and planning communication streams within a network
- Analysing/critiquing web spaces – unpacking the functional and dysfunctional in web design to establish good models of web development
- Strategic approaches to the media - identifying needs and planning
- Writing a Press Release – testing press releases against a critical checklist
- Online publishing - Developing a content management system and planning for its implementation.

Sessions were moved together so that the trainees could draw threads through from their own information strategies, to the skills developed in hard copy work, to the online possibilities for their content – how the online tools could be used more imaginatively.

There was a tangible sense of the trainees developing an awareness of how their access to ICTs could be harnessed better for their media work. This was exhibited in the hypothetical campaigns they worked on as part of their assignments – not so much in the presentations of each group, as in the comments, discussion and critique that the participants offered when reviewing each others work.

It was interesting to see how much time it took for each group to engage with the substance of those campaigns, and run with ideas of how to implement them. And from this evaluative perspective, it's possible that the assignments may have been more productive if we had asked the participants to work around existing campaigns that they already had some familiarity with.

As a whole, the group came together very well, and end-of-session discussions were often very animated and participatory. In this way, the training appears to have made a useful contribution to the expectation identified by a number of participants around wanting to share and exchange ideas and experiences more effectively. There was a general enthusiasm for being together and realising that they are part of a broader network of people who have similar struggles and goals.

Reflections at the end focused on how we could develop the ideas further, and an obvious extra element would be to include more lobbying, advocacy expertise in the workshop. This would certainly strengthen and help direct the content development work.

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