

Hackmeeting 2008

We have been in Italy for the Hackmeeting, followed the lectures and participated in the workshops, all of this in Palermo, in a building confiscated to the mafia.

Text and photographs: Olja Petrović

“A real hacker, in our opinion, is someone who wants to manage himself and his own life as he desires, and is able to struggle and fight to achieve that. Even if he has never seen a computer in his life.” This was explained by the organizers of the Italian Hackmeeting or Hackit back in 1998, when the first edition was held in Florence. We are talking about groups and individuals networked between them in different ways who realize, amongst other things, the meetings of the computer underground and the projects who are related to it. This story really begins before the Web 1.0 and the mass use of the Internet in the nineties, when a small circle of people found out how to connect their computer to the BBS by telephone. A part of them have linked themselves with the alternative scene, which has proven to be culturally stimulating, and also produced some of the more competent IT experts in the world of commercial institutions.

Palermo, the host city

It is impossible to view this hacker gathering exclusively from the outside, from bird's view, as if it were a map. Else we would see this year's logo – an island which is also a network, made up of nodes and connections. The island in question is Sicily, because this year's get-together has been held in Palermo, on 26 to 28 September, in the squatted club Ask191. It is situated in an unfinished villa with a pseudo-Gaudi' style pool, that the state had confiscated to the mafia. Hackit is held every year in a different city, by a mailing list open to everyone. Some manage to set out to the location a week before the event, to help with the upgrade of the infrastructure, which is useful both for the host and for the participants. This is important because the place then holds hundreds of people, who often stay there 24 hours a day, sharing knowledge, skills, meals, pleasant moments, but also duties – since all the participants are at least a little bit organizers as well.

I have arrived a day before the official start, and already felt tardy. Little by little the creative atmosphere was building up, the workshops and the lectures materializing, but as far as the numbers are concerned the event suffered a bit because of the relative isolation of Sicily, the once center of the Mediterranean transit. Speaking with the locals, I have this intuition – Sicily is an island and has functioned better while it was still treated that way, then today, when it is supposed to be a border area.

This Hackit follows the “round number” 10th one, which had seen the involvement of Emmanuel Goldstein, editor of the magazine 2600: The Hacker Quarterly. This year's participants study the Web 2.0 and ask themselves how could have it all had changed so much.

Home-made robots

Reactions vary – the independent Internet service Autistici-Inventati has opened a blogging platform Noblogs, without the superfluous advertising and logging, Progetto Winston Smith explains how it is much nicer to share information if you can choose to whom to communicate what, and when, and they also partake in the international initiative Freedom Not Fear. Programmers envision the future Web 3.0 and the Semantic Web with all the meta data and databases, and develop tools to help us deal with those when they become a part of our daily lives. And there's much more. Hackit is a creative swarm, where IT experts and other inspiring individuals share ideas, and that continues to produce results. Some examples are computer programs like Nuri and the Firefox plugins, home-made robots, and there's also the Italian edition of *A SteamPunk's Guide to the Apocalypse* and a DIY magazine

Ruggine. The new and the old intertwine, so it may confuse us to see that radio amateurs today, though they are curious and follow the novelties, still communicate installing improvised antennas on rooftops. But as I, under the starry sky of Sicily, heard the voices from far away and the evocative Morse code and other sounds, it became clear to me – *why not?* Or, as Hackit 2008 slogan suggests: “Code is written, future is not.”

Olja Petrović, report from the Italian Hackmeeting 2008, Plan B number 13

For those who want to know more:

<http://hackmeeting.org/index.php?lang=en>

<http://www.ask191.org/>

<http://www.autistici.org/en/>

<http://noblogs.org/>

<http://pws.winstonsmith.info/index-e.html>

[http://wiki.vorratsdatenspeicherung.de/Freedom Not Fear 2008](http://wiki.vorratsdatenspeicherung.de/Freedom_Not_Fear_2008)