

NEW NETWORKS: ANAKSERIBUPULAU

‘anakseribupulau’ means ‘Children of a Thousand Islands’. It is not a type of salad dressing. It is the name of a loose network of activists, primarily in rural areas, spread over the vast archipelago of Indonesia. Despite being from a huge range of different ethnic groups, different organising groups, and different age groups, those involved in anakseribupulau are linked in their efforts to promote environmental awareness and sustainability. Among others, their active projects include building community libraries in East Java, reforestation in Central Java, ocean protection in Karimunjawa, sustainable transport campaigns in the city of Yogyakarta, and the production of small self-initiated and self-published ‘zines’ all over the country. A project to create a website for anakseribupulau is currently in development. According to Exi Wijaya, a founding member of anakseribupulau, the main objectives of the project are ‘to provide a learning resource, develop the potential of an existing community by facilitating its communications, and promote cross-cultural understanding between Australia and Indonesia’.

anakseribupulau began three years ago with the apparent ‘opening up’ of the political environment in Indonesia. During Suharto’s thirty year regime, political pamphlets criticising the government and announcing actions were distributed as widely as possible, but as a protective mechanism, activist material did not contain names or addresses which could be linked back to groups or individuals. According to members of anakseribupulau, it was a very repressive period, during which many activists lived in fear. Of course, activists were communicating, but in a much more restricted, secretive, form, and they experienced constant intimidation from the military. The fall of Suharto in 1998 was a significant turning point. Activists began to feel more confident producing material that openly identified names, addresses, and contact details.

At this time, there emerged a discussion between groups of environmental activists simultaneously working on projects in different places in Indonesia. They decided to create a collective email account to facilitate communications, the password to which was disseminated by word of mouth. The idea was based on anarchist principles of open membership and free communication. The network was named anakseribupulau.

Intimidation still occurs. Members of anakseribupulau recently experienced violent threats from the military over an environmental campaign in Blora, in the province of Central Java. Activists were calling a public meeting about a gas leak on a plant owned by Exxon-Mobil. However, as the campaign began to gain momentum, organisers and their family members were threatened by soldiers. Because of its urgency and the potential danger to those involved, this kind of information is best disseminated by anonymous means. Activists and sympathisers were quickly informed of the situation via the collectively-owned anakseribupulau email account as well as other alternative media channels such as *Global Indymedia*. No individual could be held responsible for the campaign.

The inspiration and ideas that are shared via the anakseribupulau network are essential to many environmental projects throughout Indonesia. Another example is a community library network in Java, established to combat the ignorance encouraged by government censorship and economic depression. Facilitators communicate via the anakseribupulau network about swapping, reproducing, and transporting texts that are identified as needs of given communities.

Despite the advantages of Internet communication, there are huge frustrations in Indonesia with the limitations of the technology, especially feelings of disempowerment resulting from the majority of Internet resources being in English. Despite being the common language of over two hundred thousand people, Bahasa Indonesia is not one of the optional languages in opening even a common email account. The current techniques employed are also extremely vulnerable. The mediation of anakseribupulau relies on a shared sense of trust and the support of face-to face and telephone communication.

According to members of anakseribupulau, education and the environment are inseparable. As well as to facilitate communication between activists, the aim of the anakseribupulau network is to open people’s perspective so that people can discuss environmental issues and find genuine solutions together. One of the groups that forms anakseribupulau makes a zine called *Media Lingkungan*, or *Media of the Environment*. People email, send, or deliver contributions to the groups headquarters in Yogyakarta, and the photocopied zines are produced with whatever money the collective can scrounge together at the time. No one is paid for their work or their time. There is no advertising, no business sponsors and very little editorial selection. Although the result has more spelling mistakes than glossy photos, the circulation of the publication is phenomenal. The zine has made it to Australia, Singapore, India and Malaysia where other activists have been keen to reproduce, appropriate, comment on and contribute to the publication. ‘This...’ it states proudly on the first page of the current issue, ‘is a free, independent medium’.

The Internet is seen by anakseribupulau as just another forum to educate ourselves about how we can live together on this earth without destroying it or each other. As members of small local collectives, it is empowering to feel part of the large network of people working towards the same goals and to be able to critically discuss the realisations of those goals.

The plans for anakseribupulau are to make a bilingual site in order to offer an opportunity for young activists from Indonesia and other parts of the world to interact. Another potential application of the project, although not the primary one, is for travellers who wish to contribute to the societies and environments through which they are travelling. There are thousands of Australians backpacking through Indonesia as we speak and very few who have access to information about the multitude of activist projects in Indonesia.

While the organisation began in Indonesia, many Australians have been actively involved in anakseribupulau projects. One of the slogans of anakseribupulau is ‘Tanpa Batasan’, which translates as ‘No limits, No borders’. Because ecological conditions affect the entire planet, our strategies for dealing with environmental issues must also go beyond the borders of states and ethnic groups.

While the potential of communication technology is often overwhelming, it is important to maintain a perspective of how this technology fits into people’s lives. The consensus of anakseribupulau is that an inclusive, bilingual, inspirational forum for expressing responses to environmental crises is essential if we are to start shaping solutions. In a country such as Indonesia, where most people have never used a computer, ‘cyberculture’ is not about to replace real life communities. Besides immediate economic differences, there is not the cultural vacuum that we see in more developed capitalist nations such as our own. There is, however, a deep curiosity in the opportunity to share and create offered by new technologies. anakseribupulau is determined to take that opportunity.



> **Alexandra Crosby** is an artist, student, activist, and Indonesianist. She likes play
> more than work and friends more than enemies. For more information contact
> <anak_seribupulau@yahoo.com.au>