

Hyphanet: did it help people?

“what I’m really wondering is, if all the networks have really helped people over the years”

That is a question streetcoder asked on Mastodon. This is my answer.

In the case of Freenet / Hyphanet: there are people from around the world talking about politics and personal stuff.

We have several personal blogs, though few long-lived ones.

In the FLIP chat I already exchanged deeply personal experiences with strangers who would otherwise never dare to talk about these (legal, but something they otherwise wouldn’t dare speak aloud).

Places people talk:

- FMS (forums). Mostly technical stuff and people trying to push different political agendas all over the spectrum.
- Sone (microblogging): people talking more personally, more chatter.
- FLIP (IRC chat): in the public chat lots of political discussions (different from the other two it lacks good moderation ⇒ political spam). In the actually confidential one-on-one chats deeply personal, but only a handful of people.

and I have year-long (sometime decade long) kind-of-friendships with people of whom I only know their pseudonyms and couldn’t find out who they really are.

I only know a single forum which actually persisted for longer than the community in Freenet.

Every other community I have been part of over the years dissolved and died when their online hosted solution died. Some I met there are still friends and we keep contact, but the larger community is gone.

The one in Freenet / Hyphanet persists. And sometimes people return who were gone for half a decade.

So yes, it did help people. Having a place to talk that does not have relevant infrastructure costs, because it is provided by the participants themselves, actually creates a different kind of space than the usual comparatively short-lived (when compared to two decades) platforms people turned to the past years.

And effective moderation that grew from the need to block anonymous spam and disruption — a moderation system without inherent power-imbalance — helps to keep discussions friendly.