

Freedom Flies (2005) by Chris Csikszentmihályi

Freedom Flies is a peaceful Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV). While nearly all UAVs are developed and marketed for military applications, Freedom Flies is aimed at offering basic UAV technology to the independent media, journalism and human rights NGO communities. Typical UAVs cost on the order of \$500,000 per system. In contrast, Freedom Flies is targeted at a few thousand, but more importantly it is open source. Hardware, software, and fabrication techniques are easily reproduced.

The unit itself is built from commonly available parts (a weed-eater engine, bicycle rim, water bottle, and kite-surfing kite), glides to the ground via a parachute in case of system failure, and travels quite slowly (30mph). It can carry over 15 lbs, allowing it to lift video, GPS units, pamphlets, water, food and other payloads.

Freedom Flies has been conceived as a reaction to the disturbing technological trend of using UAVs for “border security.” It aims at helping migrants survive and monitors their encounters with militias and “border extremists”, thus counteracting selective law enforcements that focus on immigrants but not on illegal proto-fascist activities.

Test flights have been conducted on the US/Mexico border, where since 2003 UAV technology has been used for “border security” by both the U.S. government (with its Predators) and private militia groups, such as the American Border Patrol (with its Border Hawk drones). Freedom Flies has been designed according to a countervailing set of priorities: to help migrants survive the desert and to look for evidence of anti-immigrant groups that are known to promulgate unlawful violence against political and economic refugees. The use of commonly available parts for its construction underlines its different sociotechnical identity: it is a drone devoid of military DNA.

<http://www.m-iti.org/people/csik>

<https://github.com/jlev/freedomfliesonline>