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**YEAR
REPORT**



**WIKIMEDIA
DEUTSCHLAND**

Welcome!

Bringing Wikimedia conferences to the next level –
Experiences and learnings from three years of
organizing the Wikimedia Conference



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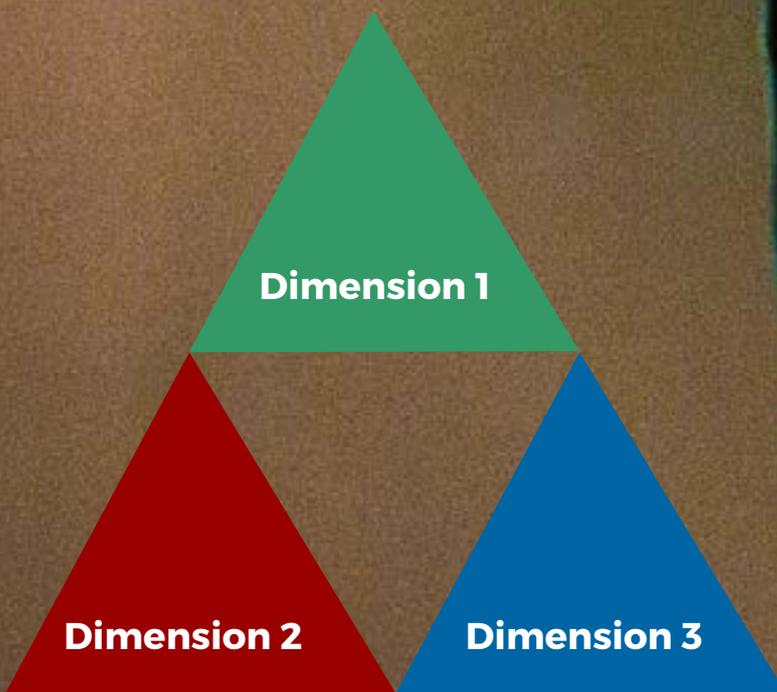
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Introduction

Over the last three years, the Wikimedia Conference has developed to be a conference with three different paths, each with its own program focus and audience. This is reflected in the “dimensions” of the conference, and the chapters of this document are structured accordingly.



Creating a great one-time experience for everyone

Dimension 1

This is the basis of the conference: what are the needs and wishes of the participants, and how are they different? How to create a socially supportive environment to enable better networking? And the 1 million \$ question: How to make logistics run smoothly

From a one-shot event to a multi-year event

The new signature of the Wikimedia Conference Program and Engagement Coordination.
How to improve participant commitment? How to create a better program design? What are the benefits of establishing links to other conferences, and supporting participants in following up on certain topics?
Ideally, the target group for the Program and Engagement coordination would consist of all participants. But in reality it has turned out to be primarily staff from the WMF and larger chapters – why is that?

Dimension 2

Improving the Wikimedia movement by being a constant forum for conversations about our future

Dimension 3

Deals with the Wikimedia Conference as a space where affiliates participate in conversations about the direction and future of the movement.

Based on the three chapters, our conclusions are

- The learnings and improvements after three years of Program and Engagement Coordination show that we need to move away from the Wikimedia Conference as a “one-stop-shop” conference and towards a landscape of more focused, specialized conferences.
- The Wikimedia Conference should in the future focus on strategy and governance, and be an inclusive forum for working iteratively on the future of the Wikimedia movement – from an affiliate perspective.
- We need to strengthen the profile and infrastructure of international Wikimedia events, regionally and globally. Regional conferences should be strengthened in terms of capacity building and learning. A global conference support for logistics and program design is needed for all international Wikimedia events.
- Conferences alone will not build a truly global movement: we need to support the growth of strong connections between Wikimedia entities worldwide

Creating a great one-time experience for everyone

Ever since its first edition, the participants of the Wikimedia Conference have been a wonderfully diverse crowd. The target group of the conference are the the Wikimedia Movement affiliates and their representatives as well as the Wikimedia Foundation. Across this group, roles, responsibilities, and experiences within and beyond the Wikimedia movement vary a lot, and it is therefore hard to make generalized statements about the Wikimedia Conference participants. All participants bring their own hopes, wishes and ideas to the conference and our main job, be it program or logistics, is to create a great experience for every single participant.

Still, after three years of organizing the conference, we have learned that it does make sense to differ between two groups of participants: One-time participants and returning participants. These two groups tend to engage differently with the conference program, which in turn created a need to design a program that embraces different levels of participant engagement.



One-time participants

On the one hand, we have a growing number of participants who attend only once. Most of these one-time participants are power contributors to the Wikimedia movement; volunteers who come to the conference on an affiliate ticket. For this growing group of one-time participants (but not limited to them), we have learned (and are still learning) how to best design the conference space and activities to fulfill their needs.

Over the last three years we have found that one-time participants mainly want to get inspired, share their experiences, and meet old and new Wikimedia friends (again, this is especially valid for one-time participants, but not limited to them). For quite a few (app. one third of the participants), this leads to starting up new projects on a small scale, mostly focused on their communities.

For most one-time participants, however, it is not a priority to discuss organizational structures, endowment strategies or the future of the Wikimedia Movement; they do not participate in sessions on these topics or the related discussions. Based on this (and the fact that many attend only once), we assume they have less motivation for following the connections between previous or future editions of the Wikimedia Conference.

One-time participants have therefore mainly profited from our continuous work over the three years to create an inclusive conference with smooth logistics.

The Wikimedia Conference has always been a place for all participants to learn from each other. The many new small scale projects that people get inspired to do, proves the value of this exchange. At the same time, it has been an opportunity for us to think about more inclusive formats (as is described in Dimension 2). However, and partly due to our work with creating more inclusive formats, we increasingly experience that affiliates may more effectively share experiences and participate in capacity building at regional conferences. Here, participants to a greater extent can apply similar solutions to similar concrete challenges. We think that in-person, regional learning events in the local languages and contexts are more impactful, and in this sense our capacity-building track at the Wikimedia Conference has its limits.

Returning participants

On the other hand, we have a group of around 60–80 participants who attend the conference regularly to have conversations about strategy and governance, to have peer to peer exchange, and to discuss the future of the movement. We have learned that the core of our “Program and Engagement Coordination” concept (i.e. making the conference more sustainable,

more productive and more outcome-oriented) is especially applicable and valuable for these participants. Over the years, it became clear that they have become the main target group of our follow-up work and the continuing conversations around the focus topics (see “Dimension 2”, which deals with this in more detail).



A socially supportive environment – meeting the right people and talking to them

Getting to know each other across affiliates to strengthen connections as well as learning about each other's work is a core element of most international Wikimedia events. And although the follow-up work of the Program and Engagement Coordinator mainly targets the returning participants, there are several benefits for all participants in our reflections and learnings from the past three years.

We have implemented a number of practical measures to enhance social networking and communication, and continuously developed these based on previous years' learnings: Creating a socially supportive environment for participants, e.g. by providing semi-structured opportunities to socialize in the evening and off-conference,

offer conversation starter lines during breaks, and initiating a “buddy system” for newbies.

Facilitating introduction and presentation of participants: Creating a Wikimedia Conference Telegram group; a “Letter Box Wall”; Wikimedia Conference business cards for all participants; and organizational profiles, i.e. simple templates that affiliates filled in before the conference to give an overview of the organizations present at the conference.

We have previously shared many of these learnings in a Learning Pattern, “Facilitating social interaction at conferences”, written by the 2016 Visiting Wikimedian, Teele Vaalma, and Program and Engagement Coordinator, Cornelius Kibelka.



Professional logistics and smooth processes for everyone in place

In terms of logistics, we have learned to develop effective and efficient processes to create a stimulating and productive experience for everyone. We have learned how a conference space needs to be designed to accommodate a huge group of Wikimedians, while providing everyone with what they need. Over three years, our “participant management” processes are close to perfection, proven by the feedback in our surveys. “Participant management” already starts with designing the registration form that has to comply with various requirements by different stakeholders (WMF, WMDE, participants, travel agency, hotel). Moreover, one needs to make sure that all important details are retrieved through the registration form to avoid unnecessary follow-up questions and to make the participant management as efficient as possible.

By organizing the conference several years in a row, we were consequently able to increasingly improve the registration form and processes.

One of our biggest learnings and improvements over the years is our visa support and application process. Because of a more global representation at the Wikimedia Conference, the number of attendees in need of a Schengen visa increased. Thanks to our experience and a close collaboration with the German authorities, we could increasingly offer our advice and support to participants within the application process and limit the denials of visa for attendees to a minimum. Unfortunately, a certain amount of denials can’t be avoided, as visa policies have gotten stricter over the years due to the general political climate in Europe.

In short: Without good logistics you will not be able to host a conference. Only thanks to our event management team at WMDE, were we able to bring this event to a new level of professionalism and efficiency. And only this gave us the space to focus on the program and the follow-up around the conference, as described in this report.



From a one-shot event to a multi-year event

Having both attended and organized the Wikimedia Conference several times before 2015, the WMDE organizing team felt that the conference never fully reached its potential. Because the conference grant was awarded on an annual basis, the Wikimedia affiliates would every year discuss the logistics of the next conference anew, instead of focusing on jointly developing the program. WMCON was a siloed event, with no connections to other events. We observed that people had great ideas and discussions,

but that these were not followed up afterwards and consequently just withered.

With the three-year conference agreement between the WMF and WMDE, one of the biggest barriers for good pre- and post-conference engagement work was lifted. The Program and Engagement Coordinator of the Wikimedia Conference, Cornelius Kibelka, established new structures for good follow-up work. This includes the following four areas of action,



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Creating greater participant commitment by improving the quality of the conference program and documentation

In the Wikimedia Movement, event organizers often tend to focus on the logistics of a conference. This is understandable: logistics are essential but challenging and often determine whether an event is successful or not. We think, however, that a great program is equally important. How do you get the most out of three days? How do you get the best people to talk about the most desired topics? And how to integrate new speakers that have not spoken at a conference before; non-native English speakers, from smaller affiliates and/or emerging communities?

Participatory program design

For the 2016 conference, we changed the program design process entirely. Instead of relying on a diverse (volunteer) program team, we decided to combine the compulsory registration process with an in-depth program survey asking for wishes, needs and experiences of all participants. Additionally, we asked how participants wanted to contribute to the conference program.

There is no “one-fits-all” solution to these questions. Based on experience and surveying the participants of the conference twice per year, Cornelius Kibelka and Nicole Ebber developed measures to improve the quality of the program. Some are still in the process of being further improved year after year, others might be discarded, as they do not fit to the conference anymore. Below, the four main measures that we have been developing over the three last years are described.

An internal matching process of wishes/demands and offers combined with our organizing experience and constant exchange with participants, allowed us to tailor the program to the expressed needs of the participants. Especially for the Capacity Building and Learning track the outcome of this approach received high ratings by the participants.

Curated program tracks

Before 2016, participants had asked for more clearly divided programmatic tracks, to give the conference a more visible structure, better allowing them to decide which sessions to attend. We started to introduce such tracks in 2016: “How to move forward” focused on the WMF Leadership Crisis; “Movement Impact” focused on how to measure and talk about the impact of the Wikimedia movement; and “Capacity Building & Learning” focused on learning workshops and skill sharing. We continued this approach in 2017 by adding the Movement Partnerships track.

This approach made a lot of sense to us as the organizing team, because it resulted in a more focused program.

It also made a lot of sense to us to include more of the excellent expertise available across Wikimedia staff in shaping and curating the tracks. Wikimedia Deutschland’s “Partnerships & Development” team (focusing on external partnerships, and resource development and evaluation), provided the necessary expertise to shape the 2016 “Movement Impact” track. In 2017, we again relied on this team, while also adding the WMF Global Reach & Partnerships team’s expertise. Other teams involved in shaping our tracks were the WMF Learning & Evaluation team and the Movement Strategy core team and track leads.



New session formats

Another focus of ours in 2015 (and before) was to transform the conference into a working conference, more actively involving the participants. This was a focus because we priorly had a majority of one-way presentations instead of in-depth conversations and workshops. At the same time, we wanted the conference to be more inclusive in terms of geographic representation. However, focusing on both higher quality and new workshop design, and geographic diversity at the same time was not easy, because the more experienced speakers that we were able to identify mostly came from European chapters or the Wikimedia Foundation. This would have lead to the conference being less global than we wanted it to be.

We therefore started to create new session formats to lower the barrier for non-native English speakers to share their opinions and experiences. One way was to have specific plenary sessions where everybody could participate. To create such a session, good facilitation was crucial to include the quieter voices.

We had positive experiences with the use of a non-violent communication facilitator in 2016 (session “How to move forward”), and with our Movement Strategy track facilitators in 2017, using Open Space Technology. In these 2017 plenary sessions, at least 24 persons that had never been speakers before spoke at the Wikimedia Conference.

On a smaller scale, we found it necessary to create more opportunities for participants to share their experiences. While you cannot expect that everybody is able to host a 90 min workshop, almost everybody is able to tell a story about something great that they have experienced. In 2017, we created our so-called “Structured Lightning Talks”, where four people had the opportunity to share their experiences around a major topic (like “GLAM partnerships”) for 10 minutes, followed by 5 minutes of Q&A. Template slides were prepared in advance (max. 3 slides per person, with specific, prepared questions). With this session 12 persons that had never been speakers before, spoke at the Wikimedia Conference.



Good documentation: hard to come by

Documentation is key for the success of the Wikimedia Movement. Because the “Chatham House Rule” applies at the Wikimedia Conference, good documentation of sessions is important for participants to be able to report back to their affiliates, and for people who have not participated to follow what happened. Good documentation makes it possible to report on the status of a conversation, on commitments that people have taken, and points of contact; so that every Wikimedian can be on the same page.

With a lot of effort, we made written summaries available for most of the conference sessions in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

However, finding volunteers that have enough of an overview of the program topics to take good notes is difficult. Distilling the main messages and outcomes from these notes is even more difficult. And what makes things even more complicated is when speakers do not provide notes or upload their slides. In 2017, we made the first attempt to hire a professional notetaker and documentation specialist for the movement strategy track, this investment turned out to be an excellent choice.





Establishing links to other conferences

To keep conversations and ideas alive between Wikimedia Conferences, one of our approaches is to build bridges to other conferences. Having people in one space and in face to face conversations is a good way to create follow-ups. Although conferences are an important instrument in the Wikimedia Movement to bring people together face to face, we have the impression that many Wikimedia events are organized as siloed, single events. The learnings of other Wikimedia events and conferences are not taken into consideration, and there is no outlook to future conferences. Especially at Wikimania the wheel is, to a certain extent, invented again every year, and sessions in the program do not build upon what happened the previous year.

We think that, generally, an efficient global conference support for logistics as well as program design is needed here.

How to build those bridges between conferences? One of the ways that has proven to be successful for us is to ask specific people to travel to certain conferences, especially Wikimedia regional conferences, to carry certain topics forward. Over the years, we have established a base of allies and “ambassadors” for the most important topics at the Wikimedia Conference, who follow up and develop them further in between conferences.



A good example of such a bridge can be seen around the “Partnerships” topic. In November 2016, the “Partnerships group” met for two days in Berlin to discuss and work on concrete ideas for creating a stronger network around how to work with Partnerships in the Wikimedia Movement. Julia Kirchner (Wikimedia Deutschland) and Jack Rabah (Wikimedia Foundation) continued this conversation and created a phenomenal space at WikiIndaba, the African Wikimedia conference, in January 2017 in Accra, Ghana, to talk about experiences on partnerships from different African Wikimedia communities, and to create a common understanding of the existence of similar and shared problems. At the same time, both hosts gathered input for the upcoming

“Movement Partnerships” track at the Wikimedia Conference 2017. In addition, the “WMCON Follow-Up Day” at Wikimania 2015, 2016 and 2017 were useful to continue working on Wikimedia Conference topics. However, it remains a challenge to build bridges to other Wikimedia events, mostly because these conferences have a limited program scope (like at WikiArabia 2016 and 2017, and IberoConf 2017), or they focus heavily on sharing experiences and capacity building within the regional context, and hence the WMCON topics do not fit into the program.





Supporting WMCON participants in following up on key topics

Besides focusing on the conference itself in terms of program quality and the links to other conferences we also support people that are dedicated to continue working on the major themes of the Wikimedia Conference. This work has been rather uphill. However, the first real results of the follow-up work are starting to show.

The main idea has been to provide tools and support (limited by our resources) to the “Thematic Ambassadors” that engage themselves in the major topics, identified in 2015, of the Wikimedia Conference. Among these topics the following are both the most interesting and promising ones in terms of activities and outcomes:

- Partnerships in the Wikimedia Movement
- Volunteer Supporters Network
- Boards Training
- International Communication (within the Wikimedia Movement)
- Public Policy in the EU
- Movement strategy (was: Movement Roles/Chapters Dialogue)

We assist the people carrying these topics regularly and provide them support. One highlight: Since 2014, the German-speaking Wikimedia Chapters Wikimedia Deutschland, Wikimedia Österreich and Wikimedia CH work regularly together, as they serve and support the same language community. With support from the Program and Engagement Coordinator, the working group of these three chapters moved towards a so-called “Volunteer Supporters Network”, a Community of Practice of (staff) Volunteer Supporters of different Wikimedia organizations.

The network had sessions at all three Wikimedia Conferences and the WMCON Follow-Up Days at Wikimania. The network already produced some learning patterns and will meet for the first time for a specific work meeting in November 2017, with around a dozen volunteer supporters from (mostly) European Wikimedia Chapters to discuss challenges and conflicts as well as impact of volunteer support. Within the movement, the network now starts to be approached by others asking for inspiration and advice on volunteer support, one of the core topics of all Wikimedia organizations and groups.

Likewise, the group of Wikimedians engaging in exchange and mutual support and strategic discussions around partnerships has been a constant at most global and regional conferences for several years now.

Despite what we consider as the success of the partnerships track, we had to realize that engaging WMCON participants between conferences generally is not easy. We rarely find people interested in volunteering on topics relating to international collaboration among Wikimedia affiliates. Our hypothesis is that especially one-time participants (see “Dimension 1”) are not really interested in engaging afterwards - they are power editors/volunteers in their communities and care about these with a lot of love and passion - they rarely put emphasis on an international perspective.

Additionally, there are currently around 100 Wikimedia affiliate staff members (excluding WMDE and WMF), and they might not have the time or resources to focus on international collaboration.

We experienced that most of those who attend the Wikimedia Conference are highly interested in working together with people from other affiliates and engaging in international collaboration. However, international collaboration per se is rarely part of affiliates’ budgets, or is even cut from grant proposals. Therefore our educated guess is that affiliate staff members in order to collaborate with others would need to take the time away from their local projects and therefore simply cannot allocate the time to work together. In order to breathe life into the strategic direction, the Wikimedia movement will have to invest tangible resources - money and people’s time - in international collaboration and in enabling collaboration between its entities. Only then will we move from being a movement sharing ideas towards a movement working together on a joint purpose.



Improving the Wikimedia movement by being a constant forum for conversations about our future

The Wikimedia movement is an organically grown network consisting of the Wikimedia Foundation, its online projects, the corresponding communities, formalized and unformalized Wikimedia organizations and groups like Wikimedia affiliates and committees. Since its modest inception in 2001 and the founding of the Wikimedia Foundation in 2003, there has never been a grand plan outlining where it all should go, or what the focus should be.



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Before it would be possible to even talk about such a plan, there was a practical question to consider: where should the conversations take place? Despite of Wikimedia being centered around our most text-based project, Wikipedia, we felt that Wikimedians were increasingly getting tired of corresponding online about these topics. Not to the mention that these discussions are mainly taking place between anglophone Wikimedians.

Even before 2015, the Wikimedia Conference could have been a place to discuss the future of Wikimedia, but despite some efforts, it never was. The scope was either too limited, there was no interest from the relevant parts, or affiliates were more interested in engaging in discussions around logistics. In 2014, the outcomes of the Chapters Dialogue project (the so-called “6 Tough Questions”) were presented at the Wikimedia Conference:

Questions that pointed towards the deeper challenges of the structures, roles, resources, and responsibilities of the Wikimedia Movement. They were not addressed immediately though. The awarding of the Wikimedia Conference for a three-year term to Wikimedia Deutschland was a game changer in this.

In 2015, the Wikimedia Conference was the first big conference for the then Executive Director of the Wikimedia Foundation, Lila Tretikov, to present herself and her ideas to the group of affiliates. As the Wikimedia Foundation faced Leadership struggles in the following months it was hard to follow up on the conference. Shortly before the Wikimedia Conference 2016, Tretikov left the WMF and her successor Katherine Maher became interim Executive Director.

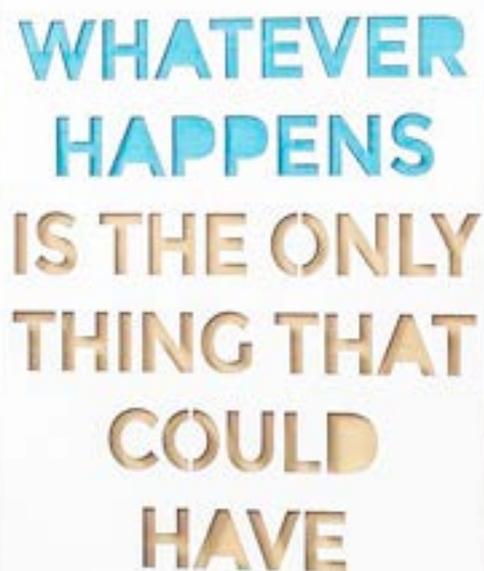


The Wikimedia Conference 2016 was then the first opportunity where we used our intentionally prepared wild-card/hot topics slots: Giving space for WMF staff as well as affiliates to talk about the struggles, conflicts and emotions. We called the track “How to move forward”, and gave space to talk about the occurring difficulties, while having a clear idea of moving forward in mind. This turned out to be relieving and reconciling at the same time, and the Wikimedia Conference 2016 became a structure for productive and fruitful conversations about the future.

At Wikimania 2016 in Esino Lario, the Board of Trustees tasked the now permanent Executive Director Katherine Maher with designing and leading a Movement Strategy process for the coming years. With an active approach, convincing arguments, and not least conversations in the Armenian mountain atmosphere, we built the Wikimedia Conference 2017. It was done – in close, trustful collaboration with the Wikimedia Foundation – to be the first – and one of the most important – spaces to really engage in talking about the future strategic direction of the Wikimedia movement.

Thanks to excellent facilitators and track designers, we think the Wikimedia Conference 2017, a conference in which even pessimistic or cynical participants turned into optimists, laid the ground for a productive Movement Strategy process.

In Wikimedia Deutschland we always saw the Wikimedia Conference as a potential forum for conversations about the future of the Wikimedia Movement, and about strategic and organizational development. Over the three last years, and with a lot of effort, we have re-designed the conference in order to live up to this potential, and we are now much closer to being such a forum than four years ago. We believe that having the Wikimedia Conference as a dialogue forum that includes affiliates in strategic conversations is in the greater interest of the Wikimedia Movement. We therefore also believe that after the Wikimedia Conference 2018, we will have enough support from both the Wikimedia Foundation and Wikimedia affiliates to turn the conference into an event focusing on strategy, governance and organizational development.



WHATEVER
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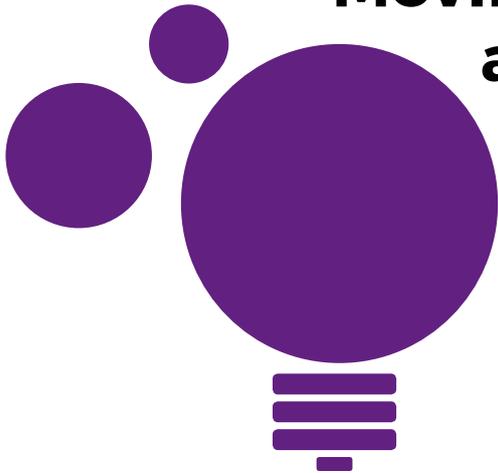
Conclusions

Having organized the Wikimedia Conference three years in a row and thinking back on what we had planned for this event (to make it more productive, outcome-oriented and effective, and more sustainable), we can say that our plan succeeded: We took the conference to a new level. With the introduction of the Program and Engagement Coordinator, we created a unique position in the movement: a dedicated staff member who produces the program

along the needs and wishes of the participants and who ensures that people stay engaged in the different topic strands of the conference throughout the year. For the first time with a Wikimedia event, there is constant follow-up, outcomes are documented, and documentation improves year after year. Approval rates by the participants for program and logistics have grown accordingly, and significantly.

4 Key Learnings

Moving away from being a one-stop shop



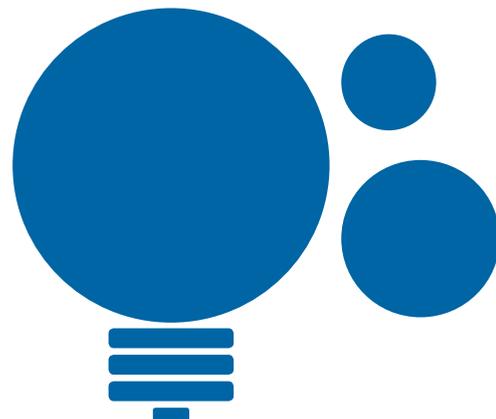
Focus on strategy and governance



Strengthening the profile and infrastructure of Wikimedia events, regionally and globally



Being a truly global movement means being connected



These years gave us the opportunity to thoroughly understand the Wikimedia Conference as an event, its audience and their needs and wishes. We came to the conclusion that despite the current success of the conference, the concept of the Wikimedia Conference has its limits. We think that we need to move away from a “one-stop shop” conference and move towards a landscape of more focused, specialized conferences tailored to the needs of the Wikimedia movement.

“ We are a global movement, a multicultural movement and a diverse movement. Therefore, many different issues need to be addressed through our events and we should consider how more specialized conferences and events can help us achieve that.”

John Andersson,
ED of Wikimedia Sverige

Moving away from being a one- stop shop

Focus on strategy and governance

In the future, we envision the Wikimedia Conference to be one focused annual event for strategic and governance conversations, as well as decision making among affiliates, the WMF and its committees: a conference that carries the conversations from the movement strategy process further into the future, and is iteratively developed along with the implementation and adaptation of the movement strategy.

**“ In the Wikimedia
Conference all of us are equal.**

It doesn't matter if you are a huge affiliate or a small one, not like Wikimania, each is represented by the same size of delegation. This allows for an intimate meeting opportunity to discuss, share and decide together.”

Itzik Edri,
Chair of Wikimedia Israel



At the same time, we would like to see an increased number of smaller, more focused Movement events and meetings for shared learning and peer-to-peer exchange among affiliates, the WMF and its committees as well as community leaders designed according to their regional and thematic contexts. Regional learning events in the local languages and contexts are more impactful. We consider in-person, in-language training to be more effective and engaging while a global event can better be used to strategically discuss results and objectives for these trainings and to decide upon improvements of the general approach.

At the same time, we think that at Wikimania the wheel is, to a certain extent, invented again every year, and sessions in the program do not build upon what happened the previous year. A new approach for designing our truly global community conference is necessary. We think that, generally, an efficient global conference support for logistics as well as program design is needed for all Wikimedia events.

“It is vital that we not only work on the major issues that we feel deeply about in the movement as a whole, but also discuss local matters, as people working around similar topics.

Strong communities built around a region, a language or a theme are very important.

They form a great basis, the critical mass for creating projects and developing ideas. And those communities are built on smaller meetups.”

Natalia Szafran-Kozakowska,
staff member of Wikimedia Polska

Strengthening the profile and infrastructure of events, regionally and globally

This proposed new landscape of conferences – a sharpened profile for the Wikimedia Conference, regional and thematic conferences, as well as the Wikimania – could offer the Movement more and better ways to interact and collaborate with each other. However, we think that structures like the Wikimedia Conference cannot solve problems, they can only support solutions. To be able to build strong and diverse communities as well as breaking down existing barriers, we need to actually live and act up to this: We do not only need boots on the ground in every country of the world, but we need collaboration and strong connections between all these entities.

“The Wikimedia conference has been an international space which allows to think strategic actions in the movement having in consideration the different challenges that we as Wikimedia activists are facing in very different contexts in the world.”

Iván Martínez,
Chair of Wikimedia Mexico

Being a truly global movement means being connected



WHEN IT'S
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Thank you!

Credits

Frontpage

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