

THE BRUSSELS OFFICE AS PERCEIVED BY ITS PARTNERS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes 33 interviews conducted in February 2021 with diverse partners to discuss the perceived assets and potentials of the Wikimedia policy team located in Brussels (referred to as the Brussels Office). The goal of the report was to combine a “snapshot” of the team’s activities and practices as seen by the partners and collaborators, as well as suggestions, needs, and expectations vis-à-vis them, expressed in the long-term perspective by internal and external stakeholders.

The major findings are in the following areas and include:

1. Quality of the policy work and the mandate

- The Brussels Office staff is widely respected and recognized by diverse stakeholders for their expertise, trustworthiness, generosity, and involvement;
- a great majority of chapters (beyond the 11 chapters that co-fund the activity of the Office) perceives the Brussels Office to represent them as a part of the Movement; this mandate/perceived bond seems to be one of the greatest assets of the Brussels Office within the Wikimedia community;
- external partners additionally emphasize how important a role the Brussels Office plays among other civil society organizations and coalitions in the field.

2. Representation and support to Wikimedia chapters

- Initiatives that go beyond policy and advocacy, such as a) support provided to the low-capacity chapters and b) “thematic generosity” and involvement in broad coalitions for digital rights — are particularly acknowledged.

3. Desired improvements

- The majority of interviewees pointed at the need to expand (staff wise), to be more proactive in the EU-level lobbying and coalition building, and to broaden the thematic interests; however, exactly opposite opinions (to stay focused and reactive rather than proactive) were also voiced;
- in their recommendations the majority of interviewees pointed at the need for establishing a better communication to be developed on different levels: a) in terms of transforming public discourse and raising public awareness; b) in terms of strongly communicating to the EU partners.

4. Implementation of the 2030 Strategic objectives

- The dilemmas around the future of the Brussels Office are strongly connected to the dilemmas regarding the Movement in general; they should thus not be addressed in a vacuum.
- There is an expectation that the Brussels Office will operate based on a clear agenda of strategic priorities; it seems that the Wikimedia movement strategy needs to be communicated more efficiently, as there is not enough awareness of its existence among the members of the movement.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Wikimedia Movement is a community of individuals and organizations centered around the open knowledge projects.

Within the movement's entities, the Wikimedia Foundation is an American non-profit organization founded in 2001, with the mission of promoting open knowledge. Wikimedia runs several projects including the Wikipedia collaborative on-line encyclopedia, and the Wikidata platform that collects structured and shareable datasets. The Wikimedia platforms host content that is collaboratively created online by their contributors, promoting an environment of free and shareable knowledge. The non-profit is present globally, running on a decentralized structure with differing local capacities—in some countries local chapters act entirely on a volunteer-base, in others they have full-time paid staff. The Wikimedia community in Europe is composed of chapter representatives, volunteer-affiliates, as well as a larger community of editors and contributors.

The Brussels Office monitors EU-level legislation that impacts Wikimedia projects and the online free knowledge environment. They are involved in influencing relevant institutions and policies in coordination with like-minded organizations that also fight for a digital commons. The civil-society organizations include Communia, Creative Commons, EDRi, and Epicenter Works, Access Now, BEUC, most of which are notably represented in Brussels; they advocate for access to knowledge, overseeing copyright and intellectual property as well as privacy and surveillance in the internet environment.

Methodology

I collected data by conducting thirty three ethnographic semi-structured interviews and sending a few follow-up inquiries to the individuals who had been interviewed. In particular, methods developed by James Spradley (descriptive questions in ethnographic interviewing) were at use in designing the project.

The objectives of the research were to evaluate the activity of the Brussels Office and develop recommendations regarding their future; thus interviewees' perceptions, opinions, and aspirations were of interest to me during the conversations. I would not correct any factual inconsistencies during my interviews, and some quotes reflect these inconsistencies.

The same applies regarding defining interviewees needs: the questions were asked in an open-ended, indirect way, to facilitate interviewees' answers articulating their actual needs. The list of core questions can be found in the appendix to this document.

Interviewees

Thirty three interviewees represented two major groups of stakeholders:

- a) 21 "internal partners," i.e. Wikimedia chapters based in Europe, User Groups and the Wikimedia Foundation, U.S.,
- b) 12 "external partners," i.e. broadly understood digital rights civil society organizations and members of the European Parliament.

They are referred to as IP and EP respectively.

Within the group of 21 internal partners, Wikimedia chapters represent diverse levels of capacity and EU-level policy involvement and aspirations, with the two not always correlating. Some interviewees come from organizations actively involved/interested in the EU lobbying and advocacy, despite their relatively low capacity (no paid policy analyst/lawyer in organization, etc); others — from more locally focused organizations, with or without larger institutional capacity.

I received data about the interviewees' values, interests, and capacities, when asking about their most successful projects, as well as when asking about the effect current crises have on the future of open knowledge movement. One surprising finding regarding the second question was that numerous interviewees were having a hard time when encouraged to speculate about the future. It seems that perhaps the real effect of current crises has also something to do with constraining long-term planning, speculating, and strategizing. It also affects the characteristics of responses in a broader sense and should be kept in mind when reading the report.

External partners are the representatives of civil-society organizations and coalitions the Brussels Office collaborates with and/or is a part of. Also, several MEPs were interviewed, as they, too, have collaborated with the Brussels Office.

In terms of access to interviewees, it was the Brussels Office that provided contact information and e-introductions with interviewees according to the diversity criteria described above. We have received ca. 80% response rate from the invited interviewees -- a demonstration of general involvement of the community and external partners. Due to time constraints, I was not asking interviewees to share their recommendations regarding more people to interview.

DEFINITIONS: WHAT DOES THE BRUSSELS OFFICE DO? WHOM DOES IT REPRESENT?

The first question asked very generally about the Brussels Office's activity.

The interviewees generally understand the activity of the Brussels Office as being involved in lobbying for the interests of Wikimedia movement/open knowledge and digital rights — this function was mentioned as the major one by everybody. Interviewees used many metaphors to describe Brussels Office's role:

- as "a voice,"
- "an interface [between the EU institutions, U.S. and the communities in Europe],"
- "a fly on the wall [of the European institutions],"
- "fighters;"
- their role described as to "be at the table"; "keep an eye on the legislation"; "be the face [of the Movement]."

These metaphors illustrate the values the interviewees assign to general roles of the Brussels Office, including: agency, "utility," stewardship, intelligence, and public representation.

The IPs point at the role of the Brussels Office representing the coalition of Wikimedia chapters, a more or less consensual voice of the Movement. Interestingly, large majority of chapters consider themselves represented by the Brussels Office, despite whether they actually co-fund the Office or not — the interviewees were using "us" and "we" when talking about the Brussels Office activity:

"I would tell you that Dimi and Anna are the European voice of the Wikimedia Movement, and that they work (...) on European policy dossiers that have an impact on our projects or are relevant to our goals as a movement." (IP 2)

"(...)it's great to have them because they're there and they can represent the movement as a coalition of European chapters." (IP 9)

At the same time it was clear that the interviewees did not participate in the decision-making of the Brussels Office's agenda, and embrace the Office's independence in this matter:

"They do the lobbying and the outreach with the political parties and other think tanks, NGOs, and others in terms of what the agenda they believe they should follow (...) I guess Dimi... I don't know really how he sets his agenda." (IP5)

The EPs, on the other hand, describe the Brussels Office as guardians of a larger community and civil society voice advocating for digital rights. Many interviewees appreciated that the Brussels Office's involvement is more generous than the particular interests of Wikimedia Foundation:

"I see them as guardians of not just Wikimedia interests, but broader interests of community and movement with similar goals. So guardians and defenders, or promoters of interests of all these different stakeholders in Brussels. So when they fight in the name of Wikimedia, they also fight for institutions who share a similar goal." (EP2)

"I perceive it as the mission of Wikipedia to not just focus on 'what's good for their service' but also to look at what's good for the wider internet ecosystem." (EP3)

“So I think, what I see them doing a lot is really engaging in some of the topics that they feel are most threatening to this open space of collaboration or engagement of bringing people to an open internet kind of framework. And they are good at bringing the voice to that.” (EP10)

Both IPs and EPs highlight that the Brussels Office advocates for free knowledge and open content — understood very broadly by each interviewee:

"They're just following the legislation that is prepared and trying to be in a scope like, try to see the whole picture of anything that could affect free content or free culture in general. So it's, I think, a hard job." (IP12)

“They do advocacy or lobbying work within Brussels, within the political institutions that are taking shape there within civil society for regulation that is favorable for the promotion of open knowledge or free knowledge. That actually includes, I think, quite a wide range” (EP5)

IPs underlined an important function of the Brussels Office in supporting the chapters, by providing training and advice on local advocacy efforts. This was usually expressed by the interviewees as a secondary capacity, not the main role of the Brussels Office:

"The second topic, which is also important, at least for me, is to help the Wikimedians to understand what the EU is." (IP3)

“They give a lot of guidance for smaller communities like ours. (...) Also for the smaller communities like us, it is really great because they raise all the red flags. They can help us analyze some text or give a lot of guidance on policy work." (IP9)

An important function of the Office, pointed by both internal and external partners, is the role as a counterweight to the industry. It was underlined by numerous stakeholders, including MEPs:

“They follow the developments from the EU Institutions to lobby in favor of the Wikimedia movement and the free knowledge movement... To be a counterweight to the lobby on the copyright holders side." (IP18)

The list of all the responses to the question “what does the Brussels Office do”:

- They represent Wikimedia, open knowledge movement, more largely other digital rights movements
- They provide a counterweight to the industrial and rights holders lobbying by partnering with digital rights organizations to amplify advocacy efforts, civil-society voice
- They support chapters with their expertise and legal advice on national transpositions of EU legislation (materials)
- They support chapters in advocacy campaigns on site (events, materials, talking points)
- They provide materials and information ahead of time of national transposition
- They provide networking opportunities for local chapters (or volunteers) to interact and get to know each other (e.g. they organize the Big Fat Brussels Meeting when chapters and volunteer representatives meet),
- They liaise local chapters and volunteers to meet their respective MEPs in Brussels
- They coach local chapters on advocacy strategy, approach with MEPs (e.g.) and they translate/train Wikimedians understand EU policies (they run a scholarship

program in Brussels)

- They brief local chapters on their approach to MEPs during advocacy campaigns
- They create trust with MEPs, building informal bonds that are crucial
- They regularly inform chapters of what is happening on EU Commission/Parliament, "raise red flags" (e.g. newsletter)
- They write drafts of legislation to improve it.

It seems that the Brussels Office clearly communicates its activity, as even those partners not involved with the Office on a regular basis were able to explain the Office's frame of activity.

OPEN KNOWLEDGE IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CRISES

The interviewees pointed at numerous challenges related to current global crises. While in general they would not analyze the role of these challenges for the near future of open knowledge and the internet governance (as asked), their choices do deserve attention, as they illustrate the general landscape in which the Brussels Office is perceived.

Numerous interviewees see the pandemic as an opportunity to confirm the importance of and the need for open knowledge, with the status of Wikipedia rising. Other comments regarding the effects of current crises include:

- a) the discussion on open knowledge/digital commons may not be high on the agenda in the coming years;
- b) there will be a push for more regulation of the platforms in general, without differentiating between the commercial and non-commercial ones, which may backfire at Wikipedia platform;
- c) the issues of surveillance have been becoming more and more critical;
- d) NGOs will be less present in the discussions on digital rights/internet governance, due to the pandemic/economic crisis affecting their institutional capacity, vis-à-vis the industry's resources;
- e) the dual effects and costs of open/close knowledge during the pandemic -- for users and for creators -- and the work needed in assisting cultural institutions that are expanding on digitization;
- f) the need to address misinformation / disinformation systemically.

EPs and IPs point that the crises work in two opposite directions: on one side, it shifts the public and political attention to the health emergency, having less funding available to advance on the infrastructure required to expand digitization. On the other, the health crisis sheds light to the pressing needs in education where the demand for access to online materials - and Wikipedia - has sharply increased.

"Political crisis makes it more difficult to give high priority to access to knowledge, access to content issues, and pandemic works in two directions. On one hand less interested to talk about other issues because you're concerned about health, but secondly children are at home, all

school movies online, and suddenly some issues become important." (EP2)

"Public health and economic crisis has reduced the amount of funds available to make that knowledge openly accessible, because it requires a lot of financial investment to digitize, to have policies in place, to have the infrastructure to make that knowledge openly accessible."(EP7)

Both EPs and IPs underline another side effect of the pandemic: the increasing space of online surveillance systems, by normalising the releasing of personal data in contact tracing apps, for example.

"(...) governments right now are saying: "Our priority is to preserve life etc ". And data protection or privacy comes second." (IP7)

IPs and EPs voiced their concerns of the digital environment being shaped by a much more equipped industry lobbying which is also more effective **"in coining terms."**(IP21) and having lobby meetings with Parliament representatives.

Both IPs and EPs underline the momentum of greater public awareness of the value of free access to knowledge as an opportunity to push for a digital commons agenda. Unlocking access to research materials for students and scientists who are working from home is key to fostering knowledge exchange and enabling the rewards of online collaboration:

"We need policies that, you know, allow researchers, students, school children and whoever concerned to access those materials. I think this is really something where there's a huge opportunity." (IP2) .

Libraries and cultural institutions are also boosting efforts in digitization to make their collections free and accessible for educational purposes and to reach new audiences. Wikimedia might seize this momentum to initiate/expand projects in support of cultural institutions going through this digitization process —opportunities in which Wikimedians can deploy their expertise and propose to hosting these materials on Wikimedia and Wikidata online space.

Despite the expansion of these digitization efforts on the cultural sector, the pandemic also enforces a counternarrative to the "opening" process:

"many creators obviously can also claim that they suffer from, you know, losses at the moment due to not being able to perform concerts or whatever they're doing and that any change to copyright policy might harm them in some way or another."(IP2)

Despite widely emphasizing the power of the industry lobby in Brussels, interviewees also described a climate that pressures for increasing platform regulation: ***It seems that especially at the state level, the politicians are upset by the big tech companies. They***

are very useful during the pandemic. Their benefits increase. So I think that the authorities will put some limits (IP3). Legislators are also under the pressure and increased awareness of **misinformation and disinformation has also seen a massive boost and attention [during the pandemic] (EP5).**

Conveying the notion of free knowledge to EU representatives is particularly challenging in times of spreading disinformation. One interviewee says:

"from an outside perspective, or even from a politician's perspective, it's often hard to grasp what free knowledge is about... (...) so much of a platform regulation talk that's happening now in terms of content moderation, for example, is largely driven by people who don't understand the internet, and mostly focused on the negative sides of things." (EP5).

It is therefore key to make legislators distinguish what open knowledge means for Wikimedia so that platform regulation and content moderation that apply to social media platforms are not harmful to Wikimedia projects (e.g. GAFA tax): **because we are not on the mind of the lawmakers, they draft legislation with social media in mind. And then it turns out that their definition sweeps us into the scope of that (IP19).**

One key challenge is the generational gap between the internet world and the representatives making decisions in Brussels who don't fully understand the IT environment; not only identifying but also explaining what are the implications of certain legislative decisions on the open knowledge environment.

"[As the] internet becomes more and more like a privatized, large international companies that are regulating a lot of things. (...)I fear politicians don't understand the value of free and non-commercial internet. And regulation for Facebook, Twitter, or Youtube they don't realize, that it can impact user generated platforms that are non-commercial."(IP20).

This is the time to design the legislation to make the digital environment a public space for the public interest:

"we're really in the baby shoes of this digitization, and we should take advantage of shaping it instead of letting the environment shape us and get ruled by bigger ones or big data or whatever, you know?"(IP5).

"And the dominance of private public spaces on the Internet is huge. I'm not against private public space. I think the mix is what counts here, and I think there is no balance in the mix. So I think what we need to do is create, including in law, some benefits for nonprofit public spaces" (IP21)

BRUSSELS OFFICE IN ACTION, AS PERCEIVED BY COLLABORATORS

I. Policy work

Policy work of the Brussels Office is widely acknowledged by both external and internal stakeholders. While Wikimedians agree that the office is in charge of overseeing what directly impacts Wikimedia movement, external partner organizations often praise the breadth and generosity of the Office's involvement: **they do not just focus on 'what's**

good for their service' but also look at what's good for the wider internet ecosystem.
(EP3)

The role as lobbyists in Brussels involves developing trust-based relationships with members of Parliament. One MEP characterizes this relationship:

"It is informal... I think that is a key part. I am on friendly terms with both of them [i.e. Dimi and Anna], I wouldn't hesitate to go grab a beer with them. I have indeed grabbed beers with them. There is a high level of trust and a high level of informality." (EP8)

Civil-society organizations fighting for digital rights and open knowledge in Brussels work together as a counterweight to the well established industry and copyrights holders lobby: ***making sure that after a hundred industry lobbyists based in the city and very well-funded, there's at least one civil society voice that they hear (...)***. (EP3) Partners rely on the Office's public knowledge and expertise in their collaborations in response to public consultations, in creating policy positions, organizing workshops and campaigns, and lobbying with the EU Parliament and the Commission:

"That irreplaceable thing of knowing who is who in Europe and getting us to contact, getting us a contact with whomever we need. (...) just the intel on the processes themselves, if something is happening, is being held in a committee, this kind of very detailed info and secret info that they do have access to. I think that's kind of the biggest advantage for us, for our organization." (EP9)

"What I see them doing a lot is really engaging in some of the topics that they feel are most threatening to this open space of collaboration or engagement of bringing people to an open internet kind of framework. And they are good at bringing the voice to that. (...) And I think they do a great job whether or not they get their Wikimedia carved out in certain legislation, they still continue to take the issue and the values forward. So I know they are extremely well respected across all the communities here and everytime I see them speak or work with them, it is inspirational to hear from them and the work they are doing, for such a small team as well." (EP10)

"If there was a legislative reform process taking place in Brussels that involved topics that we would be interested in, or that would be a concern to us. Like for example, the Database Directive is coming up. We would very much rely on the expertise of the Brussels office because of their first hand experience dealing with the whole machinery/procedural/practical side and we could rely very much on it. For example on the substantive side because I would very much rely on their specific expertise of EU law. At CC we have to have the global view, so less familiar with the regional law... so I think that's how we would be able to collaborate." (EP7)

"We have collaborated with them for a long time. Along with them, we started the campaign against upload features in the Copyright Directive, and we've been organizing seminars, workshops, speaking in public events, lobbying the Parliament and the Commission. We're doing all this advocacy together. Then we have created policy positions, responses to public consultations, basically everything you can do on advocacy. (...) I suppose we've done everything together in some fights. (...) and we coordinate together almost on a weekly basis to see how to get some victories in the Parliament or in the Commission, depending on the stage of the procedure." (EP1)

II. Support of the Wikimedians

Wikimedians acknowledge complex support they receive from the Brussels Office on various levels:

- a) **networking and capacity building** -- interviewees underline the role of the networking initiatives and communication (The Big Fat Brussels Meeting, bootcamps, newsletter, etc), as well as advice on connecting chapter members with other organizations, both internally within the movement and externally, within the broader field;
- b) **legal advice and knowledge sharing** -- interviewees unanimously emphasise the importance of Brussels Office's legal advice: its high quality, breadth that reaches local contexts, and speed;
- c) **communication** -- interviewees point at the Office's involvement in ensuring they get understanding of EU-level policies and processes, as well as support in broader communication on local level, by prepping the Wikimedians with briefings, and delivering presentations at local conferences, when needed;
- d) **"hospitality in Brussels"** -- interviewees appreciate support in navigating EU institutions in Brussels, from meetings to help with getting through the maze of buildings, etc ;
- e) **relations** -- interviewees acknowledge the Brussels team's features that provides the irrefutable sense of reliability: patience, trustworthiness, friendliness, proactive communication, and generosity of the Brussels Office.

"during the Copyright Reform process, (...) Anna and Dimi were always very concrete sources of information about what was going on during the process of implementation. So Anna and Dimi are very well-informed and a good source of information that can be used for the work of Communia. And then, of course, I'm using that information also when I do work here in Slovenia. (...) And if I need to consult with somebody about some issues, I know who to turn to." (EP2)

"We have a lot of activists, lawyers [in my organization] but this particular type of work is something that is not that common, I'd say, being a diplomat, basically. This is for me the most important thing they can do. I mean, they can, of course, Dimi is reading a lot to keep himself relevant in terms of substantive expertise.... But I think advocacy is probably the most important thing: communicating to legislators is probably the most important thing that they could do."(EP4)

"Anna and Dimi always invited me to their office and I stayed there once when they still had their own office and helped me get in touch with the right people at the European Commission, because I needed access to a specific Director General and a specific unit in this DG. And, you know, helped me get my badge at the European Parliament because you need one to enter freely and so on. So those were highlights that just helped with my onboarding. " (IP2)

"It's more than a conference [i.e. Big Fat Brussels Meeting]. They take you out for beers... but not just beers... but they make, or try to, make sure MEPs come by as well. You sit in places. I never spoke to my MEPs and now I have seen them. I can now explain Wikimedia to them. I don't have to try to put it in words in an email. (...)" (IP13)

"That bootcamp that they were co-organizers of, is where I got the contacts from the people

that I'm working now at the local level. I think it is really cool because they have a very wide vision on who could we be interacting with in different cases for regulation." (IP9)

"...just today sent out a statement [of a local Wikimedia], and I have been reaching out to Sweden... (....) It's easier to email them because we already met... we have seen each other in Brussels!" (IP13)

"Dimi has also introduced me to many people in the movement who are working on that (...), which otherwise I would have never known with whom I could discuss and see and say, Hey, don't forget us."(IP5)

"They also help us coordinate each country, each person involved in that topic: the employees and the volunteers of the movement that are involved in that. This could be done without Dimi and Anna I think, but, they do that, specifically because they manage a newsletter and also at least before the COVID once per year there was a workshop, so it was useful to meet. For me it was useful to meet my colleagues from Spain or Germany and things like that." (IP3)

"[the advantage of the Big Fat Brussels Meeting is that we] discuss with all the chapters about EU policy and what are the challenges for the coming year and so on and so forth. And I think that was really cool. I hope with these new virtual meetings that will be a little bit the continuation from that, but I hope there can still be done. This is the part I like the most, because it's the part that helps my work most." (IP9)

"And they also have connections with other organizations that alone, as me, I couldn't find. So they helped connect me with other organizations with Access now, for example, or with the EDRI."(IP7)

"[Anna] She has unlimited time to explain to me why something is important so that I can explain it in my language to my community. So she helps me do the bridging I want to do." (IP13)

"I think they give a lot of guidance for smaller communities like ours. (....)Also for the smaller communities like us, it is really great because they raise all the red flags. They can help us analyze some text or give a lot of guidance on policy work." (IP9).

"They are little mice... like the fly on the wall... they really are! I very much enjoy the summaries/monthly summaries from Dimi. He does not just give us information but also the background. Like there is gossip they will vote against, and they will vote, and we see that...it's like all the... you don't need Netflix if you have Dimi and Anna!" (IP13)

"They actually get information you don't get anywhere else which is a good sign and it takes time, really a lot of time. (...) That is trust in a person, which is important in Brussels." (IP17).

"So two weeks ago, I wrote to Anna saying "Anna, please, I need a 5-line summary of the Digital Services Act" because someone is going to talk to me about it and I need to know what is up. I got it in no time." (IP14)

"The most valuable part is the support that they get together with Communia and other actors give for the implementation of different legislative acts. Like the Copyright Directive, just to give an example, I don't think we would have been able to give so much and didn't have input on the legislative process if it weren't for the documentation, for the meetings, for the

workshops that they organized.“ (IP20)

There is a shared understanding among the Wikimedians that between two main activities: lobbying (research, narrative preparation, responding to consultations, networking with politicians and like-minded organizations), and support to the Wikimedians (networking opportunities for internal partners, writing newsletters, organizing workshops and capacity building programs) the Brussels Office team members are not sufficiently equipped "**to be at the table.**" (IP14)

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE

The interviewees were asked to recommend directions for the future development/expansion of the Brussels Office, to further cultivate their collaboration with the Office. This question revealed needs and expectations the interviewees have vis-à-vis the Brussels Office (and beyond), thus various themes and ideas would be mentioned in their responses together, sometimes in a contradictory fashion, often in a bunch of unrelated postulates. My categorizations below tend to be arbitrary if porous. I also chose longer quotes to give voice to the interviewees.

Wikimedians praise the work of Brussels office, they also understand that the current structure is insufficient for an effective lobbying presence: ***when you're really there as a bigger actor can you be visible and participate in all the lobbying as you can. Otherwise you're just a NGO, which like everyone else, with no real impact or whatever... you have to become really present and be very clear also how you push things forward.*** (IP5)

New topics?

Brussels office expansion in the coverage of new topics and dossiers is a debated issue among the interviewees. While a few Wikimedians would like to see the Brussels lobbying embrace new topics such as sustainability or AI ethics, they also note that the definition of these topics should be guided in response to the guidelines and vision provided by the Foundation and/or the Movement. Making this vision explicit would be helpful to strategize what partners and topics are key in advancing, according to the defined vision for the Movement:

"Since two years I try to track some clear views, clear positions from the Foundation. And each time when I asked for that, I did not have any answer. (...) The good thing is that they respect our independence. Their affiliates are clearly independent from the financial, but, of course, we all share the same name, the same visions, so..." (...) " I know the Foundation right now asked to join the WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization) office and... What are the next steps? Maybe there are more institutions we would like to join. But right now, I don't know what are the main priorities for the movement? So we probably need to work on that...the question about the climate and sustainable development." (IP3)

Some argue this definition could be made independently from the Foundation, and be applicable to the European context exclusively:

"I do think that in Europe, we should put ourselves together and say: Hey, you know, what's our common voice? (...) we have to become much better as, like, to have one or two or three key themes that we are pushing all together forward in the next few years." (IP5)

Surprisingly, only two among twenty-one IP interviewees mentioned the Movement's strategy -- one in the context of hubs, and another one in the context of the challenges of the decision-making process within the movement. One would guess that it has not been communicated successfully enough or that it is too new a document to be referred to/internalized.

“So the global Wikimedia Foundation has initiated a process of implementing a new strategy that goes until 2030. And there's been a number of recommendations to specify what type of changes need to happen for the movement to be relevant in a 10 year period and beyond. You know, what do we need to put in place? A lot of discussion around that was to establish different types of organizational capabilities and capacities. And one of the lessons there is about something called Hubs.” (IP16)

“And then there are these, I think it's 47 or I don't know how many chapters. Let's not call them chapters because that will be confusing. 47 focus areas, let's say that the different chapters and user groups could sort of take, and focus on them, and then they would be the leaders in those areas. When we were approached with that from the global people... I just kind of feel like, yes, we could do, we should do that. But thenwe just don't have the capacity, that's what it ended up being... Because there are way too many meetings, and to be able to contribute there's actually quite a lot of time you need to invest, because you need to read a lot of background information, like all these proposals, discussions, and then there's a lot of chat and telegram.” (IP11)

Interviewees supporting the idea of topic expansion were pointing at the currently discussed topics and also an opportunity for the general stronger presence in public discourse that they present -- with rising awareness of the importance of open knowledge and digital rights fostered by pandemic. It brought on the theme of new audiences that the Brussels Office could be reaching (both the publics and new potential allies in the EU institutions), including by public campaigns. The success of this approach would be contingent on developing the Office's communication capacities, currently unsatisfactory (see also later in the text):

"We talk about these emerging topics like ethical AI would be one, I think this traditional knowledge would be one, or personal data in GLAM collections. " (...) [The Brussels Office's initiatives] could be more "engaging". being constructed so that people are more engaged (...) I think the activities could be more engaging. (...) Popularizing the question is very important. (...) newsletter was one, but then, you know, also kind of posters. I think some campaign for the DSM directive was really visual and therefore really popular and great. So I think working with, you know, the visual culture...!" (IP4)

"The Brussels Office could have a larger audience, beyond those already interested in public policy. outreach strategy; get more people interested in the advocacy work? Affiliates also have a role in this outreach (...) I think their mandate would be stronger if they got more input and feedback there to really show more community engagement there." (IP8)

"So there are so many people now affected with what we do, maybe small publishers, libraries, universities, or educational institutions... And getting those into the debate is sometimes as hard as getting them towards meaningful digital rights, meaningful digitization concepts. (...) I. So actually the field is still narrow in the sense that it accepts the big economic actors that are very well aware of how things affect what they want to do in the world. There are many stakeholders in the wider society that are not part of the debate yet. And if we could engage them, that would really level the scores a little bit. And that's also why I said education might be the most important strategic project to look at because ultimately it's about making more people aware how their lives are affected by these political decisions about technology that they use every day" (EP3)

"So I think we should also include that and not only work on internet regulations or intellectual property. (...) I think that we can also work on some new topics, maybe on free speech against the cut down of the internet." (IP3)

"we need to become much better at communication, coining terms because we are bad at this and it's very hard for us to reframe any public discourse. So this is something we need to invent and we need to get better at". (IP21)

Other members of the community would argue, though, that the Brussels Office should only focus on the topics that impact directly the Movement, and for two reasons. One is to make sure to be involved in topics that are consensual within the European community of Wikimedians, since the Brussels Office's mandate is legitimized when a consensus among European chapters has been reached. A second reason is understanding how certain policy agendas being led in Brussels can harm the work of local chapters, according to the political regime/agenda in place.

"My proposition would be to narrowly define the issues that we work on, and don't become too broad. Stick to what could be a clear consensus within the community also. Because I think the wider the political spectrum that the Brussels team works on, the more complicated it becomes to build a consensus in the community that this is our position, this is something we care about. (...) If we want to be broader in the number of issues and the different aspects we work on, then we have to invest in negotiating the debate, or debating with the communities what is really the opposition. Because a significant number of community members are saying we should not go into fields of policy that don't directly, directly, directly affect us. And I very much hear their positions. So we should be careful when we expand the number of issues we work on, so that there is still a consensus within the community. I totally respect someone saying otherwise. (IP14)"

"they are quite broad in the topics, I don't see a big benefit in broadening that... so there was this idea to be the good tech, the anti Google/Facebook, to have more this kind of image... But that would require being more present in tech related discourses around AI, data governance...(.....) It is a lot of things to monitor, you have to have the technical expertise, the technical support from the foundation, technical people are tough to reach, they live in their own tech bubble, there are obstacles... but it would be an interesting thing" (IP17)

"So I don't think it is a good idea if the Brussels Office, which is officially or unofficially part of the Wikimedia movement, somehow starts a political activity about free speech and free media and something like that, because this would give a negative picture or influence on the local chapter. (...) if there is a Brussels office which starts to do this kind of activity and Wikimedia Hungary is somehow related to it, it can happen at the time that they will realize that we are very closely connected and then I'm not sure how long we can work anymore. So if you would talk with somebody from Hungary, maybe would say that this office could help in this advocacy work. But my opinion is it's better to focus on the knowledge line of our activity and don't touch the technical or the topics which are red carpet in the eyes of the government" (IP15)

The political participation (or lack thereof) was mentioned also by the external stakeholders, and in the opposite context -- as something that the Movement should embrace more strongly:

"I still feel that to the Wikimedia community, as an organization with national chapters in over 70 countries and probably the biggest budget of all digital rights organizations should invest more in engaging in these political debates." (EP3)

"The good thing with Wikimedia is that they are not perceived as a civil-rights organization in the same way as EDRI, so them being involved in legislation gives the impression that there is a wider network, wider categories of NGOs that care about it and not just the usual suspects. Involving them as much in policy and have a position paper and target MEPs will help. (...) They should also politicize their organization. Most of Wikimedia is not aware that there is a policy office in Brussels. (...)" If you could get all the Wikimedians to realize that they are a political organization, because they are, and that they have political influence that they should use, that would be great. That would mean for the Brussels office to reach out more actively to the local chapters and sort of politicize them." (EP8)

More proactive?

Most interviewees share the argument that the Brussels Office should take a more proactive stance on legislation impacting Wikimedia as well as digital rights and the internet governance more broadly. To do so, they need more capacity and also more substantial alliances. The capacities pointed are

- a) in-depth research,
- b) expansion of collaborations with experts in the digital field (including academia),
- c) understanding legal texts and translating to Wikimedians local contexts
- d) "being everywhere" in Brussels;
- e) having a clear agenda of the strategic priorities of the Wikimedia movement.

"But it's our ability to be ahead of a policy agenda. It requires a much larger infrastructure than we have(...) I would like us to have a more proactive, that specific thing that we are fighting for, that we want to change positively." (IP1)

"it takes a lot of time to already understand that these legal texts, and Dimi is really an expert in all of these countries, like what happens, what would happen, but I mean, come on, he can't do everything on his own! I remember for the copyright issues, he ran to all kinds of parties, you know, political parties and tried to convey the message, tried to turn them around, tried to explain... And this needs staff, this needs time, this needs analysts. We (the movement) need to equip ourselves better to make our voice heard. " (IP5)

"It feels like all of Wikimedia advocacy is defending against threats. And most of it naturally would be... I mean, we exist in the situation. We built ourselves in the current situation and we succeed in the current situation." (...) "We have tried on some occasions to make proactive campaigns, not very, obviously, not very large compared to major corporate lobbying activities. In general, the campaigns that have been run are reactive or in response to a proposal that exists, that in general, we oppose the suggestion. I mean, if we liked the suggestion, we probably wouldn't do anything. We would just say, thank you and please. But it's our ability to be ahead of a policy agenda that requires a larger infrastructure than we have." (IP1)

"They should be heavily involved in the implementation of the Copyright Directive, they should be heavily involved in the review of the Copyright Directive when that comes up. They should be better prepared - I mean everyone needs to be better prepared - for the fight that might come with any kind of change proposed in 7 years from now when the Commission will look into it. They should prepare, and not wait 6 years, but already lay the groundwork for the copyright work: build alliances with other organizations, perhaps become a bridge to involve organizations that haven't been involved this time but should be next time, like more academics, other NGOs that have digital as a field of expertise." (EP8)

"(Freedom of Panorama in the agenda) And then we had to spend so much energy on getting it back to where we had started from. So that one time we tried to put something in the agenda it really backfired. What we learned from this: if you want to be proactive, you really need to know what you are doing, and have all these discussions on all these different levels until you say OK now we are ready to put the agenda. (.....) Maybe we can be more proactive but then probably we need 10 more people in Brussels to go to even more meetings, have even more calls with people, so that we can mitigate the risk of something backfiring, like what happened with the Freedom of Panorama story." (IP14)

"How to be more proactive in these crucial early discussions in Brussels "And be part of the discussions means you need to be everywhere, so there needs to have more people doing that and I think you need to do.... There needs to be more active research to supplement that to some extent as well...because we keep trying to put a Band-Aid on an open wound, you know, it's like there's a problem and we try to fix it. "Oh, my God. It's about to break, we need to fix it! ...and that we are reactive rather than proactive. We keep being reactive because there's no time to be proactive. So how do we become proactive, opening to invest heavily in research in the different fields that we are interested in? Then we need to have that argumentation prepared well before, there's a new legislative idea coming up... to educate people that are taking those executive actions." (IP16)

Discussing further collaboration with digital rights organizations, and further support of the chapters, were also the fields where the Brussels Office would be expected to be more proactive.

"Yeah, we could collaborate even more. I don't know. I think we collaborate in everything as much as we can and, depending on their capacities at certain moments, but for the specific opportunities in the short term, I think. This complementary aspect of having access to knowledge while protecting personal data, which is ... I think both complete very well. And we need, we push ideologically for both in EDRI that's something that we can do. It's not that we don't do it, but we should be doing more because there are specific threats and opportunities coming up in the near future." (EP1)

"Maybe improving the network between NGOs would be something that they could improve to make sure that there's not only a talk in relation to a specific file, but there is some regular networking of the NGOs that will then be able to collaborate on several issues as they come up. Maybe that would be useful. And also I think the open knowledge NGOs that work in the field are not equally strong throughout Europe. There are some countries where the idea is quite present, but, when it comes to Southern Europe or to France, the other side, the closed knowledge side, is much more powerful. And so trying to counterbalance this geographical issue, might be something worth considering. (EP6)

"It could also work the other way around. Like the Brussels office could take part in our network, perhaps more actively, and coming to for example Copyright Platform meetings, which is a monthly meeting that I host where everyone who is part of the platform can come and present whatever initiatives they are currently working on, on Copyright Reform or any other policy reform. It is always of interest to other for the group to hear what is happening in specific regions. It could be a good way to share experiences and build the network." (EP7)

"I assume DSA [Digital Services Act] is going to be a big one. That's an area where we can look at what are some of the commonalities we have cross cutting in this area, what are some of the

challenges. (...) And the information ecosystem is very interesting, and I think Wikimedia when it started has evolved so far into being much more reputable in that space. Early days of Wikimedia we would say let's write our own essay in there and then reference it. But now it's much more sustainable and much more reliable. How can the larger information ecosystem, whether the traditional media to social media, what social media will become if it is a sector at all, how can we better learn from each other and find better integrated solutions to challenges we face in the online space." (EP10)

Communication

One of the most recurring recommendations among the interviewees was the need for a better communication to be developed on different levels:

- a) in terms of transforming public discourse and raising public awareness;
- b) in terms of strongly communicating to the EU partners.

"They don't have a lot of communication. I mean, they have nobody who does communication for them, but we have, and we can always support them in this regard. (...) "For example, I think this is very hard to do if you're just two people who need to work with the Commission and Parliament and so on, you can't also have relationships with press people at the same time, well, not to the same extent that our professional communications team has, they might need somebody independent to do it." (IP2)

"if they would have like a public relations coordinator, who would always try to like combine all our powers or maybe just like that, we would be the part of European Wikimedia legal movement. If you would be always just like one part in this, like one cooking machine, you know... That would be as well helpful that we are just like the part of European blackout or part of some other like raising awareness activity that we should do in cooperation with the other chapters. It would be great. Mutual cooperation would be perfect" (IP12)

"So if we receive a prepared position and materials. So these are the open possibilities in a given directive, for example, and this is how. Or there is an English version which we need to translate to Hungarian, so this kind of smaller, smaller task, we are happy to take part (...) it can be that in the future it will change, and we will have an expert lawyer who is happy to handle all these issues. But right now, we can handle small collaborations where we receive prepared materials, which we have to only present to the Hungarian government" (IP15)

A lot of our affiliates don't have staff. They have a staff member or two staff members and they don't have time to act on this because it's still too many steps away. Obviously, they cannot support everyone because they do not know the local context, but they also.... there's two of them."(...) "there was discussion about the European Hub and support actively to hire local people that could be working, but then those need to be trained and informed to understand the context and stuff.(...) Building capacity of different European countries so that everybody actually have this on your menu." (IP16)

DILEMMAS, COMMENTARIES

The theme of the Brussels Office being proactive or responsive in their policy work revealed broader dilemmas that the Movement has been facing:

"We need to define our priorities and solve the main thing that is lacking right now is the position of the Foundation. For two years I have tried to track some clear views, clear positions from the Foundation. And each time when I asked for that, I did not have any answer. So the good thing is that they respect our independence. Their affiliates are clearly independent from the financial, but, of course, we all share the same name visions, (...) But right now, I don't know what are the main priorities for the movement?" (IP3)

Only two interviewees mentioned the works on the Strategy. Among those recommending pro-activeness, almost all noted that there has to be a common stance worked out by the Movement. Yest either they don't consider the Strategy to fulfill this role sufficiently (perhaps as a very general document) or they don't know about the Strategy all together.

The general tension occurs between two major roles of the Brussels Office and their potential expansion/transformation. Here the interviewees were often self-contradictory, claiming the need to focus on policy and also recommending more involvement in the support of chapters. This support would include networking, training, and expertise support on local level.

It seems that the Brussels Office is so successful in its role of facilitator and supporter of the Movement that there is a general expectation they could continue or even expand this role — especially in the field of capacity building, beyond advising/sharing expertise. Clearly, these are the needs of chapters and their expectations projected onto the Brussels Office, as a respected and trusted "face of the movement."

Given the mandate and trust the Brussels Office enjoys from the chapters, this is certainly an important asset to keep in mind when discussing the future.

I am looking at the existing Brussels office in the context of a future European chapter, what we call a European hub (...) I want them to grow for example more in the areas of community projects so like contests, newby work and stuff like that... and partnerships. So that at the European level we work together with archives, with museums and... to better coordinate what we are currently doing in the all member states with all these knowledge institutions or GLAM institutions as we call them, to coordinate that better on the European level. (IP14)

"In that wishful thinking would also be a kind of coaching platform for chapters to go fundraising, for cooperations between large foundations and chapters for example to get some third-party funding... (...) also provide more expertise, in the sense of giving courses to Wikimedians so they can learn more about Brussels operations, and what they could do in their member states. Of course part of it is done in Brussels but what has to be done by member states, on the ground in the country. ." (IP17)

An interesting, if marginal, threat occurred in two conversations, regarding the decision making process: interviewees (both non-funders) noticed that they experience a vicious

circle of provincialization: due to low capacity they cannot “afford” participation in larger, strategic discussions and they thus become even more marginalized as time goes by. Another interviewee commented on this process admitting that the Movement is not a democracy, but rather — a meritocracy, with a strong core of active stakeholders that lead the movement, despite its declared horizontal decision-making process.

"we just don't have the capacity, that's what it ended up being... Because there are way too many meetings, and to be able to contribute there's actually quite a lot of time you need to invest, because you need to read a lot of background information, like all these proposals, discussions, and then there's a lot of chat and telegram. And then in other venues, I don't even follow the Facebook pages and discussions anymore because there's just way too many. Even on Telegram I started skipping things because I just can't keep up with it. And the downsides of this is that I can see again, then the chapters that have more funding already, will have more funding even more, or will have an even more prominent role in this, because they have the time and they have the staff to commit to this. (...) And to be honest with you, like, it's not our biggest priority really [EU policy involvement]. It is important, but we kind of feel like, well, maybe it's still better to leave it to the better to the bigger chapters that have the staff, the money and so on." (IP11)

"Yeah, it is deeply, deeply meritocratic. That applies also to the Wiki projects. Not many people are aware of this but it is a meritocracy, it is about people who have been around for years and who have shown that they do the right thing. And they get a lot of power, I mean, unofficial power, and a structure, and so far it works. But it is not a real basis democracy or something in that sense. It also depends on the people...if one person leaves we really feel it in the structure. Because then... there is no structure anymore!" (IP17)

Finally, the extent of political involvement was also challenged by a few interviewees, suggesting that the Movement's political involvement can prove counterproductive for local chapters — especially in the states where democracy is endangered.

The Brussels Office is, indeed, “the face of the Movement” both for external and internal partners. As such, it should definitely be at the core of any consolidating actions that would aim at strengthening the Movement in Europe: the Office is recognized as a valued partner by both civil society organizations and Members of European Parliament, and as a solid, reliable, and “caring” structure within the Movement. It is also advisable to reflect on the best uses for this asset in terms of resolving the dilemmas the interviews revealed: the Brussels Office is certainly in a position to initiate/facilitate discussions within the Movement regarding the future policy work in general and addressing more specific issues in particular.

APPENDIX: interview questions

Our conversation is divided in three parts: the first one regards you and your institution, the second one regards some broader questions related to open knowledge in general, and the third one regards the Brussels Office.

About you and your institution

- What do you do?
- Tell me about the projects that you find particularly successful and would like to share with me.
- How would you describe your organization's involvement with the EU level policies?

About open knowledge in a more general context:

- How do you think the current crises will affect the general need/approach to free access to knowledge? What directions you think it will follow?
- what do you think needs to happen on the EU level in your area of expertise/activity to improve public access to knowledge?

About the Brussels Office

- Tell me what they do.
- How do you understand their role?
- Have you collaborated? If so, tell me about it: in what capacity, with what results.
- if you have collaborated, what were the highlights and what could be done better?
- if you haven't, what would need to happen for your collaboration to kick-off?
- What could be areas and projects you could collaborate more on?
- What do you see fit to expand for the Brussels Office in the future?