Cross-wiki ideological conflict and Wikimedia’s vision of knowledge equity

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Wikimania 2021
I am a Wikimedian who believes in truth and supports the vision of knowledge equity.

I have no intention of offending any viewer or stirring up hatred against any nation.
“Wikipedia is afraid of governments”, 2011

Wikipedia follows place-names given by governments in each language

Polish: Gdańsk

German: Danzig

(Wikimania 2010)
• Article names and perspectives divide along real world geo-political ideology lines
• Wikipedia has a tendency to follow the navy with the biggest guns in that language

Chinese: “Diaoyu” (not colonial English “Pinnacle”!)

English: “Senkaku”

Japanese: “Senkaku”
Hong Kong protests, 2019

- Cantonese Wikipedia
  - “Riot police shot a first aider blind”
  - Hong Kong media reports taken at face value
  - News photograph included

- Chinese Wikipedia:
  - Cause and extent of injury “disputed”
  - Accepts Chinese state media viewpoint that HK media “staged” the photos
  - Hence no photo on article
Croatian Wikipedia disinformation assessment

- Croatian nationalist bias (and bullying behaviour), enabled by separation of national varieties of Serbocroat
- You don’t need a dictatorial government for nationalistic ideological bias to occur on Wikipedia
Wikipedia fundamentals

“Verifiability, not truth”

“Reliable sources”

“Consensus”

... All of these are easily manipulated by an authoritarian regime or a multinational corporation
“Reliable sources”

• Apple Daily (Hong Kong) forced closure, 24 June 2021

• When governments and corporations are sufficiently powerful, they dictate what “reliable sources” say
“Consensus” among whom?

• Chinese Wikipedia has a real consensus to accept Chinese media POV
• Reminder: Great Firewall of China blocks Wikipedia
  • Selective censorship
• “Report them to the National Security Police”
• If an authority only permits _____ to edit Wikipedia, then Wikipedia will have a _____ consensus
• Are we complicit in authoritarian abuse?

Hong Kong Wikipedia editors take precautions amid fears mainland peers may report users to national security police

"This is not a hypothetical issue". A Hong Kong Wikipedia Community user group director says there are risks that mainland users may be able to triangulate personal data using administrative privileges.
What do you mean by “knowledge equity”? 

• Imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge

• Sum of all human knowledge
  • Whose knowledge? Not just the rich and powerful

• Free access for every single person
  • Access to read and write

• Wikipedia was a fly on the wall, now Wikimedia is the central library
  • Foster a global conversation
  • Set international standards
  • Resist governments and corporations that act against knowledge equity
Creation and curation of knowledge

Stop hiding behind “independent reliable sources” and start leading the creation of reliable knowledge

- Wikimedians in Residence
- Oral history project
- WikiJournals of...
  - Science, Humanities, Medicine, Psychology & Behaviour
- Can we do more with Wikinews and our friends at Wikitribune?

“Verifiability, not truth” needs to evolve

- Because Wikipedia has become the most verifiable thing on the internet
- (Personal opinion) We can no longer escape the quest for truth
Leading international standards

Fact-checking?

- YouTube and Twitter *rely* on Wikipedia processes already

Language classification

- A language is a dialect with an army and a navy (cf. Max Weinreich)
- A language is a dialect with a missionary and a dictionary (cf. Lüanke and Storch 2013)
- A language is a dialect with an ISO-639 and a Wikipedia?
Foster a global conversation

Standardisation across Wikimedia projects...

• Too much? (e.g. German Wikipedia complains every other year)
• Too little? (Basque and Cantonese Wikipedias seem to love global features)
• Wikidata – technical standardisation
• Global *templates* please?

Global policies

• Universal Code of Conduct
• Global *editorial* policies?
• Carrot and stick on dealing with governments and corporations:
  • If an authority censors Wikipedia, Wikipedia should censor their state media!??
Summary

Wikipedia policies are great for getting us here, but...

- **Over-reliance** on authority
- Entrenches **ethno-linguistic conflicts**
- Process is **vulnerable** to abuse

To achieve knowledge equity...

- Support knowledge **creation**
- Lead international **standards**
- Strong **cross-wiki** relationships and policies
- **Robust** response to censorship
Citations

• Slide 3
  • https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gda%5C nickel
  • https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danzig

• Slide 4
  • https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senkaku_Islands
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