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## Dossier "Academic research into Wikipedia"

# Panorama of the wikimediasphere

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### Abstract

The term *wikimediasphere* is proposed to refer to the group of WikiProjects, communities of editors, guidelines and organisations structured around the Wikimedia movement to generate free knowledge that is available to everyone. A description is made of the wikimediasphere, presenting the main projects and their characteristics, and its community, technological, regulatory, social and institutional dimensions are outlined. The wikimediasphere is placed in context and reference is made to its blurred boundaries. An explanation is provided of the role of the communities of editors of each project and their autonomy with respect to each other and to the Wikimedia Foundation. The author concludes by offering a panoramic view of the wikimediasphere.

### Keywords

Wikimedia, Wikipedia, MediaWiki, free community good, communities of editors, editorial autonomy, free software

## Panorama de la wikimediasfera

### Resum

*En aquest article es proposa el terme wikimediasfera per a referir-se al conjunt de projectes wiki, comunitats d'editors, normes i entitats que s'articulen entorn del moviment Wikimedia per a produir coneixement lliure a l'abast de tothom. Es fa una descripció de la wikimediasfera presentant-ne els principals projectes i característiques, així com les seves diverses dimensions: comunitària, tecnològica, normativa, social i institucional. Se'n situa el context i se n'assenyalen els límits difusos. S'explica el paper de les comunitats d'editors de cada projecte i l'autonomia que tenen unes respecte de les altres, i també en relació amb la Fundació Wikimedia. Finalment, hom dibuixa un panorama de conjunt de la wikimediasfera.*

### Paraules clau

Wikimedia, Wikipedia, MediaWiki, bé comunitari lliure, comunitats d'editors, autonomia editorial, programari lliure



## Introduction

The *wikimediasphere* is formed by *wiki-based projects*, principally promoted by the Wikimedia Foundation, in addition to the *technologies* that make these possible and *communities of editors* that work on and manage these projects.

## Why *wikimediasphere*?

When mentioning this group, the media tend to refer simply to *Wikipedia*, as the academic literature often does; and following the community of editors, reference is also made to *Wikipedia and its sister projects* or the *Wikimedia projects*. If its social dimension is alluded to, reference may be made to the *Wikimedia movement* or, more specifically if the focus is on a particular project, the *community of editors*. All these terms are metonymic (they mention the part to refer to the whole) and therefore they emphasise a particular dimension (the projects, the communities, the social movement).

The term *wikimediasphere* or *wikimedia sphere*<sup>1</sup> can be useful in order to refer to some shared practices and some work and communication networks that are based on a group of interconnected wikis, complemented by other socio-technical devices. Theories of communication have used terms like *logosphere* (the universe of the spoken word), *graphosphere* (the universe of the written word) and *videosphere* or *iconosphere* (the universe of visual communication) to refer to the shared area of communication and meaning that is created around a mode of communication (Debray, 1994)<sup>2</sup>. In the field of the social use of digital networks, *blogosphere* has been used to refer to the panorama of blogs that are interconnected through links, back links and exchanged comments, which through these subtle interactions create a space for shared communication (Estalella, 2006)<sup>3</sup>. *Wikisphere* has also been used to refer to the equivalent concept in the field of wikis<sup>4,5</sup>, and various initiatives have been made to establish relations between them and ways to interconnect them<sup>6,7,8</sup>, generally with less success than in the case of blogs.

With respect to the *wikimediasphere*, I propose using the name of the organisation (Wikimedia Foundation) and the social movement (Wikimedia movement)<sup>9</sup> that drives and hosts a network of wikis with various widely used mechanisms of interconnection, which share, with some variations, a *modus operandi* and a public presence. The *wikimediasphere* forms part of the *wikisphere* and it is a particularly relevant part on account of its social involvement and also because, as a unit, it is more interrelated than the remaining components.

The *wikimediasphere* is mainly active in the *graphosphere*, the sphere of *written production*. The purpose of most of the projects is the production of a written work (complemented by images and

multimedia files in some cases), and communication between the co-authors mainly takes place in writing as well (on the wikis on discussion pages or through other means such as mail lists or IRC channels). The markup language of wiki editing (*wikitext* or *wiki markup*) and learning this also play an important role, especially with respect to text formatting and the creation and use of templates. Finally, the programming languages used in the development of the software (PHP, SQL, JavaScript, HTML, CSS) and of the *bots* (Python, etc.) are also forms of writing that play their part, and they have an influence on working methods in the projects.

Thus I propose using *wikimediasphere* to refer to the interrelated set of projects, technology and people grouped in communities. Therefore, the *wikimediasphere* has a variety of dimensions that can be studied separately, but together they form something that can also be studied as a whole.

## Common elements

All the projects driven by Wikimedia are linked in some way with making knowledge available to people as a *free community good* (Gómez, 2005; Kollock, 2003;<sup>10</sup> Fuster, 2010;<sup>11</sup> Jonhson, 2007<sup>12</sup>) through the joint production of content by means of wikis using a *copyleft*<sup>13</sup> type publishing license that permits the free reproduction and the creation of derived works for any use, including commercial ends, as long as they retain the same license.

The projects use the same software, Mediawiki, developed as free software under GPL license by the Foundation itself, with the support of a community of programmers. Each project can have various configurations and extensions according to its needs. The extensions are developed by various organisations and independent programmers. The wikis are hosted on a network of servers managed by the Foundation. Legally, the Foundation fulfils a role as the technical host, not the editor; the latter task is performed by the community of participants in each project (Paumier, *et al.*, 2010<sup>14</sup>).

The ideological glue that binds all the players involved is the aim of generating and supplying free content, an aim that is summarised in the *vision* statement of the Wikimedia Foundation,<sup>15</sup> which in practice has become the motto of the entire movement:

“Imagine a world in which every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge. That’s our commitment.”

This future vision materialises on the one hand in the *mission* to encourage people to participate in the creation of this content, providing them with the resources to do so,<sup>16</sup> and on the other hand, in a set of *values* that are intended to guide this task (freedom, accessibility and quality, independence, a commitment



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to openness and diversity, transparency, a community focus).<sup>17</sup> This vision also involves a set of *founding principles* of the *Wikimedia projects as a community*, which include the neutral point of view in the content, giving everyone the opportunity to edit, free licensing of content, the “wiki process” of decision-making (which means seeking consensus), an editorial environment that welcomes newcomers, and the creation of room and mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts.<sup>18</sup>

## The wiki projects

Wikipedia<sup>19</sup> is the flagship project of the wikimediasphere. It is a universal and multilingual encyclopedia created collaboratively by thousands of people around the world. The project was begun in January 2001 and it uses wiki technology to make it easy for anyone who wishes to publish material, create new content or improve what others have written before them.

In the years that followed, other projects were launched, all of them based on wiki and with the same open editing and community management approach:

- **Wiktionary**: a project begun in 2002. An encyclopedia is not a dictionary, and Wiktionary was created as a lexical companion to Wikipedia. It includes definitions, pronunciation, examples of use, etymology, synonyms and antonyms, and multilingual equivalents.
- **Wikibooks**: a project begun in 2003. It is a platform for the creation of text books for various areas of knowledge and various educational levels. In contrast to Wikipedia’s encyclopedia entries, the content can be structured into chapters and sections following a reading itinerary.
- **Wikiquote**: a project begun in 2003. It is a compendium of quotations, well-known phrases, popular sayings and set phrases, with attribution and contextual information.
- **Wikisource**: a project begun in 2003. It is a repository of public domain or freely-licensed texts. These include novels, poetry, plays, songs, manifestos, essays, ...
- **Wikimedia Commons**: a project begun in 2004. It is a repository of public domain or freely-licensed images and multimedia files (audio recordings, videos). The initial aim was to avoid duplicating files published on the various Wikipedias or wiki projects. The file is saved just once on Commons and it can be embedded into the pages of any of the projects. In terms of the number of editors and pageviews, it is the second most important project<sup>20</sup> in the wikimediasphere after Wikipedia.
- **Wikinews**: a project begun in 2004. A space where news is published, usually drawing together news published in various media. The aim is to expand on the news and to offer a neutral point of view.

- **Wikispecies**: a project begun in 2004. This is a catalogue of biological species with scientific information and references.
- **Wikiversity**: a project begun in 2006. It is devoted to learning resources and projects and research; it aims to be a platform for learning communities from pre-school to university, including vocational training and non-formal education.

## The communities of editors

In order to gain a better understanding of what the wikimediasphere is and how it is organised, it is important to point out that each of these projects includes a set of subprojects in different languages. With the exception of *Wikimedia Commons* and *Wikispecies*, which are multilingual wikis on a single installation, for each language there is a separate installation of the Mediawiki system, an autonomous project and a community that takes independent decisions about the rules of operation and the actions to be taken. Thus it is in the *intersection* between types of project (encyclopedia, dictionary, text books, etc.) and the language (English, German, Spanish, Catalan, French, Galician, etc.) where an *autonomous community of wiki editors* is formed. I would add that it is the language and not the country or territory that defines the project.

Any one can launch a version of these projects in a new language, first in the *Incubator* wiki, intended for the first stages of development of a project, and then by getting a community together and transferring the project to an independent installation. In the case of Wikipedia, there are versions being edited for more than 270 languages.

In the wikimediasphere, the dynamics of the autonomous language communities that create their own rules, working methodologies and decision-taking mechanisms have a considerable influence on the specific implementation and operation of each project. As a result of this autonomy, each community adapts its processes to the volume of editors and to the aims it sets at any given time. However, this autonomy also means that each community has its own path of development and that there are variations in style, guidelines and policies.

Thus it would be possible to partially understand and study the wikimediasphere by looking at this intersection between project type and language used from different perspectives. On the one hand, it is possible to explore the language variations of the same project (the wikipediasphere, wikibooksphere, etc.), observing how they are interrelated and looking at the similarities and differences in operation and results of each community. On the other hand, it is also possible to review the different projects in the same language and, in a manner similar to that adopted with blogs – e.g. *the Hispanic blogosphere* (Cerezo, 2006)<sup>21</sup> – talk about the wikimediasphere in English, Spanish, Catalan or any of the languages used.



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Besides the projects that have been mentioned, there are others that form part of the wikimediasphere and which are developed on a single multilingual MediaWiki installation, with English as the main language and translations of the content into other languages. Of these, we have already mentioned Wikimedia Commons, Wikispecies and Incubator. Another is [Mediawiki.org](http://mediawiki.org), the wiki that serves as the official website for the software used by all the wikis.

## The technical component

The MediaWiki.org wiki is a resource that provides information about the program and instructions for its installation, update, maintenance and administration. It is also the site where the extensions of the program developed by independent programmers, university teams, development companies or communities of programmers are documented. It is through MediaWiki that the wikimediasphere spreads and diffuses beyond the projects hosted by the Wikimedia Foundation; for the program, modulated for the needs and the working methods of its projects, in addition to the social relevance of these, has an influence on a large number of independent wiki projects that use it. At the same time, the administrators and users of the independent projects have their own needs and develop or demand characteristics for MediaWiki that often lead to one of the projects promoted by Wikimedia.

A project that complements *MediaWiki.org* is [Translatewiki](http://translatewiki.org). This is not a project hosted on the servers of the Wikimedia Foundation, but an independent project maintained by two developers, Niklas Laxström and Siebrand Mazeland. It is a MediaWiki with a self-developed extension ([Translate](http://translatewiki.org)) that facilitates the translation and revision of software translations. Translatewiki is used for making collaborative translations of the interface and the system messages of the MediaWiki program, its extensions and many other free web-oriented software projects.

Another technological resource of note is [Toolserver](http://toolserver.org). And there are at least two reasons for its importance: because it hosts various technological “tools” that are used in the projects, and because it is an infrastructure provided by Wikimedia-Deutschland<sup>22</sup> (the German chapter of the movement) with the assistance of the Wikimedia Foundation and the support of other chapters, rather than being provided directly by the foundation. Thus Toolserver shows the capacity and the autonomy of a local Wikimedia chapter to provide an infrastructure of key importance to the wikimediasphere as a whole, and it also offers the glimpse of a possibility that the latter is able to work while shifting part of the responsibility for the infrastructure on to organisations outside the foundation.<sup>23</sup> Toolserver consists of a cluster of UNIX servers.<sup>24</sup> Of the tools that these host, some are experimental and under development, while others are stable tools that are used in the

projects. Among the tools hosted are programs that provide statistical and analytical information about participation in the projects, “patrol” tools that assist maintenance, and bots used by the editors to perform repetitive tasks.

The technical aspect is one of the characteristic ingredients of the wikimediasphere. The most evident consideration is the fact that the same software is shared, but there are other aspects that contribute to its integration, such as the sharing of images (through Wikimedia Commons) or the possibility of inserting interwikis, a type of link shown as an internal link, but which connects to pages in other languages or other projects.

## The legal and regulatory dimension

The legal and regulatory dimension of the wikimediasphere involves both its relation to the national laws and the editorial and operational rules that it creates itself through the communities. The production and implementation of rules is an important activity performed by the wikimediasphere. The first stages of the projects resulted in the drafting of some general guidelines, such as the 5 pillars of Wikipedia,<sup>25</sup> which guide the activity of the editors. However, the production of content constantly means that the project communities have to deal with conflict, with situations arising in which a solution has to be defined to ensure editorial coherence, or a procedure needs to be created for the operation of these communities, and this leads to policies being established which, although they can be reviewed, will have to be followed by new editors that arrive at a later stage.

The free licenses used regulate the conditions in which the content is published. The Wikimedia projects represent one of the most significant examples of mass collaborative production of free content on a world scale. There are close links and relations with the organisations that promote the licenses, such as the *Free Software Foundation* or *Creative Commons*, and the use of the *copyleft* licenses for Wikipedia triggered the *freedomdefined*<sup>26</sup> initiative to clearly establish what is understood by free cultural production (Chen, 2011).<sup>27</sup> The incorporation of images and multimedia resources into Wikipedia, and especially Wikimedia Commons, represents constant interaction with the regulation of the copyright and intellectual property rights in various countries, detecting and standardising a range of issues related with the implementation of the licenses, the limits of the copyright, the scope of the public domain and the freedom of panorama.

Thus the wikimediasphere is self-regulated through the use of free licenses and rules created through internal processes of negotiation, consensus and decision-making. And, at the same time, it has a growing influence on social uses, rules and regulatory mechanisms that affect cultural production in various countries.



## The social and institutional dimension

The wikimediasphere also has a dimension as an institution, association and social movement, which is developed, as mentioned earlier, around the [Wikimedia Foundation](#). This is a non-profit organisation based in California (US), created in June 2003 by Jimmy Wales in order to assure the long-term future of the Wikipedia project, which he had begun in his company Bomis, and to provide a response to the demand made by some editors that it should not be a profit-making organisation that provided Wikipedia with its infrastructure (Chen, 2011).<sup>28</sup> The governing body of the Foundation is the Board of Trustees,<sup>29</sup> formed by 10 people, some of whom are chosen by mechanisms that include the participation of the community of editors. The Board is advised by the Advisory Board,<sup>30</sup> an international network of experts. The Foundation has a relatively small, but growing number of staff (130 people as at April 2012)<sup>31</sup> and its principal support comes from the sharing of tasks between thousands of volunteers and unpaid collaborators.

There are various grass-roots associations that support the development of the Wikimedia projects around the world, and the Wikimedia Foundation has agreements with these (39 recognised associations as at April 2012)<sup>32</sup> as National and sub-national chapters or as Wikimedia Thematic Organizations.<sup>33</sup> <sup>34</sup> There are also organisations that sympathise with the free knowledge movement — Movement partners — with which stable collaborations are created, in addition to User groups that do not have to be formally established as associations.

The costs incurred by the Foundation consist of maintaining the technical infrastructure and paying the staff. Financing mainly comes from thousands of small contributions collected in annual campaigns, in addition to contributions made by individual and corporate benefactors through cash sums, servers and hosting.<sup>35</sup> To date, the fundraising campaigns have succeeded in covering the costs of the Foundation's staff and maintaining its infrastructure, while they have also provided financial assistance for trips and initiatives undertaken by individuals and organisations linked with the movement.

An important part of the organisational activity is also structured through wikis at a single multilingual installation, with English as the main language for each of these:

- [Wikimedia Foundation](#): this serves as the official website of the Foundation. It is also a MediaWiki installation, but configured so that editing is limited to those persons authorised to do so. It is possible to comment on any content or contribute to it through a parallel web page created at Meta-Wiki.
- [Meta-Wiki](#): the wiki dedicated to coordination and documentation for the global community of participants in the various projects in the wikimediasphere. On this wiki,

different projects were developed that have subsequently ended up by having their own wiki, eg. [MediaWiki.org](#), [Wikimedia Strategy](#) and [Wikimedia Outreach](#).

- [Wikimedia Strategy](#): this is used as a platform for discussion, deliberation and development of the five-year strategic plan for the *Wikimedia movement*. It was used for the first time for this purpose between July 2009 and July 2010.
- [Wikimedia Outreach](#): this is a resource for outreach initiatives that provide information about the projects in the wikimediasphere. It is a collection of good practices, outreach materials and collaborative experiences with cultural and academic institutions.

The wikimediasphere is also structured on the Internet by means of other resources besides wikis. There is the [official blog](#) of the Foundation, in addition to the blogs of the various community members that are compiled on the aggregator [Planet Wikimedia](#). Various IRC channels and specific mailing lists are also used. There are common channels and lists for different spheres, while each project community and each local chapter usually have their own.

The encyclopedia editors who work on Wikipedia call themselves *Wikipedists*. *Wikimedians* is a more generic term to refer to the participants in any of the Wikimedia projects. Wikimedia is not only the Foundation, because it also sees and projects itself as a social movement, the *Wikimedia movement*. For some time now, Wikipedists from each language version have been holding wiki meetings face to face to get to know each other personally and to coordinate work on the encyclopedia. They also organise workshops and other activities to promote the projects and to teach other people to edit. Since 2005, [Wikimania](#) has been the annual congress which brings together an important part of the Wikimedia community and serves as a platform for the presentation of initiatives and research relating to Wikipedia and its sister projects.

## Blurred boundaries and context

Use of the term the *wikimediasphere* to refer to this entire framework of projects, communities and technology leads one to imagine it as being fairly structured and interconnected. But the wikimediasphere is not very clearly defined, falling within the context of society and the life of those who take part in it. In particular, the wikimediasphere forms part of a broader movement that works towards the “liberation” of technology, knowledge and cultural production, and which is in tension with other social forces that are working in an opposing or different direction. The operational characteristics of Wikipedia and other Wikimedia projects are largely the result of transferring to the field of knowledge what had been successfully tried out in the field of free software.<sup>36</sup> The evolution of the wikimediasphere participates



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in and interacts with this movement, which uses free software, free and/or open licenses for content, and open, transparent and participative forms of organisation; it is also a movement that fosters social and technological autonomy. Together with the formation of communities of participants with the capacity for collective action, there is a process of forming non-profit organisations (Wikimedia Foundation, [Mozilla Foundation](#), [Free Software Foundation](#), [Blender Foundation](#), [LibreOffice Foundation](#), [Creative Commons](#), [P2P Foundation](#), etc.) that become players in the cultural production and social use of technologies. Some of these are as technologically and socially relevant as the corporate players such as Google, Yahoo and Microsoft; however, their mode of operation and impact is very different.

## Editorial autonomy of the communities

From the outset, the versions of Wikipedia in different languages were created as independent editions and not as translations from one production language, such as English, to other languages. Thus each Wikipedia is written anew and it does not have to have the same articles or articles written in the same way. The articles can be translated (and the more complete languages with more articles are often translated into other languages), but this is a decision taken by each editor who chooses to contribute. In keeping with this independence of the versions, the communities of editors around each one are also free to take their own decisions. The definition of the role of the Wikimedia Foundation as an infrastructure supplier that does not intervene in editorial policy consolidates this position. The editorial policies on which each community can make decisions cover a very wide range of aspects: from the decision-making process itself, the way in which the content is organised (front pages, categories, navigation templates), and text format and style, to technical aspects and decisions on whether to include images. In practice, the communities have a mutual influence on each other in the way they do things, and when something works well in one community, it can serve as a reference for another. In particular, the Wikipedias that have a large number of articles and many participants usually have to find solutions to issues that are subsequently adopted or adapted by other communities.

An example of these variations can be seen in how the articles are distinguished in terms of quality. If three communities are compared (English, Spanish and Catalan), we may observe that in all three cases this process is begun with a request for peer review. This is optional, but it is generally considered to be necessary. Once this review has been completed, an active user (who has been registered for at least one month and has completed 100 editing assignments) can make the *proposal* which is discussed by the other active editors, who can declare themselves in favour, against or raise objections. In the English Wikipedia, the person

who determines the length of this process and decides whether a consensus has been reached is the *Featured Articles director* (FA director) or someone delegated by this person.<sup>37</sup> In the Spanish Wikipedia, this evaluation (in a discussion in which a minimum of 6 editors take part) is made by an *Administrador de Candidaturas a Artículo Destacado* (ACAD — Featured Article Candidature Administrator), a post awarded following a vote.<sup>38</sup> And in the Catalan Wikipedia the proposal must receive a minimum of 8 votes in favour and no more than 2 objections; if these conditions have been met within a month, it is considered approved, but there is no specific post for making this evaluation.<sup>39</sup> In all three cases, a distinction is drawn between featured and good articles. Thus we can observe similar processes with slight variations related with the type of community, its experience in the evaluation of articles, and its size.

Some recent examples also demonstrate the autonomy enjoyed by the communities when taking decisions, even when these have a considerable impact on society and in the media:

- *“Strike” called by the Italian Wikipedia on 4 October 2011*: The community of editors of Wikipedia in Italy decided to block access to the pages of the encyclopedia in protest against a law passed by the Italian parliament restricting freedom of expression on the Internet, which was a potential threat to Wikipedia.<sup>40</sup>
- *“Strike” called by the English Wikipedia on 18 January 2012*: The community of editors of the English Wikipedia decided (following a vote made by some 1,800 editors, the highest number to take part in a decision making process up until that time) to block access to the encyclopedia for 24 hours in protest against the SOPA and PIPA “anti-piracy laws” presented to the US Congress; in this way they took part in joint action with other websites and key Internet players. The Wikipedia communities in other languages and the communities of other projects (such as Commons, Wiktionary and Wikinews) discussed whether to back this initiative and 37 of them adopted some kind of measure in support; most of them posted an informative announcement on all the pages, but did not block access to articles. The Wikimedia Foundation offered and gave its technical support to the communities so that they could implement the decisions taken, which the foundation respected.<sup>41 42 43</sup>
- *Proposed “fork” of the German Wikipedia; autumn 2011*: The discontent of the German Wikimedia community at the plans of the Wikimedia Foundation to promote a filter of “indecent”, “dangerous” or culturally “unacceptable” images led it to consider the possibility of creating a *fork* of the German Wikipedia in October and November 2011; it would do this by making a copy of it and operating it from servers outside the foundation.<sup>44 45</sup>



In practice, the Wikimedia Foundation plays a very important role, to the extent of championing this autonomy of the communities. In this respect, the following interventions were significant: the message of Sue Gardner, executive director of the foundation, defending the decision (and the decision-making process) of the Italian community;<sup>46</sup> her message of support for the blackout in protest against SOPA and PIPA, accompanied by an explanation of the decision-making process;<sup>47</sup> the press release from the foundation about this blackout;<sup>48</sup> and the active role played by both the foundation in compiling the positions of the editors, and by the founder of Wikipedia, Jimmy Wales,<sup>49,50</sup> in promoting the protest and explaining the reasons for it.

The actions taken by the foundation on some issues also generate tension related with the editorial autonomy of the communities. One example here is the initiative that caused the discontent of the German Wikimedians and of various Wikimedians in other communities: the proposal to create a filter so that users could make certain images invisible. The drive behind the proposal of the foundation has been seen as interfering with editorial autonomy. Likewise, the foundation's "imposition" of a common policy on biographies of living people in April 2009 was seen as interference.<sup>51,52</sup> As Shun-Ling Chen has pointed out (Chen, 2011),<sup>53</sup> in the Wikimedia movement it is considered that the source of authority is in the communities and that the Wikimedia Foundation, at the appropriate moment, must implement the decisions taken by these communities; however, in practice the foundation has played an active role, both in internal processes and in external affairs with other social players. Due to a community-focused vocation, one of the values of the foundation, decision taking seeks at all times to open up participative processes and procedures to facilitate the search for consensus. The communities, however, urge the foundation not to over-extend its role.

Therefore, the communities of editors of each project and language version consider themselves as autonomous with respect to their editorial policies and they customarily take collective decisions about these. Even so, in some socially relevant aspects or aspects that may have legal implications, the Wikimedia Foundation has defended the positions and the autonomy of the communities, but at the same time it has not refrained from promoting certain policies that may have a significant impact on the practices of the communities or even from imposing these in specific cases.

## Conclusions

The *wikimediasphere* is an interrelated unit of people, technological devices and self-generated regulations that operate mainly on the Internet. The people work on projects whose aim is the production of a common good related with knowledge and

making this knowledge accessible to the whole of humanity. They form communities according to the type of project and language, with autonomy in their editorial policies, although they are heavily influenced by each other. The technological dimension is extremely relevant: the projects share the same software, MediaWiki, with variations in its configuration, while its main characteristic is the possibility to edit any content collaboratively. The wikimediasphere also has a social and institutional dimension. The Wikimedia Foundation is the principal supplier of the technological infrastructure and also the principal instrument for obtaining economic and organisational resources. Various grass-roots organisations disseminate and support the projects by organising activities, making them known in various social sectors and acting as interlocutors with other organisations and institutions. Together, the communities of editors and organisations form the Wikimedia movement, which perceives itself as a social movement in support of free knowledge. Despite its considerable activity and its strong interconnectedness, the wikimediasphere is not very strictly defined, and its influence and relations extend to projects and similar initiatives with which technologies or aims are shared.

If we look at the wikimediasphere as a whole, despite its blurred boundaries and its "fragmentation" or internal "modularity", it becomes easier for us to understand how its various dimensions (content, values, community, social, institutional, regulatory, technological) are integrated and related.

## Notes

1. As with the term "logosphere", here "sphere" (from the Greek *σφαῖρα*, "sfaira") refers to the "universe of" or "world of" as something that constitutes a coherent group.
2. DEBRAY, R. (1994) *Vida y muerte de la imagen. Historia de la mirada en occidente*. Barcelona:Paidós.
3. ESTALELLA, A. (2006) "La construcción de la blogosfera: yo soy mi blog (y sus conexiones)". In: CEREZO, J.M. (coord). *La blogosfera hispana: pioneros de la cultura digital*. Fundación France Telecom España, pp. 20-37.
4. Wikisphere proposal – DELiwiki <http://www.deli.deusto.es/wiki/index.php/Wikiesfera>
5. Wikisphere (definition) – GetWiki <http://getwiki.net/WikiSphere>
6. Wikitracer <http://wikitracer.com/docs/Home>
7. Wikindex <http://wikiindex.org/Welcome>
8. Wikinoding – Wikindex <http://wikiindex.org/WikiProject:Wiki-Noding>
9. On Wikimedia Meta-Wiki the Wikimedia Movement is defined as the totality of people, activities and shared values which revolve around Wikimedia projects, including the Wikimedia Foundation, its chapters or sections, other similar-minded organisations and anyone who makes a



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- contribution to Wikimedia's open knowledge initiatives. [http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia\\_movement](http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia_movement)
10. In 2005, in a text about Wikipedia, I referred to this as a community project that produces a common good, taking the definition of P. Kollock, according to whom a common good is a good from which anyone can benefit, independently of whether or not they have contributed to its production. See: GÓMEZ, D. (2005). "Wikipedia, un projecte comunitari en xarxa". In: COL·LECTIU INVESTIGACIÓ. Recerca Activista i moviments socials. Ed. El Viejo Topo. Barcelona [http://www.enlloc.org/dvd/recerca/mmss/wikipedia\\_pcomu.pdf](http://www.enlloc.org/dvd/recerca/mmss/wikipedia_pcomu.pdf)
  - KOLLOCK, P. (2003) "Las economías de colaboración on-line; regalos y bienes públicos en el ciberespacio" (original ed. 1999). A: SMITH, M. A. and KOLLOCK, P. (ed.) Comunidades en el ciberespacio. Barcelona:Editorial UOC, p. 263
  11. Mayo Fuster has described Online Creation Communities (OCCs) as those in which people communicate, interact and cooperate by means of an Internet-based platform with the common goal of knowledge-making and sharing. The OCCs, among which she cites Wikipedia as an emblematic case, constitute a digital common good in themselves, as an integrated resource of information and knowledge, collectively owned and freely accessible to those who do not form part of the community. See: FUSTER, M. (2010) *Participation in Online Creation Communities: Ecosystemic Participation?* European University Institute.
  12. Benjamin Keith Johnson considers Wikipedia to be a public good, insofar as it is an open community resource that requires voluntary contributions in order to be able to provide its content. See: JOHNSON, B.K. (2007). *Wikipedia as collective action: personal incentives and enabling structures*. P. 24. Thesis for Master of Arts, Michigan State University.
  13. In reality, Wikipedia began to be published in 2001 under the GFDL copyleft license, and then in 2009 it was also published under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike license. Other Wikimedia projects also use these licenses, publish public domain content or, in the case of images and multimedia files, use a variety of free licenses.
  14. PAUMIER, G.; DEVOUARD, F. [et al.] (2010) *Viquipèdia, Descobrir, utilitzar, contribuir* Edicions A.L.I.L.L. p. 23
  15. The vision statement for the future of the Wikimedia Foundation is published on its website: <http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Vision>
  16. The mission statement of the Wikimedia Foundation is published on its website: <http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Mission>
  17. [11d] The values that guide the Wikimedia Foundation in its initiatives are published on its website: <http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Values>
  18. The Wikimedia projects as a community share certain principles that are published on Meta-Wiki: [http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Founding\\_principles](http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Founding_principles)
  19. You can access any language version of Wikipedia from the following address: <http://www.wikipedia.org>
  20. Activity by project (April 2010) <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Beyondencyclopedia.wikimania2010-100714133959-phpapp02.pdf&page=4>
  21. CEREZO, J.M. (2006) *La blogosfera hispana: pioneros de la cultura digital*. Fundación France Telecom.
  22. Toolserver is presented as "a service of Wikimedia Deutschland e.V. with assistance from the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. and supported by Wikimedia UK, Wikimedia Switzerland, Wikimedia Austria and Wikimedia Sweden". The access page to Toolserver is: <http://toolserver.org> The page about Toolserver on Meta is: <http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Toolserver> The Toolserver wiki where information about the tools offered can be found is: <https://wiki.toolserver.org>
  23. As the user *Yavidaxiu* remarked to me in a comment about the first version of this text in the Spanish Wikipedia Café, the communities of editors and the wiki technology are necessary so that the wikimediasphere may exist, but the existence of the Wikimedia Foundation is not essential; it is a useful instrument as an institutional space for the movement, but the wikimediasphere would also be possible without it. This said, it might then be different, since the institutional characteristics of the foundation also contribute to shaping it.
  24. See the composition of the cluster that forms Toolserver at: <https://wiki.toolserver.org/view/Servers>
  25. Any official Wikipedia policy must be based on the 5 pillars: Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, strive for the neutral point of view, the content is free, follow rules of etiquette, no rule is carved in stone. These can be found at: [http://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viquip%C3%A8dia:Els\\_cinc\\_pilars](http://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viquip%C3%A8dia:Els_cinc_pilars) The first version of these, drawn up on the English Wikipedia in 2005, can be found at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Five\\_pillars&oldid=13207659](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Five_pillars&oldid=13207659)
  26. Freedomdefined provides an agreed definition of what a "free cultural work" means. This is an independent definition of the license, and therefore it can cover various licenses and situations that achieve the "freedoms" enumerated. See the text at: <http://freedomdefined.org>
  27. Erik Möller, member of the Board from 2005 to 2007 and then an employee of the foundation, promoted the definition of free cultural works, in order to clarify the ambiguity of the expression "free content" in the context of the Wikimedia projects. See: CHEN, S-L. (2011) "The Wikipedia Foundation and the self-governing Wikipedia Community. A dynamic relationship



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- under constant negotiation". In: LOVINK, G. and TKACZ, N. (eds.) *Critical Point of View: A Wikipedia Reader*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, pp. 358-359.
28. CHEN, S-L. (2011) "The Wikipedia Foundation and the self-governing Wikipedia Community. A dynamic relationship under constant negotiation". In: LOVINK, G. and TKACZ, N. (eds.) *Critical Point of View: A Wikipedia Reader*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, pp. 352-353.
  29. There is information about the *Board of Trustees* on this page: [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Board\\_of\\_Trustees](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Board_of_Trustees)
  30. There is information about the *Advisory Board* on this page: [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Advisory\\_Board](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Advisory_Board)
  31. Information obtained from [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Frequently\\_asked\\_questions#How\\_is\\_the\\_Wikipedia\\_Foundation\\_run.3F](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Frequently_asked_questions#How_is_the_Wikipedia_Foundation_run.3F) In February 2011, when I wrote the first draft of this text, there were 57 employees. One year later, in February 2012, there were 104, almost double. As at April 2012, there were 130.
  32. [19b] The information about the approved Wikimedia organisations and those that are being prepared can be found at: [http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia\\_chapters](http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia_chapters)
  33. During the drafting and revision of this text, the Wikimedia movement is in the throes of an important debate about movement roles, with a range of proposals on the table (local chapters, partner organisations, associations, affiliates), and also about the role that these grass-roots organisations should play in fund raising and the distribution of funds. Finally, the various proposals have been synthesised in an agreement by the Board, whereby 5 models of affiliation are defined (Movement Partners, National or Sub-national Chapters, Thematic Organizations, User groups) without a hierarchical relationship between them: [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:Recognizing\\_Models\\_of\\_Affiliations](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:Recognizing_Models_of_Affiliations) The Amical Viquipèdia (Friends of Catalan Wikipedia) Association is an example of an extremely active Wikimedian organisation, but one that defines its territorial scope by the Catalan-speaking region and not by national administrative boundaries. For years, its associative activity did not fit into a structure of local Chapters, which was only defined on the basis of this administrative delimitation. This case has been a reference in the definition of the thematic organisations that has eventually been approved.
  34. At the 2012 Wikimedia Conference held in Berlin at the end of March, the Wikimedia chapters decided to initiate the constitution of a Chapters Council or Chapters Association to coordinate the Wikimedia organisations. This body, which will have its own legal status, has the potential to play an important institutional role in the future. See: [http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia\\_Chapters\\_Association/Berlin\\_Agreement](http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia_Chapters_Association/Berlin_Agreement)
  35. The Wikimedia Foundation publishes reports on the sums of money raised and how they are used. From the most frequent questions section on its website it is possible to access the most recent reports: [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Frequently\\_asked\\_questions#Where\\_can\\_I\\_find\\_more\\_financial\\_information.3F](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Frequently_asked_questions#Where_can_I_find_more_financial_information.3F)
  36. See WikipediaOS (*Detecting and validating the parallelisms between Wikipedia's peer-production model and the way programmers and developers interact and work together in collaborative Open Source environments.*) Enric Senabre (Esenabre) at Wikiversity: <http://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/WikipediaOS>
  37. On the determination of the quality of articles in English Wikipedia, see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Featured\\_article\\_candidates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Featured_article_candidates)
  38. On the determination of the quality of articles in Spanish Wikipedia, see: [http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Candidatos\\_a\\_art%C3%ADculos\\_destacados](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Candidatos_a_art%C3%ADculos_destacados)
  39. On the determination of the quality of articles in Catalan Wikipedia, you can view the content "The process for determining the quality of articles" on this page: [http://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viquip%C3%A8dia:Proposta\\_de\\_distinci%C3%B3\\_d%27alta\\_qualitat\\_d%27un\\_article](http://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viquip%C3%A8dia:Proposta_de_distinci%C3%B3_d%27alta_qualitat_d%27un_article)
  40. See the announcement made by the Italian Wikipedia community about the strike on 4 October 2011 at: [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Comunicato\\_4\\_ottobre\\_2011](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Comunicato_4_ottobre_2011) The page where the decision was taken: [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Bar/Discussioni/Comma\\_29\\_e\\_Wikipedia](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Bar/Discussioni/Comma_29_e_Wikipedia) And the page where an evaluation was made and reopening was discussed: [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Bar/Discussioni/Sciopero:\\_il\\_punto\\_della\\_situazione](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Bar/Discussioni/Sciopero:_il_punto_della_situazione)
  41. Voting page, driven by the WMF, to determine whether the English Wikipedia community would support the blackout: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:SOPA\\_initiative/Action](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:SOPA_initiative/Action)
  42. Article on English Wikipedia about the protests against SOPA and PIPA. Section on the involvement of the Wikimedia community. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protests\\_against\\_SOPA\\_and\\_PIPA#Wikimedia\\_community](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protests_against_SOPA_and_PIPA#Wikimedia_community)
  43. List of actions taken by the various Wikimedia project communities on the day of action against SOPA and PIPA on 18 January 2012: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:SOPA\\_initiative/Actions\\_by\\_other\\_communities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:SOPA_initiative/Actions_by_other_communities)
  44. Discussion on German Wikipedia about the possibility of a fork and its viability: <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia-Fork>
  45. EISSFELDT, J. 26 September 2011, *The global mission, the image filter and the "German question"*. Article in "The Signpost": [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia\\_Signpost/2011-09-26/Opinion\\_essay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia_Signpost/2011-09-26/Opinion_essay)
  46. Message from Sue Gardner about the strike on 4 October



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- 2011: <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-l/2011-October/069258.html>
47. See: [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/English\\_Wikipedia\\_anti-SOPA\\_blackout](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/English_Wikipedia_anti-SOPA_blackout)
48. Note from the head of communication of the Wikimedia Foundation about the strike on 18 January 2012: [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Press\\_releases/English\\_Wikipedia\\_to\\_go\\_dark](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Press_releases/English_Wikipedia_to_go_dark)
49. *Wikipedia Founder Jimmy Wales: We May Go On "Strike" To Protest SOPA*, 13 January 2012. <http://whatstrending.com/2012/01/wikipedia-founder-jimmy-wales-strike-protest-sopa/>
50. *Why Wikipedia went down at midnight* CNN, 17 January 2012
51. See the cited resolution about biographies of living people that is applied to all the language versions of Wikipedia: [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:Biographies\\_of\\_living\\_people/ca](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:Biographies_of_living_people/ca)
52. I would like to thank the user *Montgomery*, who in some observations about the first version of this text focused my attention on these tensions related with the autonomy of editorial policy.
53. CHEN, S-L. (2011) "The Wikipedia Foundation and the self-governing Wikipedia Community. A dynamic relationship under constant negotiation". In: LOVINK, G. and TKACZ, N. (eds.) *Critical Point of View: A Wikipedia Reader*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, pp. 362-363.

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