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## THE WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION AND THE SELF-GOVERNING WIKIPEDIA COMMUNITY

### A DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP UNDER CONSTANT NEGOTIATION

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#### Introduction – Wikipedia as a New Network for Encyclopedia Production

Traditional encyclopedias base their credibility on two mutually dependent institutions that have claimed authority over knowledge production, namely the academic institutions that produce 'experts' and the publishing houses whose practices involve contributors, reviewers, and editors whose expertise is certified by the academic institutions. The Wikipedia community<sup>1</sup> – a loosely-structured group of individuals who share the goal of providing a free and quality encyclopedia to the public, who have developed a collective identity, and who participate in the production of Wikipedia and its self-governing structure in various ways – questions the production model of traditional encyclopedias and the claim that such a model is the only path for the public to enjoy quality reference work. Wikipedia suggests that a self-governing community consisting of dispersed and sometime anonymous individuals is also capable of providing credible reference works and has gradually convinced many that it is a viable alternative to traditional encyclopedias.

Using the analytical framework offered by Michel Callon's sociology of translation,<sup>2</sup> this essay explores local processes of social ordering and resistance by following the dynamic relations between various actors associated with the production of Wikipedia.

The Wikipedia community defines reference works as succinct summaries of existing knowledge, a definition with which traditional encyclopedias may agree. But the Wikipedia commu-

1. Wikipedia exists in many languages; each has its own community. This paper does not deal with local policies in each project, but focuses on the relationship between the Wikimedia Foundation (WMF) and the Wikipedia community as a whole. The WMF also supports Wikipedia's sister projects. When discussing cross-project issues, as the Wikipedia community can be negotiating with the WMF together with sister communities, I also use the term 'Wikimedia community'.
2. The process of translation starts from *problematization*; some actors seek to be indispensable to other actors by defining the nature of the problems of the latter. The former self-appoint as the focal actor and seek to lock other actors in the roles proposed to them (*interressement*), claiming that by implementing their proposal, the obligatory passage point – a situation through which all actors' interests can be satisfied – will be reached. The focal actors strategize to define and interrelate the various roles assigned to the actors (*enrolment*) and use a set of methods, including displacing actors with *mobiles* – figures, graphics, and tables – to ensure that supposed spokesmen for various relevant collectivities are able to represent them and not be betrayed by them (*mobilization*). Michel Callon, 'Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay', in John Law, *Power, Action and Belief; A New Sociology of Knowledge?* Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, pp. 196-223.

nity proposes an alternative network of encyclopedia production. The *interessement* device<sup>3</sup> is made of a technological platform (the wiki), a legal platform (free copyright licenses that reverse the usual application of copyright law to facilitate cooperation), and a set of community-developed policies. Many of the editorial policies are widely accepted principles of science – the community absorbed them and converted them into its own policies, which can be further negotiated and refined.<sup>4</sup> These policies and practices allow the community to remove experts from the central position they traditionally occupy in producing encyclopedias. In Wikipedia's network, the boundary between contributor/reviewer/editor and reader that was paramount in the traditional model is blurred – any literate person who has reasonable judgment and who follows good practices as defined by the community can contribute. These content policies apply to every contributor and are enforced by trusted community members, who have earned such trust by conforming to communal policies. The community assigns readers a new role to vigilantly examine the information provided by contributors and, ideally, to become editors.<sup>5</sup>

The sociology of translation offers a way to explore the origins of power and organization by showing how actors are connected with one another in a network and by analyzing the ordering struggle among actors. This paper does not attempt to provide a full description of the Wikipedia network, but focuses on one actor I have identified – the Wikimedia Foundation (WMF) – and its negotiations with the Wikipedia community.

### Recruiting a Non-profit Organization to Wikipedia's Network

While the Wikipedia community appears to be a novel institution – a flat structure operated by dispersed and sometimes anonymous individuals – it has had a conventionally organized legal entity to provide certain services. In its first two years, Bomis, Jimmy Wales' for-profit company, served this role. In fact, Bomis started Wikipedia in 2001 as a feeder project for Nupedia – its other free encyclopedia project that operated on an expert-written/reviewed/edited model. But Wikipedia took off as Nupedia stalled, and its network eventually disintegrated. As the Wikipedia community grew, the struggle between the community and Bomis intensified. The community demanded a more sophisticated *interessement* device by replacing the for-profit company with a non-profit organization. It became clear that without such a refinement, some contributors would disenroll and could greatly threaten the network's stability.<sup>6</sup> In 2003, the

3. Ibid.

4. See Shun-ling Chen, 'Wikipedia: A Republic of Science Democratized', *Albany Law Journal of Science and Technology*, 20 (2) (2010): 247.

5. See *ibid.*, 309-312.

6. In 2002, suspecting that Bomis retained overall control over the project and disagreeing with Bomis on various issues, including the possibility of introducing advertisements to Wikipedia, the Spanish Wikipedia community forked, taking the free content on the Spanish Wikipedia, as well as many of its contributors, to start another free encyclopedia project. See Edgar Enyedý and Nathaniel Tkacz, "Good luck with your WikiPAIDia": Reflections on the Spanish Fork of Wikipedia' in Geert Lovink and Nathaniel Tkacz, *Critical Point of View: A Wikipedia Reader*, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011, pp. 110-118. Andrew Lih also sees the Spanish fork as a key incident, which stalled the Spanish Wikipedia and 'convinced Wales and his partners [at Bomis] that they had to spin off Wikipedia into a non-profit entity'. Andrew Lih, *The Wikipedia Revolution*, New York: Hyperion, 2009, pp. 9, 138.

WMF was founded<sup>7</sup> at the community's urging.<sup>8</sup> The development not only ensured that Bomis would not be able to harvest the collaborative work of the community, but also showed that the community had stepped up to be the focal actor of the network.

The WMF is conscious that it owes its legitimacy and value to the community. Such consciousness is also reflected in how the WMF Board of Trustees (Board) – WMF's highest authority – is structured, with about half of it members representing the community, and the other half appointed for professional skills.<sup>9</sup>

The WMF serves various functions to mediate between the community and society, which I divide into two categories:

#### 1. *The WMF as an institutional interface:*

The WMF manages services and resources for Wikipedia and its sister projects (Wikimedia projects),<sup>10</sup> and can enter into agreements with a third party in these capacities. For example, Wikimedia projects are hosted on WMF's servers.<sup>11</sup> The WMF has obtained charity organization status to receive tax-deductible donations to support Wikimedia projects and has registered related trademarks and policed them to prevent their dilution.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, while volunteers often self-organize to issue press releases and to answer public inquiries,<sup>13</sup> the WMF has become an important communication window between the com-

7. Jimmy Wales, posting to the Wikipedia-I list (Wikipedia-I), 20 June 2003, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/wikipedia-I/2003-June/010743.html> (informing the creation of the WMF).
8. See e.g., Chuck Smith, posting to Wikipedia-I, 30 January 2003, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/wikipedia-I/2003-January/008780.html>, inquiring about the plan for setting up a foundation, with Wales replying that it was in the process. Wales acknowledged Erik Möller for urging the founding of the WMF: '[T]hanks really go [sic] to Erik, who called me on the phone about it this morning. That call kicked my butt to investigate the holdup, only to find that there was no holdup, and everything is ready to proceed'. Wales, posting to the WikiEN-I list (WikiEN-I), 20 June 2003, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/wikien-I/2003-June/004722.html>.
9. See MetaWiki, BoardChart, <https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/meta/wiki/Template:BoardChart>, showing that aside from the first months, community-elected members occupy 40-50 percent of the seats on the WMF Board. With the Board restructuring in 2008, chapter seats (selected by chapters – independent organizations founded by community members within a specific geographical region and approved by the WMF to support Wikimedia projects) and community seats together make up half of the Board.
10. Wales transferred the ownership of the Wikipedia and Nupedia domains from Bomis to the WMF and donated the copyright of related contributions by Bomis' employees' to the WMF. See *supra* note 7.
11. See Wikimedia Foundation, 'Our Projects', [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Our\\_projects](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Our_projects).
12. Mike Godwin (mnemonic1, WMF's General Counsel, 2007-2010) and others: IRC Office Hours/Office Hours, 15 October 2009, [http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/IRC\\_office\\_hours/Office\\_hours\\_2009-10-15](http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/IRC_office_hours/Office_hours_2009-10-15) (discussing how the WMF deals with trademark violation); See also Wikimedia Foundation, 'Resolution: Trademark Statement', [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:Trademark\\_statement](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:Trademark_statement).
13. Even after the WMF was established, community members continue to serve as press contacts. See [http://wikimediafoundation.org/w/index.php?title=Press\\_room&oldid=46746](http://wikimediafoundation.org/w/index.php?title=Press_room&oldid=46746).

munity and outsiders. As Wikipedia's cultural and social significance grew with its popularity, more complaints and inquiries arose from the public. Those who are unfamiliar with Wikipedia's model may prefer addressing their inquiries to a legally incorporated entity instead of dispersed and often anonymous and pseudonymous individuals. However, the WMF often simply refers them to the volunteer response team, which was initiated in 2004 to handle the public relations of Wikimedia projects.<sup>14</sup>

That the WMF often has to act on behalf of the community when it performs functions in this category adds difficulties to its *enrolment*,<sup>15</sup> for the community is unable to effectively cut or weaken the links between the WMF and other entities, and to lock the WMF in the community-designated positions. In fact, the community sometimes relies on the WMF to establish links with other actors. Hence, the WMF has a special role as it may compete with the Wikipedia community to represent the network, and the community constantly attempts to keep it in check.

### 2. The WMF as an institutional buffer:

The WMF may formally adopt policies or resolutions that affect the operation of the projects.<sup>16</sup> WMF's authority is based on two related facts: (1) the WMF is established to carry out community-designated goals; (2) the WMF as a service provider has to meet certain legal obligations.

As the service provider, under the governing U.S. law – section 512 of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA)<sup>17</sup> and section 230 of the Communications Decency Act<sup>18</sup> –, the WMF is not responsible for users' copyright violations or libelous speeches, so long as the WMF adopts reasonable procedures and performs them accordingly when being notified of such violations. While earlier the WMF office did directly respond to some complaints,<sup>19</sup> in order to retain these immunity statuses, it has gradually taken on the position that the WMF should not make editorial decisions for the community,<sup>20</sup> although the Office Actions Policy on the English Wikipedia still permits the WMF to act directly in extreme cases.

When certain measures are taken as responses to external pressures, WMF's role and actions as an institutional buffer is important for the *enrolment* of actors – for such a buffer cuts

14. Wikimedia, 'Wikipedia: Volunteer Response Team', [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Volunteer\\_response\\_team&oldid=370149438](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Volunteer_response_team&oldid=370149438).

15. See *supra* note 2

16. See Wikimedia Foundation, 'Bylaws', <http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Bylaws> (indicating WMF's power to pass resolutions and policies).

17. 17 U.S.C. 512.

18. 47 U.S.C. 230.

19. Wikipedia contributors, 'Wikipedia: Office Actions', [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Office\\_actions&oldid=344580302](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Office_actions&oldid=344580302).

20. Now the WMF considers the overly broad application of office actions as a result of its immaturity in the early age. See e.g., Kat Walsh, posting to the Foundation-I mailing list (Foundation-I), 18 May 2008, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-i/2008-May/043106.html>; Michael Snow, posting to Foundation-I, 19 May 2008, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-i/2008-May/043126.htm>.

off, or obstructs, the link between the community and outsiders, preventing outsiders from providing actors with definitions that are different from the ones assigned by the community. How effectively such an institutional buffer can separate the community from conventional understanding of encyclopedia production and how much community autonomy and self-governance it can incubate, partly depends on the substance of the WMF policy, which is itself a result of negotiation.

### Wikimedia Foundation Policies That Have Impacts on Communal Practices: Two Case Studies

Each WMF resolution has its own distinct history. Below I offer a closer look into the negotiations between the community and the WMF in deciding two issues that are fundamental to the community – one, two privacy-related resolutions adopted in 2008, and two, the licensing policy resolution adopted in 2007 and the license migration in 2009.

#### 1. Privacy-related resolutions in 2008:

Wikipedia is known for its open structure: anyone can edit without a user name and register a user name without providing an email address, the server only temporarily stores the IP address information of logged-in users, and the access of such IP address information is restricted to a small number of highly trusted users. Although it is criticized for being prone to manipulation, the project remains friendly to privacy-conscious users<sup>21</sup> and refines its *in-teressement* device by tackling malicious edits with other measures that do not compromise this openness.<sup>22</sup>

The community traditionally develops the privacy policy for the projects. The first WMF Privacy Policy, adopted in 2005, was based on community discussions.<sup>23</sup> In April 2008, the Board passed two privacy-related resolutions. First, the Board adopted the Data Retention Policy, stating that the WMF only retains the least amount of users' personally identifiable information (PII) as needed for maintenance of its services, as consistent with its privacy policy or as required by governing law.<sup>24</sup> The community did not seem to perceive the resolution

21. In a study conducted by the advocacy group Privacy International, Wikipedia was among the five most highly rated websites among 23 regarding privacy awareness. Privacy International, *Race to the Bottom: Privacy Ranking of Internet Services Companies*, 2007, [http://www.privacyinternational.org/article.shtml?cmd\[347\]=x-347-553961](http://www.privacyinternational.org/article.shtml?cmd[347]=x-347-553961).

22. Wikimedia projects are not entirely friendly to anonymous edits made from open proxies for they are prone to be used for abusive purposes, although contributors can edit from open proxies if they are not blocked. See Meta-Wiki, 'No open proxies', [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/meta/wiki/Open\\_proxies](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/meta/wiki/Open_proxies).

23. See archived community discussions before the board adopted the 2005 privacy policy [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/meta/wiki/Talk:Privacy\\_policy/archive](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/meta/wiki/Talk:Privacy_policy/archive). This version was later updated in 2006 to give a user group – Checkusers – access to registered users' IP addresses. See Angela Beesley, posting to Foundation-I, 14 April 2006, <http://www.gossamer-threads.com/lists/wiki/foundation/56009#56009>.

24. Wikimedia Foundation, 'Resolution: Data Retention Policy', [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:Data\\_Retention\\_Policy](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:Data_Retention_Policy).

as having changed the existing practices.<sup>25</sup> Then board member Domas Mituzas explained that the resolution is to provide ‘clear guidelines, [for] what we want to comply with, and a place to point at anyone [...] what [private information] we do [have]’.<sup>26</sup> From researching the public records, I am not aware of a direct statement on whether the board proposed the Data Retention Policy as a response to outside pressure. But the proposal was made in February 2008, almost immediately following the January 2008 ‘Video Professor’ incident (in which the WMF provided a user’s PII when served a subpoena, explained below).

The second resolution the WMF adopted in April 2008 was to amend its privacy policy.<sup>27</sup> Other than addressing the privacy-related consequences of the various user activities in Wikimedia projects, the policy also states the limited occasions when the WMF may have to provide users’ PII retained on its servers to third parties.<sup>28</sup> The Board resolved to revise the privacy policy after a user, Nsk92, protested the WMF for providing his PII (IP address in this case) to a third party without first notifying him/her when it was served a subpoena in a civil law process,<sup>29</sup> although the practice was permitted by the privacy policy in effect at the time of the incident.<sup>30</sup> Nsk92 was among the users<sup>31</sup> who edited an entry about ‘Video Professor (VPI)’, a company that provides computer tutorial CDs.<sup>32</sup> The article mentioned criticisms of VPI’s business model which involves advertising a first free trial disc, charging only shipping cost, but assuming subscriptions and automatically charging subsequent course fees.<sup>33</sup> VPI did not appreciate the negative descriptions and went after users who edited the Wikipedia article.<sup>34</sup> The WMF considered its provision of Nsk92’s PII to VPI as merely throwing the ball to Comcast, Nsk92’s internet service provider, to decide whether it would provide the

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25. E.g., Lodewijk (effe iets anders), a Dutch user, understands the resolution as simply restating the actual practices, posting to Foundation-I, 9 May 2008, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2008-May/042760.html>.
26. Posting of Domas Mituzas to Foundation-I, 9 May 2008, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2008-May/042762.html>.
27. Wikimedia Foundation, ‘Resolution: Privacy Policy Update April 2008’, [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:Privacy\\_policy\\_update\\_April\\_2008](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:Privacy_policy_update_April_2008).
28. Wikimedia Foundation, ‘Privacy Policy’, [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Privacy\\_policy](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Privacy_policy).
29. See ‘Policy Updates, Wikipedia Signpost’, 12 May 2008, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia\\_Signpost/2008-05-12/Policy\\_updates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia_Signpost/2008-05-12/Policy_updates).
30. The privacy policy in effect was the 2006 version, which permitted the WMF to release users’ personally identifiable data ‘in response to a valid subpoena or other compulsory request from law enforcement’. Wikimedia Foundation, Privacy Policy 2006, [http://wikimediafoundation.org/w/index.php?title=Privacy\\_policy&oldid=14088#Policy\\_on\\_release\\_of\\_data\\_derived\\_from\\_page\\_logs](http://wikimediafoundation.org/w/index.php?title=Privacy_policy&oldid=14088#Policy_on_release_of_data_derived_from_page_logs).
31. Wikipedia contributors, ‘Video Professor’, [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Video\\_Professor&oldid=152512779](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Video_Professor&oldid=152512779) (archived 20 August 2007, showing the first revision of the entry made by Nsk92).
32. VideoProfessor.com, Press Kit, <http://www.videoprofessor.com/aboutvideoprofessor/presscenter/presskit/presskit.html>.
33. See *supra* note 31. See also Joseph S. Enoch, ‘Video Professor Drops Subpoena, Goes After Wikipedia Users’, ConsumerAffairs.com, 18 December 2007, [http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2007/12/video\\_prof03.html](http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2007/12/video_prof03.html).
34. *Ibid.*

subscription information associated with the IP address.<sup>35</sup> Nsk92 questioned the WMF for not having given him an opportunity to resist the subpoena. Nsk92’s stance obtained wide community support and led to the subsequent board resolution.<sup>36</sup> The new draft developed by the WMF office<sup>37</sup> was posted on a public wiki in June 2008 for two rounds of discussions, and the final version was largely taken from a revision provided by users.<sup>38</sup> Even after such an extended discussion, the board requested more comments from the community in August<sup>39</sup> before it adopted the current privacy policy in October 2008.<sup>40</sup>

## 2. The Licensing Policy Resolution in 2007 and the License Migration Process in 2009

To provide a free encyclopedia, Wikipedia chose the GNU Free Documentation License (GFDL) when it started in 2001. The GFDL is a free license that permits users to copy, distribute, and modify the content. It is also a ‘copyleft’ license that requires derivative works to be released under the GFDL. WMF’s 2003 bylaws states that its mission is to develop and maintain Wikipedia and sister projects and distribute them ‘free of charge to the public under a free documentation license such as the [GFDL]’.<sup>41</sup>

In the earlier days when free content was rather limited, compromises were made to include non-free content for comprehensiveness. Such compromises became less justifiable as Wikipedia became more mature and as more free content became available. For example, in May 2005, Wales posted a message on the English Wikipedia mailing list (WikiEN-I) clarifying that non-free images were tolerated only as an ‘interim measure’ and that images would not be acceptable as new uploads if they are not free.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, whether non-free material could be included and under what circumstances remained a source of uncertainty and disagreement in the community.

In January 2007, a Wikipedian suggested on the Foundation-I mailing list (Foundation-I) – the list for discussions about Foundation-wide policy or universal issues – that the Board should

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35. See Wikipedia contributors, ‘Releasing IP Addresses of Registered Users: the Video Professor Incident’, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Village\\_pump\\_\(policy\)/Archive\\_25#Releasing\\_IP\\_addresses\\_of\\_registered\\_users:\\_the\\_Video\\_Professor\\_incident](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Village_pump_(policy)/Archive_25#Releasing_IP_addresses_of_registered_users:_the_Video_Professor_incident).
36. *Ibid.* See also Ral315 (Ryan Lomonaco), ‘Policy Updates’, Wikipedia Signpost, 12 May 2008, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia\\_Signpost/2008-05-12/Policy\\_updates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia_Signpost/2008-05-12/Policy_updates).
37. For full disclosure, in May 2008, I interned at the WMF and was involved in preparing the draft. I was instructed to only incorporate existing policy and the new resolution.
38. Meta-Wiki, ‘Draft Privacy Policy June 2008’, [http://meta.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=Draft\\_Privacy\\_Policy\\_June\\_2008&oldid=1050218](http://meta.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=Draft_Privacy_Policy_June_2008&oldid=1050218) and its talk page; Meta-Wiki, ‘Draft Privacy Policy June 19 2008’, [http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Draft\\_Privacy\\_Policy\\_June\\_19\\_2008](http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Draft_Privacy_Policy_June_19_2008) and its talk page.
39. Michael Snow, posting to Foundation-I, 8 August 2008, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2008-August/045169.html>.
40. The board adopted the latest version of the privacy policy on 3 October 2008. *Supra* note 28.
41. Wikimedia Foundation, Bylaws (2003), [http://wikimediafoundation.org/w/index.php?title=Bylaws&oldid=203#ARTICLE\\_II:\\_STATEMENT\\_OF\\_PURPOSE](http://wikimediafoundation.org/w/index.php?title=Bylaws&oldid=203#ARTICLE_II:_STATEMENT_OF_PURPOSE).
42. Jimmy Wales, posting to WikiEN-I, 19 May 2005, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/wikien-I/2005-May/023760.html>.

advise the community on the usage of non-commercial images.<sup>43</sup> The posting generated extensive discussions. Two Italian Wikipedians defended the inclusion of non-free material in the Italian Wikipedia due to the lack of free alternatives.<sup>44</sup> Some Dutch community members also attempted to approve the Creative Commons NonCommercial (CC-NC) license, which prohibits commercial uses, in the local project.<sup>45</sup> Almost at the same time, a WMF employee notified the Hebrew Wikipedia (He-WP) that the WMF prohibited non-commercial and educational-only licenses. The He-WP community was aware of Wales' posting to WikiEN-I in May 2005 but considered it to be effective only on the English Wikipedia.<sup>46</sup> Hence, an editor inquired whether the He-WP could have its special license that permits only educational reuses.<sup>47</sup> It was clear that the community lacked an agreement regarding what the obligatory passage point is in this network, i.e., what counts as a 'free' and quality encyclopedia.

With intensive community discussions going on, the board postponed a decision about this issue.<sup>48</sup> On 8 February, Kat Walsh, a Board member,<sup>49</sup> announced its position before it reached a final solution – the WMF would only host freely licensed media, except when it is unrealistic to expect that media considered important for educational purposes would be released under free licenses.<sup>50</sup> On 20 February, Erik Möller, then a board member,<sup>51</sup> posted a draft resolution on Foundation-I, requesting comments from the community.<sup>52</sup> The discussion that followed was mainly about ensuring that the resolution expressed WMF's position on free educational material and limiting the exceptions local projects could have. At the end Möller stated that he did not expect consensus within the diverse community on whether

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43. Hay Kranen, posting to Foundation-I, 10 January 2007, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2007-January/026790.html>.
44. See several responses to the thread in *supra* note 42 by Marco Chiesa and Senpai.
45. See Lodewijk, posting to Foundation-I, 10 January 2007, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2007-January/026815.html>.
46. Yoni Weiden, posting to Foundation-I, 10 January 2007, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2007-January/026823.html>.
47. Yoni Weiden, posting to Foundation-I, 10 January 2007, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2007-January/026804.html>.
48. Kat Walsh, posting to Foundation-I, 14 January 2007, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2007-January/026937.html>.
49. Walsh was appointed to the board in December 2006 following a board expansion decision. See Florence Devouard, posting to Foundation-I, 8 December 2006, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2006-December/025503.html>. Since July 2007 she has occupied a community-elected seat on the board. See Philippe Beaudette, posting to Foundation-I, 12 July 2007, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2007-July/031683.html> and the BoardChart in *supra* note 9.
50. Kat Walsh, posting to Foundation-I, 8 February 2007, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2007-February/027547.html>.
51. Erik Möller was a community-elected Board member from 2005 until he resigned in December 2007. He then joined the WMF and has been serving as the deputy director since January 2008. See the BoardChart, *supra* note 9. and Sue Gardner, posting to Foundation-I, 18 December 2007, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2007-December/036323.html>.
52. Erik Möller, posting to Foundation-I, 20 February 2007, <http://www.gossamer-threads.com/lists/wiki/foundation/84383#84383>.

to exclude non-free material for the principle of freedom or to include non-free material for the purpose of comprehensiveness. Nevertheless, he expected higher support for freedom among regular contributors and asserted that freedom is fundamental to WMF's community-designated goal, which should never be abandoned 'even if a majority of contributors opposed it. It is a foundation value (with both a lower and upper case F)'.<sup>53</sup>

In March 2007, the WMF Board adopted the licensing policy: free licensing is the principle, while a minimal exception policy may be adopted locally if the unfree media can be included legally under certain legal doctrines within governing jurisdictions – such as the fair use doctrine in the United States.<sup>54</sup> The board also specified a standard of freedom – all free licenses have to meet the terms of 'Definition of Free Cultural Works (DFCW)', a definition that was initiated by Möller himself to resolve ambiguity about the phrase 'free content' in the context of Wikimedia projects.<sup>55</sup> The ambiguity of the term is an issue in the broader 'free culture' movement.<sup>56</sup> Being a prominent organization in the movement, Creative Commons (CC) offers a variety of licenses, from which a copyright owner can freely give away some kinds of authorial control and retain others. Some advocates, including Richard Stallman, founder of the Free Software Foundation (FSF), criticized those CC licenses that prohibit commercial reuses (NC licenses) and the preparation of derivative works (ND licenses) as unfree.<sup>57</sup> The DFCW shows closer ideological ties with the FSF, defining free cultural works as 'works or expressions which can be freely studied, applied, copied and/or modified, by anyone, for any purpose'.<sup>58</sup>

Möller was right about the difficulty for the diverse community to reach a consensus on this issue. Soon after the board adopted the resolution, in April 2007 some Norwegian Wikipedia users objected to WMF's 'dictat[ion]' over local projects for lack of consensus.<sup>59</sup> Kat Walsh replied to confirm that although '[f]or most community matters individual projects have autonomy [...] licensing [...] is part of [WMF's] mission', the WMF has authority to adopt a policy that is binding on all projects.<sup>60</sup>

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53. Erik Möller, posting to Foundation-I, 5 March 2007, <http://www.gossamer-threads.com/lists/wiki/foundation/85368#85368>.
54. Wikimedia Foundation, 'Resolution: Licensing Policy', [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:Licensing\\_policy](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:Licensing_policy).
55. Definition of Free Cultural Works, History, <http://freedomdefined.org/History>.
56. For a more detailed account for the ambiguity of free content in the free culture movement, see Shun-ling Chen, 'To Surpass or to Conform – What are Public Licenses For', University of Illinois *Journal of Law, Technology and Policy*, 2009 (1), <http://www.jltp.uiuc.edu/archives/Chen.pdf>.
57. Richard Stallman, 'Fireworks in Montreal', posting on Free Software Foundation Blog, <http://www.fsf.org/blogs/rms/entry-20050920.html>.
58. Definition of Free Cultural Works, <http://freedomdefined.org>.
59. See Kjetil Ree, posting to Foundation-I, 15 April 2007, reporting objections in the Norwegian (bokmål) Wikipedia community and asking for clarification, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2007-April/029212.html>.
60. Kat Walsh, posting to Foundation-I, 15 April 2007, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-I/2007-April/029215.html>.

Möller was also right to assume stronger support for freedom within the community. There had been a longstanding community concern over whether the GFDL was the most suitable license for providing free material, or whether the content should be relicensed to a similar copyleft license, the CC Attribution-Share Alike License (CC-BY-SA). The GFDL was designed for hardcopies of software manuals and may not be suitable for other media. Its requirement to reproduce the lengthy license text when distributing verbatim copies or derivative works is burdensome for reusers. Secondly, the CC-BY-SA had become more popular than the GFDL, which was primarily used by Wikipedia and other projects that sought legal compatibility with Wikipedia. Because two copyleft licenses are inherently incompatible with one another (each requires a derivative work to adopt itself but not any other license), the GFDL prevented people from reusing most Wikipedia content under the CC-BY-SA.<sup>61</sup> In December 2007, the board resolved to collaborate with the maintainers of both licenses – the FSF and CC – to allow the WMF to relicense the GFDL material in Wikimedia projects.<sup>62</sup>

The license migration process is another example that shows the delicate negotiation of power between the WMF and the community on important policy decisions. In the 2007 resolution, the board did not adopt a substantial policy change, but only resolved to work with both organizations to produce a proposal for migration. It framed this decision as ‘respond[ing] responsibly to longstanding community concerns’, as well as a ‘continu[ation of] longstanding traditions of strong community input and control over major decisions affecting the projects’.<sup>63</sup>

The WMF had started to negotiate with both organizations even before the 2007 resolution.<sup>64</sup> The heated discussion in the community immediately after the resolution showed that the community was not entirely aware of and involved in the initial process – suggesting that the WMF somehow acted independently and without clear delegation by the community. The language in the resolution also showed that the WMF understood the controversial nature of this decision and of its leading role in the process. After the 2007 resolution, the WMF actively facilitated community discussions on this issue, collecting doubts and concerns and seeking consensus. As many questions had to be addressed by the two license maintainers, the WMF acted as an institutional interface and negotiated on behalf of the community. For example, one major discussion was about CC’s reputation as an organization that defends freedom, especially when it was compared to the FSF. Erik Möller engaged community members to turn their doubts about CC into a ‘CC-BY-SA migration checklist’, listing things the

61. Not all Wikipedia content was under GFDL. Uploading images that are in the public domain or under the CC-BY-SA and the CC-BY had always been permitted.

62. See Wikimedia Foundation, ‘Resolution: License Update’, [http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:License\\_update](http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Resolution:License_update). Extended discussions on this resolution are archived at <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-1/2007-December/>.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

community wanted CC to do before license migration.<sup>65</sup> CC took several measures to earn the Wikimedia community’s trust, including adopting the same definition of freedom as the WMF and pledging that future versions of the CC-BY-SA would be at least as free as it was.<sup>66</sup>

As the community discussion gradually reached consensus and the WMF worked out a solution with the FSF and CC in spring 2009, the board ‘invite[d]’ the community to vote on the proposal to offer Wikimedia contents under the CC-BY-SA in addition to the GFDL.<sup>67</sup> The voting results in May 2009 showed strong support for the proposal, with 10.5 percent against and 75.8 percent in favor of relicensing.<sup>68</sup> The board immediately approved the relicensing.<sup>69</sup> To make this relicense possible, the FSF offered a new version of GFDL (1.3) that permits the site operator of a large-scale collaboration project (in this case the WMF), instead of the copyright holders (those who contributed to the Wikimedia projects), to relicense the website content.<sup>70</sup> Hence while the WMF lacked the legitimacy to implement the migration independent of the community, the new GFDL entitled the WMF to do so legally for those contents that were licensed as ‘GFDL 1.2 or later’.

Overall, the Wikimedia community has shown strong commitment to providing free educational material. However, some continued advocating for including non-free materials. In March 2009, while the community was getting ready for the relicensing vote, a few people who had contributed high-quality photos proposed on the English Wikipedia Village Pump – a place where the community debates project policies – to admit photos released under NC licenses.<sup>71</sup> Proponents wanted to avoid exploitation by commercial entities and believed the inclusion of NC images would improve the project’s overall quality and comprehensiveness, while opponents emphasized the principle of freedom. The proposal was withdrawn after WMF’s general counsel confirmed that Wikipedia could not host NC content.<sup>72</sup> One proponent, Fir0002, retired/disenrolled from Wikimedia projects, mainly due to the lack of

65. Erik Möller, posting to Foundation-I, 3 December 2007, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-1/2007-December/035677.html>. Möller made this proposal right before resigning from the board to serve as WMF’s deputy director. See *supra* note 51.

66. See Mike Linksvayer, ‘Creative Commons Statement of Intent for Attribution-ShareAlike Licenses Released’, posting on the Creative Commons Blog, 17 April 2009, <http://creativecommons.org/weblog/entry/8213>. For a more detailed discussion of some Wikipedians’ distrust of CC and how CC responded to Wikimedia community’s concerns, see Chen, *supra* note 54, pp. 107, 129.

67. See Meta-Wiki, ‘Licensing Update’, [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/meta/wiki/Licensing\\_update](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/meta/wiki/Licensing_update).

68. Another 13.7% did not have an opinion on the issue. Meta-Wiki, *Licensing Update/Result*, [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/meta/wiki/Licensing\\_update/Result](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/meta/wiki/Licensing_update/Result).

69. Wikimedia Foundation, ‘Resolution: Licensing Update Approval’, [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/foundation/wiki/Resolution:Licensing\\_update\\_approval](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/foundation/wiki/Resolution:Licensing_update_approval).

70. See Free Software Foundation, ‘GNU Free Documentation License Version 1.3’, <http://www.gnu.org/licenses/fdl-1.3.html>.

71. Wikimedia contributors, ‘Proposal for Introduction of NC Licensed Photos on Wikipedia’, [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/wiki/Wikipedia:Village\\_pump\\_%28policy%29/Archive\\_62#Proposal\\_for\\_introduction\\_of\\_NC\\_licensed\\_photos\\_on\\_Wikipedia](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/wiki/Wikipedia:Village_pump_%28policy%29/Archive_62#Proposal_for_introduction_of_NC_licensed_photos_on_Wikipedia).

72. Ibid.

NC options.<sup>73</sup> Another proponent, Muhammad Mahdi Karim, continued to negotiate with the community by contributing images only under the GFDL 1.2<sup>74</sup> – whose burdensome requirements allows him to strike deals with commercial reusers and a licensing arrangement that the German Wikipedia (De-WP) voted to disallow in 2008.<sup>75</sup>

On top of the Village Pump page of Wikimedia Commons, a note discourages users to suggest allowing non-free material, calling it a ‘waste of time’, as hosting only free material is a ‘basic rule of the place’.<sup>76</sup> Although so far the majority of the community supports free licensing, one can assume that disagreements on the licensing issue are likely to remain within the community.

The above examples show that when the WMF makes policy decisions that affect community practices, it typically involves the community in the discussions, which can take place on public wikis or on public mailing lists. The community-elected board members have played an important role in the communication between the WMF/Board and the community by soliciting comments and answering questions in these public channels. There are often several rounds of discussion. In the later rounds, the community participates in deliberating on a draft text, which reflects major points raised in the discussion or even includes languages provided by the community.

In the first example, the WMF restated its data retention practice in a resolution as well as revised its privacy policy as a result of external pressure, the legal procedure initiated by Video Professor. An upset individual or entity suing Wikipedia editors for making libelous claims, even if such editors followed good community norms and practices, can have chilling effects. Redefining the community boundary is a way for a self-governing community to defend itself against unwanted external interference. The WMF restated its ‘longstanding commitment to minimizing the data retention of users and editors’ to negotiate a realm of autonomy, which also helps the *enrolment*. Without having access to Nsk92’s PII, VPI cannot bring him to court, where edits might be ruled legally libelous despite having been made according to communal norms, and make Nsk92 and other editors disenroll from the network with the threat of potential legal consequences. The resolution about updating the Privacy Policy also resulted from negotiations between the community and the WMF – the community demanded the WMF adopt a higher standard when handling users’ privacy-sensitive information and formally inscribe it in a new policy.

73. Fir0002, User:Fir0002/Retirement, <https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/w/index.php?title=User:Fir0002/Retirement&oldid=311069440>.

74. Ragesoss, ‘Making Money with Free Photos’, Wikipedia Signpost, 31 May 2010, [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia\\_Signpost/2010-05-31/Photography](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia_Signpost/2010-05-31/Photography). Unlike content under ‘GFDL 1.2 or later versions’, which was also under version 1.3 when it became available, then could be relicensed to CC-BY-SA, a work with ‘GFDL 1.2 only’ would be only under GFDL and could not be relicensed without the author’s permission.

75. Meinungsbilder/GFDL 1.2-only für Dateien, [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/de/wiki/Wikipedia:Meinungsbilder/GFDL\\_1.2-only\\_f%C3%BCr\\_Dateien](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/de/wiki/Wikipedia:Meinungsbilder/GFDL_1.2-only_f%C3%BCr_Dateien) (in German).

76. Wikimedia Commons, ‘Village Pump’, [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/w/index.php?title=Commons:Village\\_pump&oldid=41101847](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/w/index.php?title=Commons:Village_pump&oldid=41101847).

In short, on the issue of user privacy, one can see that the WMF has largely served its designated function as an institutional buffer in Wikipedia’s network. The community has a strong voice in deciding the substance of WMF’s privacy-related policies. The current WMF privacy policy and data retention policy not only respond to the needs of the privacy-conscious community, but also enhance the community’s autonomy by limiting the possibility of external intervention – thus allowing the community to remain open to anonymous editors.

If the privacy policy is ‘one of the nearest thing[s] to define terms of agreements between WMF and editors’, as characterized by Florence Nibart-Devouard – then chair of the Board –, <sup>77</sup> the Licensing Policy can be seen as one of the nearest things that defines the goals shared by the WMF and the community – i.e., what it means to provide a *free and* quality encyclopedia to the world. There has not been much external challenge of WMF’s immunity status under the DMCA.<sup>78</sup> The repeating debate of licensing and freedom mainly rose from the disagreements within the community.

The license migration in 2009 furthered the community’s commitment to providing free content. Procedurally, the community remains the source of authority, whose final decisions will be implemented by the WMF. Nevertheless, the WMF played an active role both in the internal and external negotiations, though it was conscientious about its lack of legitimacy. Sue Gardner, WMF’s executive director, characterized the process as a ‘long campaign’, initiated by ‘people in leadership positions’ who did not have ‘the moral or legal right to make the switch’, negotiating with the FSF and persuading the community.<sup>79</sup> Her language leaves open whether the term ‘Wikimedia’ is the WMF or the community. In the process of adopting the 2007 licensing policy and relicensing in 2009, disagreements within the community persisted even after a long persuasion process. I suggest that those who hold the majority opinion of the community leveraged the WMF and its institutional position as the server operator and reinforced a definition of ‘free content’.

We also see that while the community refines the *interessement* device to provide the kind of free and quality encyclopedia according to the prevailing idea of freedom within the community, the *enrolment* of some individual contributors became challenging. Eyeing the potential personal gains from their works – a link that connects these contributors to other entities, e.g., commercial reusers – some left, and some sought to retain more authorial control by

77. Florence Nibart-Devouard, posting to Foundation-I, 14 June 2008, <http://www.gossamer-threads.com/lists/wiki/foundation/135681#135681>.

78. Mike Godwin (mnemonic1), ‘IRC Office Hours/Office Hours 2009-10-19’, [http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/IRC\\_office\\_hours/Office\\_hours\\_2009-10-09](http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/IRC_office_hours/Office_hours_2009-10-09) (‘[I] typically get only one or two true takedown notices a year. [I] always thought [I] would get more, but our community is very good at removing infringing material before a copyright owner complains to us.’).

79. Looking back in 2010, Gardner highlighted the license migration as an example about ‘good patterns of leadership and change-making’ at Wikimedia. See Sue Gardner, ‘Making Change at Wikimedia: Nine Patterns That Work’, Sue Gardner’s Blog, 9 November 2010, <http://suegardner.org/2010/11/09/making-change-at-wikimedia-nine-patterns-that-work/>.

uploading their works to Wikimedia projects only under GFDL. The GFDL was initially part of the *interessement* device in Wikipedia's network, included to facilitate collaborations. Its use as a strategy for personal gains underlines the reason why the majority moved to relicense in 2009. Some other community members have drawn the line of freedom at disallowing GFDL-only uploads, such as what has been done in the De-WP.

### Conclusion: Keeping the WMF under the Community's Check? – The Dynamic Relationship and the Continuous Negotiation within the Network

While the WMF has expanded significantly and professionalized in recent years, the WMF does not function as the corporate proprietor in the traditional encyclopedia model that centralizes the decision-making process and claims the ownership of the products. Every editor continues to hold the copyright of her contribution. Wikipedia remains community-run and is largely independent of the WMF. While the WMF can decide and adjust policies that have wide impacts on community practices, this paper shows that so far the community has managed to actively engage in these decision processes and that the WMF seems to have adopted these policies only when there have been efforts to seek for consensus, or when community consensus can be assumed.

Using Callon's analytical framework, I suggest that since the WMF was founded as a non-profit and legally incorporated body enlisted by the Wikipedia community to join their network, so far the community has been able to keep the WMF in its designated role – as an institutional interface between the community and society and as an institutional buffer that enhances *enrolment*. I suggest that the tensions surfacing in the policy-making process of the WMF are locales where observers can study the power relationships between the community and the WMF, which are crucial for the stability of Wikipedia's network.

Other hot spots are generating debates and their developments may be the subjects of future studies: (1) the WMF initiated the Usability Project to improve the editing interface, which has long been criticized for deterring newcomers. Some new features were not well received by experienced editors and generated extensive discussions, which have led to a reflection on the gap between the WMF staff and the volunteer contributors over the issue of engineering.<sup>80</sup> (2) The openness of Wikimedia projects invites potentially controversial content, and the community may reach a consensus in editorial policy that some readers might still find objectionable. In June 2010, the board requested the Executive Director (ED) to study this issue and to develop a set of recommendations for the board, and the ED contracted an external consultant to carry out the project. Samuel Klein, a community-elected board member, called it 'the most controversial resolution passed in a few quarters', questioning whether the recommendations about editorial policy should be presented to the community policy makers

80. Erik Möller, posting to Foundation-I, 8 June 2010, <http://www.gossamer-threads.com/lists/wiki/foundation/199025#199025>.

or to the board.<sup>81</sup> (3) In the 2010 annual fundraising campaign the WMF set an ambitious goal of 16 million USD and implemented several new features in the fundraising banners.<sup>82</sup> There were doubts about the necessity of the high figure,<sup>83</sup> complaints about the intrusive banners,<sup>84</sup> including those with Wales' portraits,<sup>85</sup> and questions about the aggressive blinking effects in the end of the campaign.<sup>86</sup> One banner featured the personal appeal of WMF's ED but initially described her as 'the Executive Director of Wikipedia', a position that does not exist. Some community members criticized the WMF for misleading the public.<sup>87</sup> The WMF soon corrected the banner and explained that the language choice was out of 'effectiveness' concerns since many people simply do not know about the WMF.<sup>88</sup> Although the WMF might have simply wanted to serve its fundraising role well, the misbranding raised the question of representation. This incident not only shows that the WMF still owes its legitimacy to the community-based projects, but that the *enrolment* of the WMF in Wikipedia's network as the institutional interface is particularly difficult, since the community would not be able to effectively cut the link between the WMF and other entities.

One may notice the existence of special WMF task forces in these hot spots. The growth of the WMF has been a source of tension between the WMF and the community. The community has raised concerns about the potential conflict between the culture of the community and the culture of the professionals. Will the 'maturity' and 'professionalization' of the WMF change the character and the agency of this organization in Wikipedia's network?

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81. Samuel Klein's posting to the discussion page of the Resolution 'Commissioning Recommendations from the Executive Director' on 24 June 2010 11:48 (UTC), [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/foundation/wiki/Talk:Resolution:Commissioning\\_Recommendations\\_from\\_the\\_Executive\\_Director](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/foundation/wiki/Talk:Resolution:Commissioning_Recommendations_from_the_Executive_Director).
82. See HaeB, November 15 Launch, 'Emphasis on Banner Optimization and Community Involvement', Wikipedia Signpost, 8 November 2010, [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia\\_Signpost/2010-11-08/Fundraiser](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia_Signpost/2010-11-08/Fundraiser).
83. See e.g. the discussion of the Signpost story, *ibid*.
84. Erik Möller, in response to criticisms by community members, acknowledged that 'Indeed, the size and graphical visibility of the banners this year [2010] have certainly pushed my own pain points as to what I consider an acceptable balance.' Erik Möller, posting to Foundation-I, 1 January 2011, <http://www.gossamer-threads.com/lists/wiki/foundation/220343#220343>.
85. See e.g. Strange Passerby and HaeB, 'Fundraising banners mocked', Wikipedia Signpost, 22 November 2010, [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia\\_Signpost/2010-11-22/In\\_the\\_news](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia_Signpost/2010-11-22/In_the_news), and Lumos3, HaeB, and Ohconfucius, *Fundraiser Coverages and Parodies Continue*, Wikipedia Signpost, 29 November 2010, [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia\\_Signpost/2010-11-29/In\\_the\\_news](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia_Signpost/2010-11-29/In_the_news).
86. See Domas Mituzas, posting to Foundation-I, 31 December 2010, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-l/2010-December/063266.html>, and the following discussions.
87. See ZM McBride, posting to Foundation-I, 9 December 2010, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-l/2010-December/062914.html>, and the following discussions.
88. Zack Exley (WMF's Chief Community Officer), posting to Foundation-I, 9 December 2010, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-l/2010-December/062932.html>. His second posting on this issue, reads: 'OK, everyone – I learned my lesson! ... I was looking at it from the perspective of the reader who has never heard the word 'Wikimedia'. ... Luckily they simply think we are misspelling Wikipedia, and are donating anyways.' 10 December 2010, <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-l/2010-December/062963.html>.

I would like to provide my reflection on the *mobilisation* moment in the sociology of translation.<sup>89</sup> Many *mobiles* are produced spontaneously by community members, for example when the WMF's data analyst Erik Zachte was hired in 2008, he was already known as a community member who developed 'Wikistats', 'an amazing statistics package that reveals data about the growth and editing patterns in our [...] projects'.<sup>90</sup> However, recently we see that the WMF can produce or collect these *mobiles*, gather resources, initiate, and implement projects based on this information – including dedicating resources to produce more *mobiles* – in a way that is far more systematic and efficient than individual community members. The large amount of *mobiles* permitted the WMF to act as a 'center of calculation'<sup>91</sup> in deciding future community development. Examples include: the Strategic Planning process,<sup>92</sup> while inviting community involvement, allowed the WMF to set a five year plan, including an expansion from 50 employees in 2010 to around 200 in 2015;<sup>93</sup> the WMF is tightening relationships with local communities in large developing countries, including opening a new office in India, because the *mobiles* showed low participation and large potential from these places;<sup>94</sup> the fundraising goal in 2010, a huge increase from 2009, was partly set to cover WMF's costs for expansion and many planned tasks; the image banners used in the fundraising were optimized by extensive research,<sup>95</sup> and the effectiveness of each banner was monitored closely.<sup>96</sup> To be fair, these *mobiles* were not generated only by the professionals or consultants that work for the WMF; many community members were also involved. However, such community involvement does not stop us from asking if the role of the WMF is gradually changing from merely an actor recruited by the community to perform designated functions to one that is actively deciding the future development of the network – asking which new actors to recruit, which strategies to enroll them, and how to mobilize actors in the network.

Although in the Strategic Plan the WMF identifies its role as supporting the community, this is not a modest role that performs only community-designated functions, but one that is 'positively transformative' and may 'ultimately, increase the overall impact of the projects on

89. The term *mobiles* comes from Michel Callon. They include graphs and tables that can be taken into boardrooms to 'speak' for what they represent: a translation of people and things into something literally portable. See also *supra* note 2.

90. Brion Vibber, posting to Foundation-l, 2 July 2008, <http://www.gossamer-threads.com/lists/wiki/foundation/137181#137181> (announcing the hire).

91. Bruno Latour, *Science in Action*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.

92. Wikimedia Strategic Planning, 'Task Force/Strategy/Plan Overview', [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/strategy/w/index.php?title=Task\\_force/Strategy/Plan\\_overview&oldid=70029](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/strategy/w/index.php?title=Task_force/Strategy/Plan_overview&oldid=70029).

93. See Wikimedia Foundation, 'Minutes 17 2010, Strategy Project Update: Recap, Implications, and Revenue Strategy', [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/foundation/wiki/Minutes/April\\_17,\\_2010#Strategy\\_Project\\_Update:\\_Recap.2C\\_Implications.2C\\_and\\_Revenue\\_Strategy](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/foundation/wiki/Minutes/April_17,_2010#Strategy_Project_Update:_Recap.2C_Implications.2C_and_Revenue_Strategy).

94. Wikimedia Strategic Planning, Strategic plan/Role of the WMF, [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/strategy/wiki/Strategic\\_Plan/Role\\_of\\_the\\_WMF](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/strategy/wiki/Strategic_Plan/Role_of_the_WMF).

95. See HaeB, *supra* note 82. See various links to donor surveys on the sidebar of Fundraising 2010/Updates, [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/meta/w/index.php?title=Fundraising\\_2010/Updates&oldid=2281539](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/meta/w/index.php?title=Fundraising_2010/Updates&oldid=2281539).

96. Meta-Wiki, Fundraising 2010/Banner testing/Stats/Banner history, [https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/meta/wiki/Fundraising\\_2010/Banner\\_testing/Stats/Banner\\_history](https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/meta/wiki/Fundraising_2010/Banner_testing/Stats/Banner_history).

readers and the world'.<sup>97</sup> Can this quoted language look like an act of translation, projecting the WMF as the translator for actors in the Wikipedia network in the future, with an adjusted goal of *increasing the impact* of free and quality reference works? What would be at stake if the WMF replaces the community as the focal actor? Wikipedia posed a challenge to traditional encyclopedia models and the two sources of authority on which it is grounded. Would such challenges be weakened in any way if the focal actor shifted from the unconventional institution of the self-governing community to a rather conventional institution of a charity? Would Wikipedia's 'do-acracy' – the merit-based, self-governing structure – and its open structure, which differentiates it from the traditional model, be affected in any way in the kind of 'positive transformations' projected by the WMF? Would we identify this as a later version of the current network, or would we consider this a different one? And if the latter, how would it affect the stability of Wikipedia's network?

I do not think the course of future development is set, not for the community, for the WMF, or for the network as a whole. As taught by the sociology of translation, actors are always negotiating their relationships with other actors, and the actors themselves also change according to these relationships. I end this paper by quoting from the Strategic Planning's interview with a Board member (who was later elected as the chair<sup>98</sup>) Ting Chen, which proves my point:

Well, the ideal is professionalize. The community would in this case [moving to a Greenpeace or Red Cross model] play a less and less role, while professionals would slowly take over. This is ridiculous to say, especially from a board member, and even a community elected board member, but I think this is a possibility, if we want it this way.

As I had already mentioned at the beginning of the interview personally I am more conservative and would prefer a small Foundation, not a Red Cross or Green Peace like Foundation. I am also totally aware that the community is mostly against professionalization of our projects. But we are on a strategic planning process. And as such it should be allowed to think about all possibilities. I had expressed this alternative as a possibility, but it doesn't mean that I wish this to happen. Indeed my personal preference is, as mentioned, another'.<sup>99</sup>

97. *Supra* note 94.

98. Ting Chen became the chair of the board in July 2010. Wikimedia Foundation, 'Board of Trustees', [http://wikimediafoundation.org/w/index.php?title=Board\\_of\\_Trustees&oldid=57307](http://wikimediafoundation.org/w/index.php?title=Board_of_Trustees&oldid=57307).

99. Wikimedia Strategy Wiki, Interviews/Ting Chen, conducted on 11 September 2009, [http://strategy.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=Interviews/Ting\\_Chen&oldid=54199](http://strategy.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=Interviews/Ting_Chen&oldid=54199).

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