

# Chapter 1

## Framing the Production of Historical knowledge on Wikipedia: Policies, Guidelines, Rules, Hierarchy, and History

We cannot understand how historical knowledge is produced on Wikipedia without knowing how Wikipedia works, how it appeared in the digital and public sphere, what rules it has established to produce knowledge. The aim of this chapter is to shed light on how the Wikipedia community collects and disseminates knowledge, what tools it uses, how Wikipedia editors decide which pages they will create or edit, and what is the hierarchy of users within that community. Wikipedia as an encyclopedia includes subjects ranging from mathematics and biology to sports, culture, and the arts. Even though all guidelines and hierarchical structures are common for all its subjects, there are particular modifications and rules for each subject. Each content category constitutes a small, consolidated community within the broader community of Wikipedia.

In this chapter, my analysis will focus on history as a content subject category of Wikipedia, but at the same time, I will explore the broader system of Wikipedia to examine the relation between Wikipedia's world and the production of historical knowledge within the Wikipedia community. The chapter aims to show how Wikipedia allows editors to produce historical knowledge, what tools Wikipedia provides them, which policies and guidelines it includes, and how it manages to motivate Wikipedia users to actively engage with its contents.

More specifically, I will firstly examine the historical context in which Wikipedia was founded and the major technological and epistemological influences that shape its identity. Secondly, I will analyze the policies, guidelines, and rules of Wikipedia and explore how they determine the production of historical knowledge. Wikipedia is not an empty box; instead, it provides both editors and users with a framework of interaction for its contents and behavior within the community. The public agency of Wikipedia users is determined by a set of rules established by the Wikimedia Foundation, the organization that funds Wikipedia and other related projects.<sup>1</sup> These rules allow specific types of engagement with history and, thus, define the production of historical knowledge. At the same time, the policies of Wikipedia reveal how the online encyclopedia has perceived his-

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<sup>1</sup> See "Wikimedia Foundation," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia\\_Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia_Foundation)

tory in the last twenty years of its existence. Thirdly, I will investigate the hierarchy that exists within the Wikipedia community and show how that hierarchy affects users' engagement with history. Lastly, I will examine history as a content category and the related WikiProjects that Wikipedia users interested in history have created. My main argument here is that a community-authored set of guidelines and practices enables and encourages the active agency of Wikipedia users within the Wikipedia community. However, these policies create a multilayered system of bureaucracy and surveillance that controls users' behaviors within the community, checks the quality of its contents, and supervises the editors' role in the production of historical knowledge.

## The historical context of Wikipedia

Wikipedia itself has constructed its own history by creating a page about its relationship with other epistemological and technological developments. In that way, Wikipedia connects itself with different encyclopedic traditions and the broader history of knowledge and technology. According to the page, "History of Wikipedia," Wikipedia claims to have its roots in the Libraries of Alexandria and Pergamum, but its function is based on the printed encyclopedia of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, and other eighteenth-century French encyclopedists.<sup>2</sup> As the historian Peter Burke has argued, *Encyclopédie* and other eighteenth-century encyclopedias signified a broader reform in the organization of knowledge itself, which became systematic and based on "research" and "improvement".<sup>3</sup> In these encyclopedias, knowledge became secular and covered topics from agriculture to education.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, even though Diderot and d'Alembert argued that there are several possible systems of knowledge and thus challenged the model of the tree, which was the dominant system of knowledge organization in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they organized the knowledge of the *Encyclopédie* by using a diagram of a tree.<sup>5</sup> The tree signified that knowledge has specific roots and a single order.

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<sup>2</sup> "History of Wikipedia," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 16, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Wikipedia#Background](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Wikipedia#Background)

<sup>3</sup> Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge*, 254–5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Ahnert, Sébastien E. Ahnert, Catherine Nicole Coleman, and Scott B. Weingart, *The Network Turn. Changing Perspectives in the Humanities* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 30.

Wikipedia also clarifies that its influences are not limited to the encyclopedists of the eighteenth century but are also connected to several personalities of the twentieth century, who were devoted to compiling the world's knowledge in a single location.<sup>6</sup> Wikipedia refers to Paul Otlet, a Belgian information activist, who challenged the tree as a model for knowledge organization and argued that knowledge is a network, an interconnected web.<sup>7</sup> Thus, knowledge does not have a specific root but is interconnected.<sup>8</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, Otlet created the Universal Decimal Classification Scheme to show the "multidimensionality of knowledge relationships" that the tree system could not present.<sup>9</sup> Otlet also wrote several books; in one of them, the *Traité de documentation* published in 1934, he developed the idea of using automated machinery to build a more useful encyclopedia, and in 1910 he created the institution of Mundaneum to present new methods on how to collect and organize the world's knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Paul Otlet was one of the first figures who developed the idea that technology can produce, collect, and disseminate knowledge on an international scale.<sup>11</sup> This idea was based on the available technologies of his time, such as loose-leaf binders, index cards, and microphotography.<sup>12</sup>

Wikipedia also mentions two other personalities, H. G. Wells and Vannevar Bush, whom Wikipedia considers as its main ancestors.<sup>13</sup> Both figures are important not only for how Wikipedia presents itself, but also for how Wikipedia connects itself with the broader history of computing. Firstly, H. G. Wells was a British socialist, novelist, and science writer influenced by Paul Otlet's idea that knowledge can be classified flexibly and in multiple dimensions.<sup>14</sup> Wells did not agree with the narrow specialization of human knowledge and worked toward the creation of a World Encyclopedia, similar to what Diderot had accomplished in the eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup> For Wells, the World Encyclopedia should take the form of a network of people as a "World Brain".<sup>16</sup> He started to develop his ideas about the concept of a

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<sup>6</sup> "History of Wikipedia".

<sup>7</sup> Ahnert, et al., *The Network Turn*, 32.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Reagle, *Good Faith Collaboration*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>13</sup> "History of Wikipedia".

<sup>14</sup> Martin Campbell-Kelly and William Aspray, *Computer: A History of the Information Machine* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2004), 256; Ahnert, et al., *The Network Turn*, 33.

<sup>15</sup> Campbell-Kelly and Aspray, *Computer*, 256–7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 257.

machine-assisted encyclopedia in his book *World Brain* (1938).<sup>17</sup> Both Otlet and Wells focused on the technologies of their time and developed an international vision for knowledge.<sup>18</sup> They expressed the idea of a universal encyclopedia based on technology and large scale collaboration.<sup>19</sup> However, as the communication scholar Joseph Reagle has argued, this vision could not be fully accomplished with the available technology in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup>

Vannevar Bush was also an influential figure for the development of Wikipedia. As the historians Martin Campbell-Kelly and William Aspray outline, in the postwar United States, H. G. Wells first met Bush, a scientist and inventor, who had developed an analog computer and had become chief scientific adviser to the president and head of the Office of Scientific Research and Development.<sup>21</sup> During the 1940s, Bush was a prominent figure. He worked at MIT as an engineer and had an important influence on the government.<sup>22</sup> His greatest achievement was putting together the OSRD's army of scientists and university research laboratories, which offered the computational power required to win the war.<sup>23</sup> As the historian of technology Margaret O'Mara tells us, the Stanford engineer Frederick Emmons Terman was a Ph.D. student of Vannevar Bush at MIT and then became a faculty member at Stanford University.<sup>24</sup> Terman became Dean at Stanford and soon transformed Stanford into a high-tech university, which ultimately contributed to the economic development of the West.<sup>25</sup> Bush envisaged a personal information machine, a proto-hypertext device that he called the memex.<sup>26</sup> This machine could not only contain a lot of information but also make use of it. He defined the memex as "a device in which an individual stores all his books, records, and communications, and which is mechanized so that it may be consulted with exceeding speed and flexibility".<sup>27</sup> However, the existing technologies of the period did not yet allow for the creation of such a network of computers.<sup>28</sup>

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17 "History of Wikipedia".

18 Reagle, *Good Faith Collaboration*, 24.

19 Ibid., 26.

20 Ibid., 27.

21 Campbell-Kelly, *Computer: A History of the Information Machine*, 257.

22 Margaret O'Mara, *The Code: Silicon Valley and the Remaking of America* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), 20.

23 Ibid., 21.

24 Ibid., 21.

25 Ibid., 27–8.

26 Campbell-Kelly, *Computer: A History of the Information Machine*, 258.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 259.

The other major influence on Wikipedia came from Ted Nelson, an American pioneer of information technology, philosopher, and sociologist, who introduced the concepts of hypertext and hypermedia through the Xanadu project, which appeared in 1960.<sup>29</sup> The Xanadu project was influenced by Bush's memex, allowing users to create a document and make it available to others for editing.<sup>30</sup> Instead of several copies, users could make several edits on a single document and then store it. In addition, the Xanadu project allowed users to not only create links between various documents but to link whatever they wanted.<sup>31</sup> In the 1990s, however, the emergence of the Web led to a declining interest in the Xanadu project, as the Web became the dominant networked system.<sup>32</sup>

In the 1990s, the Internet had become a public communication tool and embraced several opportunities for information gathering, social interaction, entertainment, and self-expression.<sup>33</sup> The Internet had moved from military to civilian control and made the network more accessible to the broader public.<sup>34</sup> During that time, people continued talking about the creation of a free and universal Internet encyclopedia. The major projects of that decade were the Interpedia of Rick Gates, which appeared as an idea in 1993, and the GNUPedia of Richard Stallman, which appeared in 2000.<sup>35</sup> In the 1990s, more and more universities and companies started using emails and Usenet, so the idea of Interpedia was based on these developments.<sup>36</sup> However, the project was never completed, as its members were not very active in mailing and Usenet groups.<sup>37</sup> The project managed to introduce the idea that anyone can create articles and a decentralized system can check the quality of these articles.<sup>38</sup> This system will not accept or reject an article but will place a label upon it denoting whether or not the article is good. For Joseph Reagle, this project also introduced the notion that the overall editing process should be based on "good faith" collaboration, which Wikipedia will seek to integrate later.<sup>39</sup>

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29 Ibid.

30 Reagle, *Good Faith Collaboration*, 27; Belinda Barnet, *Memory Machines. The Evolution of Hypertext* (London, New York, Delhi: Anthem Press, 2013), 84–5.

31 Barnet, *Memory Machines*, 85.

32 Reagle, *Good Faith Collaboration*, 28.

33 Abbate, *Inventing the Internet*, 181.

34 Ibid.

35 Roy Rosenzweig, *Clio Wired: The Future of the Past in the Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 119.

36 Reagle, *Good Faith Collaboration*, 33.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 34.

39 Ibid.

The other influential project in terms of Wikipedia was Richard Stallman's GNUPedia. Stallman was an important pioneer in the development of free and open-source software and a leading figure in the Free Software Movement.<sup>40</sup> In the 1970s, Stallman was a programmer at the Artificial Intelligence Lab at MIT and a prominent member of the then hacker culture, who left MIT and decided to create an entire operating system (OS) that would not follow the concept of closed software.<sup>41</sup> He also established a nonprofit company, the Free Software Foundation (FSF) to supervise this movement and create copyright licenses.<sup>42</sup> Other programmers followed that logic and started the Open Source Initiative (OSI).<sup>43</sup> Both FSF and OSI argued that the commodification of software reduced the liberties of the individuals who use it.<sup>44</sup> The free and open-source software (FOSS) created several new products, such as the Open Humanities Press, the Bentham Open project, Open Medicine, Open Courseware Consortium, Open Everything movement, etc.<sup>45</sup>

As previously mentioned, Stallman, who had envisioned the creation of an online encyclopedia, was part of the Free Software movement. The Free Software movement was based on the 1960s critique against the industrial-military complex that connected technology with centralization, violence, and hierarchy.<sup>46</sup> That movement promoted the idea that software should be free and should not belong to corporations and viewed the Internet as an open space for discussion and communication.<sup>47</sup> According to the GNU operating system website, "the free software movement campaigns to win for the users of computing the freedom that comes from free software. Free software puts its users in control of their own computing. Nonfree software puts its users under the power of the software's developer".<sup>48</sup> As it also states, "free software means the users have the freedom to run, copy, distribute, study, change and improve the software".<sup>49</sup> Influenced by the developments in free and open-source software, Stallman pro-

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<sup>40</sup> Rosenzweig, *Clio Wired*, 119.

<sup>41</sup> Tkacz, *Wikipedia and the Politics of Openness*, 22.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 25–7.

<sup>46</sup> O'Mara, *The Code*, 120–6; Thomas P. Hughes, *American Genesis. A Century of Invention and Technological Enthusiasm 1870–1970* (New York: Viking Penguin Books, 1989), 11.

<sup>47</sup> For a broader analysis of Free Software, see Christopher M. Kelty, *Two Bits. The Cultural Significance of Free Software* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> "What is free software?" *GNU Operating System*, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.gnu.org/philosophy/free-sw.en.html>

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

posed GNUPedia in 2000 and it then appeared in 2001. According to Stallman's plan, each article should be written by a single author like on Interpedia.<sup>50</sup> He envisioned a decentralized system of knowledge without any central authority.<sup>51</sup> However, Stallman's vision remained very much in the proposal stage and the project was never fully realized.<sup>52</sup>

While Stallman was planning the creation of GNUPedia, Jimmy Wales was working on the creation of an online encyclopedia that would follow the structures of past encyclopedias, mainly the Encyclopedia Britannica.<sup>53</sup> The name of the encyclopedia that Jimmy Wales created was Nupedia and went online in September 2000.<sup>54</sup> However, Wales soon realized that the process of creating and editing articles on Nupedia demanded a lot of time, as each topic had to be studied professionally, so each article had to be sent to experts for review.<sup>55</sup> Wales has explained that the whole process "felt like homework".<sup>56</sup> During the first months of Nupedia, from September 2000 to the end of that year, there were only twenty-one articles online. Wales also hired Larry Sanger, who had finished his Ph.D. in Philosophy at Ohio State University and was actively participating in online mailing lists and Usenet discussion groups about the philosopher Ayn Rand and objectivism.<sup>57</sup> Sanger became the first paid editor in chief.<sup>58</sup>

Both Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger, the two founders of Wikipedia, were also involved in the hacker culture of the early 1990s. In his childhood, Jimmy Wales played Dungeons & Dragons, a popular fantasy game of that period.<sup>59</sup> In the 1980s, a computer network, named Multi-User Dungeon (MUD) was created and allowed users not only to play games but also to create virtual fantasy worlds.<sup>60</sup> Wales became an active player of MUDs at Alabama during the 1980s and started to explore the opportunities of networked computers. He also participated in several online discussion forums.<sup>61</sup> In a similar context, Larry Sanger, as

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<sup>50</sup> Reagle, *Good Faith Collaboration*, 37.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>53</sup> Salor, *Sum of all Knowledge*, 93.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Rosenzweig, *Clio Wired*, 119.

<sup>56</sup> Stacy Schiff, "Know it all: Can Wikipedia Conquer Expertise," *The New Yorker*, July 31, 2006, accessed December 4, 2019, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/07/31/know-it-all>

<sup>57</sup> Rosenzweig, *Clio Wired*, 119.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>59</sup> Marshall Poe, "The Hive," *The Atlantic*, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/09/the-hive/305118/>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

he has admitted, when he was young, also played computer games and coded an adventure game in BASIC, the first popular programming language.<sup>62</sup> Combining his interests in epistemology and programming, he created a mailing list, the Association for Systematic Philosophy, in which users could discuss philosophy and express their opinions on different philosophical issues.<sup>63</sup>

After the creation of Nupedia, Jimmy Wales and his colleagues became aware of the success of open-source software, so they decided to change the structure and the model of Nupedia and create an encyclopedia based on the tools of sharing and openness. In January 2001, Jimmy Wales learned about a website called WikiWikiWeb, which allowed “anyone to edit any page at any time,” as Andrew Lih explains, while no special software was needed and no log-in or password was required, and the changes on each page were saved immediately.<sup>64</sup> The WikiWikiWeb software was developed by the programmer Ward Cunningham in the 1990s and allowed anyone to create and edit a Web page.<sup>65</sup>

By mid-January 2001, Sanger and Wales had followed that model and changed the encyclopedia’s name to Wikipedia. From a free and online encyclopedia of experts, Wikipedia transformed into an encyclopedia where “anyone could edit any page at any time”.<sup>66</sup> Soon, Wikipedia managed to surpass Nupedia and create a new community of people, who actively engaged with its contents. Wales also created a discussion list for Wikipedia’s users to enhance the improvement of the project.<sup>67</sup> In late January, Wikipedia managed to have 17 articles, in late February it had 150 articles, in March 572, in April 835, in May 1,300, in June 1,700, in July 2,400, and in August, 3,700.<sup>68</sup> At the end of 2001, Wikipedia had 15,000 articles and 350 Wikipedia editors.<sup>69</sup> In late 2001, while a significant economic decline was taking place across the dot-com industry, Sanger was unable to receive his salary, so he continued working voluntarily on the project, but in March 2002 he officially resigned.<sup>70</sup> When Sanger stopped working on Wikipedia, he started making some

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Schiff, “Know it all”; Lih, *The Wikipedia Revolution*, 44, 61.

<sup>65</sup> Rosenzweig, *Clio Wired*, 120.

<sup>66</sup> Lih, *The Wikipedia Revolution*, 14.

<sup>67</sup> Poe, “The Hive”.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Lih, *The Wikipedia Revolution*, 174–5.

claims about the encyclopedia's hostility toward experts and its problems with regard to accuracy.<sup>71</sup>

So why did Wikipedia become a successful free and online encyclopedia while all the previous efforts failed? Joseph Reagle offers an answer to that question. According to his analysis, Wikipedia was the project that managed to bring together all the ideas related to universal knowledge production, access to knowledge, and collaboration through its wiki technology.<sup>72</sup> The wiki was the most significant factor that propelled Wikipedia forward in comparison to previous technological and epistemological efforts. The wiki gave people the opportunity to edit the Web and offered tools for communication, documentation, contribution, reversion, and discussion.<sup>73</sup> In 2005, Jimmy Wales gave a talk about the emergence of Wikipedia and explained the basic logic behind the online encyclopedia.<sup>74</sup> He argued that the major technological feature of Wikipedia is the wiki technology, which gives power to anyone who wants to create content.<sup>75</sup>

As shown above, Wikipedia has managed to combine a series of older epistemological and technological developments and create a digital and public space that enables users to contribute to the production of (historical) knowledge. Wikipedia's influences, the history that presents itself, its relation to important figures in the context of the history of knowledge and computing, make it clear that Wikipedia incorporates an encyclopedic tradition and technological mechanisms, aiming to empower the public and make its users active agents in the compilation of human knowledge. However, before Wikipedia, most of these general concepts and ideas had either remained unrealized or had failed to take shape in any single concrete project that would attract long-term public interest. By borrowing ideas and innovations from the past and by taking advantage of contemporary technologies, Wikipedia managed to make users active participants in the collection, production, and dissemination of human knowledge. However, these technological features were not the only characteristics that made Wikipedia a digital public space, where a high number of people will be able to co-exist effectively and produce historical knowledge efficiently.

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<sup>71</sup> Rosenzweig, *Clio Wired*, 121. See also Larry Sanger's user profile on Wikipedia, in which he also explains his involvement: "User:Larry Sanger," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Larry\\_Sanger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Larry_Sanger)

<sup>72</sup> Reagle, *Good Faith Collaboration*, 42. Reagle clarifies that wiki technology was one of the important factors that made Wikipedia successful. Other factors were the NPOV policy, "culture of collaboration," "good faith social norms," and the role of the "benevolent dictator".

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>74</sup> Jimmy Wales, "The Birth of Wikipedia," *TED*, accessed December 10, 2020, [https://www.ted.com/talks/jimmy\\_wales\\_the\\_birth\\_of\\_wikipedia#t-176024](https://www.ted.com/talks/jimmy_wales_the_birth_of_wikipedia#t-176024)

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

## Organizing the chaos: Policies, guidelines, and rules on content and conduct

In 2003, Jimmy Wales created the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation aiming to supervise Wikipedia, which had grown significantly during that time, and to appoint the appropriate staff to run the online encyclopedia and other projects, such as the Wiktionary, and organize annual fundraising efforts.<sup>76</sup> Wales transferred all the rights of Wikipedia to the Wikimedia Foundation and created a board of trustees for the administration of the foundation.<sup>77</sup>

Since the creation of Wikipedia in 2001, there were few rules that determined both the production of Wikipedia's contents and the interaction between involved users.<sup>78</sup> However, the establishment of the Wikimedia Foundation gave a more formal organizing structure to Wikipedia, which expanded its rules and methods of knowledge production.<sup>79</sup> Wikipedia's structure includes policies and guidelines that focus on the content of Wikipedia and the users' conduct within the Wikipedia community. In this way, Wikipedia creates a framework of interaction for its users to better control users' behaviors within the Wikipedia community, check the quality of its contents, and, even more importantly, supervise the editors' role in the production of historical knowledge.

As Wikipedia itself clarifies, its policies and guidelines are developed by the Wikipedia community and reflect the consensus of the community.<sup>80</sup> As Phoebe Ayers has explained, the most experienced users of the community are those who determine the policies and guidelines to an important extent.<sup>81</sup> The policies and guidelines of Wikipedia have changed over time, as they respond to the needs and problems that Wikipedia faces. Unfortunately, there are no studies on how the Wikipedia community has developed its policies and guidelines since its creation in 2001. Nevertheless, as we can see in the works that have examined Wikipedia in the last two decades, there are some basic policies and guidelines, despite not having changed significantly over time, that define the creation of content and Wikipedians' behaviors. Those policies will be the subject of this chapter.

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<sup>76</sup> "Wikimedia Foundation"; Salor, *Sum of all Knowledge*, 98.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. See also "Board of Trustees," *Wikipedia*, accessed December 4, 2019, [https://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Board\\_of\\_Trustees](https://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Board_of_Trustees)

<sup>78</sup> Lih, *The Wikipedia Revolution*, 112–13.

<sup>79</sup> Salor, *Sum of all Knowledge*, 99.

<sup>80</sup> "Wikipedia: Policies and guidelines," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 3, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia: Policies\\_and\\_guidelines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia: Policies_and_guidelines)

<sup>81</sup> Phoebe Ayers, "Wikipedia and Libraries," in *Wikipedia* @20.

Wikipedia policies, guidelines, and rules appear on several of its pages and shape Wikipedia's system. Even though Wikipedia remains a chaotic digital space and it is almost impossible to analyze all its rules and policies, here I try to investigate those that Wikipedia considers as the most significant and those which are related to historical knowledge production. All the pages described below are interconnected, as each page includes hyperlinks, which serve as references to other pages and, in that way, provide more explanations on how Wikipedia works. There is not one singular page that contains all the guidelines and rules pertaining to Wikipedia. Instead, there is a network of policies, which appear on several pages and are interconnected through hyperlinks, so the user can jump from one page to the other and explore the universe of Wikipedia. Lastly, all the analyzed guidelines and policies refer to the English Wikipedia and cannot be applied to other Wikipedia editions.<sup>82</sup>

Wikipedia has three fundamental policies, the “neutral point of view” (NPOV), “verifiability” (V), and “no original research” (NOR).<sup>83</sup> These three policies constitute the three “core content policies” of Wikipedia, which “determine the type and quality of material that is acceptable in Wikipedia articles”.<sup>84</sup> In other words, these three content policies shape the character of knowledge – in this case study, historical knowledge – that Wikipedia collects, produces, and disseminates.

The policy of “neutral point of view” (NPOV) means that the content of Wikipedia articles should be neutral, fair, and without bias.<sup>85</sup> Wikipedia editors should not be biased, they should “describe disputes, but not engaged in them [sic]”.<sup>86</sup> As Jimmy Wales has explained, the policy of neutrality is determinant for the quality of Wikipedia, it was established at the very outset of Wikipedia and is non-negotiable.<sup>87</sup> NPOV does not prevent editors from writing their own opinions about the related topics; instead, it forces them to present a more balanced narrative. As Wales has mentioned, Wikipedia does not emphasize truth, as truth itself is subjective.<sup>88</sup> Wikipedia emphasizes neutrality, which is a “social concept of co-operation”.<sup>89</sup> As such, the goal of neutrality is to show what different editors have written about a topic and, in this way, encourage them to work together.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> “Wikipedia: Core content policies”.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> “Wikipedia:Neutral point of view,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 3, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral\\_point\\_of\\_view](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view)

<sup>87</sup> Wales, “The Birth of Wikipedia”.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

The principle of NPOV does not exist only on Wikipedia, it is also connected to other epistemological fields. If we think about historical scholarship in Wikipedia's terms, we notice that the notion of objectivity has been strongly connected to the study of history. As the philosopher of history Herman Paul suggests, objectivity in the discipline of history is connected with the detachment of historians' feelings, opinions, and biases, which have traditionally been regarded as a virtue for historians and as "a sine qua non for epistemic success".<sup>91</sup> In a more extensive analysis of objectivity, the historians Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza argue that, since the professionalization of historical studies in the late nineteenth century, the concept of objectivity has become strongly connected to history and the work of historians.<sup>92</sup> The modern conception of objectivity means the use of footnotes, bibliographies, and different types of primary sources.<sup>93</sup> However, in the mid-twentieth century, several historians challenged the idea of objectivity, as being something impossible to attain, and replaced it with the concept of "impartiality".<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, many historians argued that objectivity is crucial for the work of the historian, even though it is difficult to achieve.<sup>95</sup> Wikipedia values objectivity in terms of producing balanced and non-biased historical narratives based on "verifiable sources". This feature is not radically different from how scholars tend to approach historical knowledge, even if it is more like a nineteenth-century characteristic of historical studies.

The content policy of "verifiability" refers to the sources that Wikipedia editors should use to find information and produce knowledge.<sup>96</sup> That policy is important for the perception of history within the Wikipedia community. As the historian Despoina Valatsou writes, the concept of "verifiability" replaces the con-

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<sup>91</sup> Herman Paul, "What is a scholarly persona? Ten theses on virtues, skills, and desires," *History and Theory* 53 (2014): 361.

<sup>92</sup> Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza, "Introduction: The Cultural History of Historical Thought," in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, ed. Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 809. Kramer and Maza also mention that the relation between objectivity and history is even older and comes before the modern era.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 9. On the relation between history and "objectivity," see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge University Press, 1988); Otis Graham, et al., "'The Ideal of Objectivity' and the Profession of History," *Public Historian* 13 (1991): 9–23. For the broader concept of "objectivity" and its transformations over time, see Loraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> "Wikipedia: Verifiability," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 3, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Verifiability>

cept of truth on Wikipedia.<sup>97</sup> In other words, for Wikipedia, the most significant thing is not to produce “true” knowledge, as truth can be a contested notion.<sup>98</sup> The historian Marshall Poe provides a thought-provoking definition of the truth on Wikipedia:

The power of the community to decide, of course, asks us to reexamine what we mean when we say that something is ‘true.’ We tend to think of truth as something that resides in the world. [ . . . ] But Wikipedia suggests a different theory of truth. Just think about the way we learn what words mean. Generally speaking, we do so by listening to other people (our parents, first). Since we want to communicate with them (after all, they feed us), we use the words in the same way they do. Wikipedia says judgments of truth and falsehood work the same way. The community decides that two plus two equals four the same way it decides what an apple is: by consensus. Yes, that means that if the community changes its minds and decides that two plus two equals five, then two plus two does equal five. The community isn’t likely to do such an absurd or useless thing, but it has the ability.<sup>99</sup>

Even though the description by Marshall Poe is rather overstated, he adequately presents the important role of the Wikipedia community in the production of historical knowledge on Wikipedia. The policy of “verifiability” shows that Wikipedia does not care about what is “true” according to editors’ views or their research but what is “verifiable”.<sup>100</sup> Wikipedia has created a separate page about this topic, named “Verifiability, not truth,” in which it argues that “verifiability” is the minimum requirement for Wikipedia to accept material.<sup>101</sup> It is interesting that the concept of “verifiability” has also been associated with historical scholarship since the modern era. Historians have used the “verifiability” of sources as “evidence to support historical claims about what happened in the past”.<sup>102</sup> In the nineteenth century, historians managed to separate themselves from novelists, poets, artists, and philosophers.<sup>103</sup> Of course, historians do not only aim to find “verifiable sources” but also to “tell a good story,” in other words to produce an accurate historical narrative.<sup>104</sup>

The third content policy is “no original research,” which makes clear that Wikipedia articles should not be the results of original research, in the way that aca-

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<sup>97</sup> Valatsou, *Ανάδυση νέων μνημονικών τόπων στο διαδίκτυο*, 105.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Poe, “The Hive,” cited in Valatsou, *Ανάδυση νέων μνημονικών τόπων στο διαδίκτυο*, 105–6.

<sup>100</sup> “*Wikipedia:Verifiability, not truth*,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Verifiability,\\_not\\_truth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Verifiability,_not_truth)

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Kramer and Maza, “Introduction: The Cultural History of Historical Thought,” 8.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

demic articles are, but they should be based on secondary published sources.<sup>105</sup> According to this policy, Wikipedia articles should be based on reliable – published – sources, namely, secondary sources, which are known and widely accepted.<sup>106</sup> This kind of research is completely antithetical to academic historical research, which is based on primary sources and tends to place value on original research.<sup>107</sup> It is consistent, though, with traditional encyclopedias and other tertiary sources.

To clarify its content policies, Wikipedia explains what sources are considered “reliable, published sources”.<sup>108</sup> According to Wikipedia, the definition of reliability is complex and depends on three factors: the work itself, the author of the work, and the publisher of the work.<sup>109</sup> The reliability of a source also depends on the broader context in which this source will be used, and the age of the source(s), especially for scientific and academic topics because older sources can be regarded as outdated and inaccurate.<sup>110</sup> However, Wikipedia warns editors to be careful when they use very new sources and to ensure they are able to discern the historical differences between the present and the past and not to make anachronistic arguments.<sup>111</sup> This is particularly interesting in relation to historical topics because, as Wikipedia itself states, editors should be aware of the problem of “recentism” and provide a broader, long-term historical view.<sup>112</sup>

In addition, Wikipedia cites a catalogue of the sources that it considers as reliable materials in each subject area.<sup>113</sup> It suggests different sources for mathematics, physics, arts, sports, geography, and history. For the users interested in creating articles about history, Wikipedia urges users to use mainly published scholarly sources from academic presses. These sources include both books and journal articles, some of which might be available online and to which the users can have easy access.<sup>114</sup> They can also use specialized encyclopedias on historical

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<sup>105</sup> “Wikipedia: Core content policies”.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. For more information, see “Wikipedia:No original research,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:No\\_original\\_research](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:No_original_research)

<sup>107</sup> Salor, *Sum of all Knowledge*, 101.

<sup>108</sup> “Wikipedia: Reliable sources,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable\\_sources](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources)

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> “Wikipedia: Recentism,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 30, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Recentism>

<sup>113</sup> “Wikipedia: Reliable source examples,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable\\_source\\_examples#History](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_source_examples#History)

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

topics, which are edited by experts.<sup>115</sup> However, Wikipedia warns that users should use “memoirs and oral histories that specialists consult with caution, for they are filled with stories that people wish to remember – and usually recall without going back to the original documentation”.<sup>116</sup> This is an interesting point, as it shows that Wikipedia adapts its guidelines and policies to the specific subject that it aims to cover. It does not regard the same types of sources as reliable for all its subjects. Additionally, the use of oral material for articles about history reveals Wikipedia’s broader desire to include content related to marginal communities and individuals who might not otherwise be covered by printed materials. Wikipedia seems to value people’s memories, at least when it comes to its guidelines and on the subject of history, even though several studies have pointed out the absence of oral histories within Wikipedia’s contents.<sup>117</sup>

On the other hand, Wikipedia supports the idea that its users should not get information about history from novels, films, TV shows, or tour guides at various sites, as “they are full of rumor and gossip and false or exaggerated tales and tend to present rosy-colored histories in which the well-known names are portrayed heroically”.<sup>118</sup> Popular forms of history are not regarded as accurate historical knowledge by Wikipedia. Therefore, even though Wikipedia is a digital encyclopedia, its reliability and more specifically the reliability of the historical articles on Wikipedia is mainly based on printed academic sources that may be (or may not be) available online. Even though Wikipedia is characterized by its public and digital nature, it prioritizes printed and academic sources. In this way, history on Wikipedia is effectively crowdsourced by its editors’ abilities to synthesize established academic knowledge.

Apart from the main content policies of Wikipedia, there are also broader principles that guide user engagement with Wikipedia. On his profile page, Jimmy Wales has listed the main principles of Wikipedia. The Wikipedia community created the “Statement of Principles” in October 2001.<sup>119</sup> Wikipedia has updated these principles since then but there are only minor differences between the 2001 version

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> About the absence of oral histories on Wikipedia, see Matthew A. Vetter, “Possible Enlightenments: Wikipedia’s Encyclopedic Promise and Epistemological Failure,” in *Wikipedia @20*; Jake Orlowitz, “How Wikipedia Drove Professors Crazy, Made Me Sane, and Almost Saved the Internet,” in *Wikipedia @20*.

<sup>118</sup> “Wikipedia:Reliable source examples”.

<sup>119</sup> For the 2001 version of the statement of principles, see “User:Jimbo Wales/Statement of principles,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 11, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?oldid=409315229>

and the current one.<sup>120</sup> Specifically, Wales refers to Wikipedia's openness by arguing that "Wikipedia's success to date is entirely a function of our open community," namely that anyone can take part in the Wikipedia community and contribute to its contents.<sup>121</sup> He adds that Wikipedia will continue to exist and grow if the users respect the NPOV policy and promote a "culture of thoughtful, diplomatic honesty".<sup>122</sup> He encourages new users to take part and write, and makes clear that there should be no organization, elitism, or any hierarchy within Wikipedia, which prevents new users from participating in the community.<sup>123</sup> This does not necessarily mean that Wikipedia should be free from vandalism or other forms of misbehavior.<sup>124</sup> Instead, it means that more experienced editors should not impose obstacles for new users and, instead, create a friendly environment for them. Wales also writes that any user should feel free to intervene in the editing of Wikipedia articles and check the edits that have already taken place. He also reiterates that the collaborative spirit of Wikipedia is to have good quality content. As he mentions, "any changes to the software must be gradual and reversible," which means that any editing on Wikipedia should be the result of "community consensus".<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, users should respect the non-licensed form of Wikipedia's contents and their open character. Users should understand that "Wikipedia is an encyclopedia," so it should cover more and more topics.<sup>126</sup> Thus, editors should work on more and more subject areas and keep the existing ones constantly updated. Users, who are dissatisfied and have complaints, should share their problems with other users but in a "constructive way".<sup>127</sup> They should engage in discussions about the related topics to develop and improve the coverage of the topic. The last principle refers to the way users should behave within the Wikipedia community. As Wales writes, users should behave with "honesty and politeness," and should not "misrepresent" other users' arguments.<sup>128</sup> In this way, Wikipedia editors can reach a "community consensus," do not commit vandalism, and continue to improve Wikipedia's contents.

Wikipedia has established several other principles that supplement each other. One of them is the "trifecta," as Wikipedia calls it, that is the three main

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<sup>120</sup> "User:Jimbo Wales/Statement of principles," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 11, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Jimbo\\_Wales/Statement\\_of\\_principles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Jimbo_Wales/Statement_of_principles)

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

guiding principles of the encyclopedia.<sup>129</sup> In 2005, Wikipedia established the principles of the “trifecta” to determine users’ engagement with Wikipedia’s contents.<sup>130</sup> The “trifecta” warns editors to “remain neutral,” “don’t be a jerk,” and to “ignore all rules” (IAR).<sup>131</sup> The first principle refers to the policy of neutrality that is analyzed above. The second principle shows the polite and respectful way Wikipedia editors should behave within the Wikipedia community, while they create and edit articles. The third principle is the most crucial here, as it reveals how Wikipedia perceives editors’ agency. It introduces the logic of “ignore all rules,” which means that users should prioritize the editing and improvement of Wikipedia, even if it goes against Wikipedia’s own rules. The principle of IAR was one of the first Wikipedia policies and aimed to encourage users to participate in the Wikipedia community.<sup>132</sup> Specifically, Larry Sanger, the co-founder of Wikipedia, proposed the policy of IAR as he wanted to make clear that the rules of Wikipedia should not prevent users from taking part in the editing of Wikipedia articles.<sup>133</sup> According to Wikipedia, the original formulation of the IAR policy was: “If rules make you nervous and depressed, and not desirous of participation in the Wiki, then ignore them and go about your business”.<sup>134</sup> Wikipedia cites the following example to explain what this policy means in practice (Figure 2).

IAR is significant in terms of how users should contribute to the production of knowledge on Wikipedia. It activates users’ agency and subjectivities and does not oblige them to follow all the established rules and policies. Instead, Wikipedia encourages users to improve the encyclopedia, even if they do not follow all rules.<sup>135</sup>

Since 2005, the Wikipedia community has updated the “trifecta” to a more contemporary version based around the concept of the “five pillars,” which summarize the fundamental principles of Wikipedia. According to those principles, Wikipedia constitutes an encyclopedia which means that it “is not a soapbox, an advertising platform, a vanity press, an experiment in anarchy or democracy, an indiscriminate collection of information, nor a web directory. It is not a dictio-

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129 “Wikipedia:Trifecta,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 12, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Trifecta>

130 “Wikipedia:Trifecta: Revision history,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 12, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Trifecta&action=history&dir=prev>

131 “Wikipedia:Trifecta”.

132 Lih, *The Wikipedia Revolution*, 112.

133 *Ibid.*

134 “Ignore all rules,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 17, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignore\\_all\\_rules#:~:text=Meaning,-A%20flowchart%20relating&text=%22Ignore%20all%20rules%22%20refers%20to,it%20augments%20Wikipedia's%20bureaucratic%20structure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignore_all_rules#:~:text=Meaning,-A%20flowchart%20relating&text=%22Ignore%20all%20rules%22%20refers%20to,it%20augments%20Wikipedia's%20bureaucratic%20structure).

135 See “Wikipedia:Here to build an encyclopedia,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 17, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Here\\_to\\_build\\_an\\_Encyclopedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Here_to_build_an_Encyclopedia)

*Suppose you have an idea...*

- Are you sure that your idea is a good one by common sense and that it improves the encyclopedia?
- **No: DON'T DO IT**
- **Yes:**
  - Does it break the rules?
  - **No: DO IT**
  - **Yes:**
    - Is that because the rules are wrong?
    - **No: Ignore the rules and DO IT**
    - **Yes: Change the rules and DO IT**

**Figure 2:** Screenshot of “What ‘Ignore all rules’ means,” accessed November 17, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:What\\_%22Ignore\\_all\\_rules%22\\_means&oldid=851388560](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:What_%22Ignore_all_rules%22_means&oldid=851388560).

nary, a newspaper, or a collection of source documents, although some of its Wikimedia projects are”.<sup>136</sup> Secondly, “Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view”.<sup>137</sup> In other words, Wikipedia consists of articles that “document and explain major points of view, giving due weight with respect to their performance in an impartial zone”.<sup>138</sup> This can be achieved if “articles strive for verifiable accuracy, citing reliable, authoritative sources, especially when the project is controversial or is on living persons”.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, “editors’ personal experiences, interpretations or opinions do not belong” to Wikipedia.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, Wikipedia contents are free and “anyone can use, edit and distribute”. This means that “no editor owns an article and any contributions can and will be mercilessly edited and redistributed”.<sup>141</sup> Nevertheless, they have to “respect copyright laws, and never plagiarize from sources”.<sup>142</sup> They should also behave with “respect and civility”.<sup>143</sup> The last principle is that “Wikipedia has no firm rules,” which means that “Wikipedia has policies and guidelines, but they are not carved in stone”.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> “Wikipedia:Five Pillars,” *Wikipedia*, accessed January 20, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five\\_pillars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five_pillars)

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

Consequently, “their content and interpretation can evolve over time”.<sup>145</sup> The last pillar is the most important, as it consolidates users’ active role within Wikipedia. The pillar of “no firm rules” is strongly connected to the policy of “ignore all rules” that I analyzed above. Both policies encourage users to care more about the broader spirit of editing and improving the online encyclopedia, and do not just focus on all the rules. The users should understand the broader logic of Wikipedia and how it works, not just try to follow all its rules. They should focus on the principles and not on the guidelines. As Wikipedia mentions, the policies can change over time, so users should prioritize editing.

In this way, Wikipedia promotes the engagement of users with Wikipedia, even if the users do not follow all rules and guidelines. As Wikipedia clarifies, “the rules are principles, not laws”.<sup>146</sup> In other words, “policies and guidelines exist only as rough approximations of their underlying principles”.<sup>147</sup> The rules are just signs of broader principles that Wikipedia editors should consider while they edit Wikipedia pages. Wikipedia editors should interpret the policies of Wikipedia according to the broader framework to which they aim to contribute. Therefore, policies and guidelines “must be understood in context, using some sense and discretion”.<sup>148</sup> The words “some sense” and “discretion” include hyperlinks that further explain what these terms mean. Both terms make clear that editors should not follow every single rule but “use common sense” and, in some cases, they should even ignore rules to improve Wikipedia.<sup>149</sup> Therefore, editors should find a balance between the principles and the improvement of Wikipedia.<sup>150</sup> They should be able to understand the broader context of any principle and make the appropriate contributions.<sup>151</sup> Each instance of editing has its own context, so it should be understood separately.<sup>152</sup>

Also, every contribution should be the result of a broader community consensus.<sup>153</sup> Thus, Wikipedia enables users’ agency and prioritizes constructive editing.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> “Wikipedia:The rules are principles,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 16, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:The\\_rules\\_are\\_principles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:The_rules_are_principles)

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid; “Wikipedia:Ignore all rules,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 16, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Ignore\\_all\\_rules](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Ignore_all_rules)

<sup>150</sup> “Wikipedia:The rules are principles”.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

As Jimmy Wales clarifies: “Wikipedia is first and foremost an effort to create and distribute a free encyclopedia of the highest possible quality to every single person on the planet in their own language. Asking whether the community comes before or after this goal is really asking the wrong question: the entire purpose of the community is precisely this goal”.<sup>154</sup>

To enable the agency of the community in the editing of articles and to give users space to discuss the process of editing, Wikipedia provides the “talk pages,” a feature that is available on every article. This gives editors the opportunity to actively engage with any of Wikipedia’s contents, discuss issues of editing, style, prose, and organization, and pose broader questions related to the topic they have chosen to edit. More specifically, every Wikipedia article includes its own “talk page,” which provides space for editors to further discuss the topic of the article.<sup>155</sup> Wikipedia points out that users should use the “talk pages” to “communicate, stay on topic, be positive, stay objective, deal with facts, share materials, discuss edits, make proposals”.<sup>156</sup> As Wikipedia clarifies, “talk pages” should not be used as spaces for the expression of personal opinions on a topic.<sup>157</sup> However, as I will show in the next chapters, editors do use that space for personal reflection, even if that reflection is often geared towards the improvement of the relevant article. These “talk pages” can be very long, so they are typically archived when they exceed seventy-five kilobytes.<sup>158</sup> Thus, the reader can find older discussions by searching within the archive of any given “talk page”. The “talk pages” constitute one of the most significant features of Wikipedia’s public character and reveal the process of how an article has been formed, which debates took place between the editors involved, what differences they may have had, which issues might have appeared, and how these were resolved.

Apart from its main policies and guidelines, Wikipedia has also established a set of rules that not only determine how Wikipedia editors should create and edit Wikipedia articles, but also how they should interact with other editors. According to these rules, Wikipedia editors should “be civil,” they should not “make negative remarks about other editors as people,” even if they disagree with them in

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> “Wikipedia:Talk page guidelines,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Talk\\_page\\_guidelines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Talk_page_guidelines)

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> “Help:Archiving a talk page,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Archiving\\_a\\_talk\\_page](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Archiving_a_talk_page)

their discussions.<sup>159</sup> The editors should “assume good faith,” which means that they should consider other editors as rational beings that aim to improve Wikipedia.<sup>160</sup> Also, Wikipedia editors should “discuss contentious changes on a talk page,” so when they edit other user’s contributions, they should mention the reasons for their changes.<sup>161</sup> As Wikipedia clarifies, editors should “undo others’ edits with care”.<sup>162</sup> Moreover, editors should understand why their “article or edit was deleted”.<sup>163</sup> There are several reasons why editors can delete an article. For example, if the article does not follow the guidelines of Wikipedia or it is not based on reliable sources.<sup>164</sup> Lastly, editors should use the talk pages of Wikipedia articles to “resolve disputes”.<sup>165</sup> They should express their disagreements, but they should not be aggressive.<sup>166</sup>

On the same page, Wikipedia also defines how editors should collaborate to create and edit articles. Editors should provide summaries of their contributions to explain what they want to change and why.<sup>167</sup> If more clarifications are necessary, they should make discussion posts on the talk page.<sup>168</sup> Their discussion posts should be signed with their username and a timestamp.<sup>169</sup> Editors should also preview the changes they have made in order to be on track with how they have changed the article.<sup>170</sup> If the editors are not sure about some issues, such as neutrality or reliability of sources, they can use noticeboards to ask for help from the administrators.<sup>171</sup> In that way, editors can get feedback about their contributions. Wikipedia encourages editors to join in with the Wikipedia community because, in doing so, they would be able to see the community discussions, the tasks, and the projects that should be covered.<sup>172</sup> Lastly, editors should ask for help if they are not sure about any potential issues. They can do that in several ways, such as posting on talk pages, using the help desk, the help chat, or visiting Wikipedia

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<sup>159</sup> “Wikipedia:Simplified ruleset,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 12, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Simplified\\_ruleset](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Simplified_ruleset)

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

pages that offer guidance and assistance to editors.<sup>173</sup> The overall aim of all these guidelines is to make editors improve Wikipedia's contents by following the broader established principles that I analyzed above, and by reaching a community consensus.

Regarding how users can reach a consensus, Wikipedia suggests a specific method of engagement with its contents.<sup>174</sup> Apart from diplomacy, good faith, and respectful behavior, editors should follow the logic of the “BOLD, revert, discuss cycle (BRD)”.<sup>175</sup> “BOLD” editing means that even if editors are not sure about their contributions to Wikipedia and have not yet received any feedback from other editors, they should still make the edit on Wikipedia.<sup>176</sup> Editors should “revert” an edit if they think that the edit does not improve Wikipedia. However, BRD does not encourage reverting.<sup>177</sup> Editors should also “discuss” a contribution and explain the reason why they made that specific contribution.<sup>178</sup> The last approach is “cycle,” which means that if an editor has realized other editors’ concerns about his contribution, they can make a new edit.<sup>179</sup> All those steps can lead to a quick community consensus and produce knowledge that is of good quality.

In case the editors do not reach a community consensus, Wikipedia has established a set of rules, the “three revert-rule” (3RR), which helps to resolve this situation.<sup>180</sup> This rule is applied when an editor is involved in a dispute between editors, in an “edit war,” as Wikipedia calls it. “Edit warring” is when an editor “repeatedly restores their preferred version”.<sup>181</sup> Editors engaged with “edit warring” can be blocked or even banned from Wikipedia community.<sup>182</sup> The 3RR rule claims that an editor cannot make more than three reverts, either on the same or different material, on a single page within a 24-hour period.<sup>183</sup> In other words, performing a fourth revert within one day signifies “edit warring”.<sup>184</sup> Wikipedia

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> On consensus, see “Wikipedia:Consensus,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Consensus>

<sup>175</sup> “Wikipedia:BOLD, revert, discuss cycle,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 17, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:BOLD,\\_revert,\\_discuss\\_cycle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:BOLD,_revert,_discuss_cycle)

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> “Wikipedia:Edit warring,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 18, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Edit\\_warring](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Edit_warring)

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

points out that there are exemptions from that rule, such as reverting their own actions, vandalism or clear violations of policies.<sup>185</sup> In that way, Wikipedia tries to prevent disputes between editors and promote only constructive debates and discussions that aim to improve and further develop Wikipedia's contents.

Overall, as shown above, the rules that Wikipedia has established in the last twenty years of its operation can be categorized into policies, guidelines, rules on content, and rules on conduct.<sup>186</sup> Policies represent Wikipedia's broader principles, and guidelines signify the application of these policies. The rules on content explain how Wikipedia articles should be written and the rules on conduct refer to how editors should behave within the Wikipedia community and interact with other Wikipedia editors. Even though Wikipedia has established a solid community of users, whose actions are determined by rules, it gives space and freedom to users to become active participants and work on the production of knowledge. As Wales has pointed out, all Wikipedia's rules and methods are open-ended; as they are just on wiki pages, there is no mechanism of enforcement.<sup>187</sup> The main purpose of Wikipedia is not to force its users to follow all guidelines and policies but to create pages, edit them constantly, and thus, improve the online encyclopedia. The policies exist to create a self-regulated community and not restrict users' activities. As Wikipedia puts it, policies do not "police content quality," rather they "provide the framework and a safe environment for an anarchic wiki community to function".<sup>188</sup>

## Hierarchy and engagement within the Wikipedia community

Wikipedia has been celebrated as a digital platform on which "anyone can edit any page at any time".<sup>189</sup> However, not all users have the same power to determine how they will edit a page, what they will delete, revert, or change. There is an important hierarchy within the Wikipedia community, which categorizes users and assigns them specific roles.<sup>190</sup> At the same time, this notion of hierarchy not only

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> "Help:Introduction to policies and guidelines/4," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 18, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Introduction\\_to\\_policies\\_and\\_guidelines/4](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Introduction_to_policies_and_guidelines/4)

<sup>187</sup> Wales, "The Birth of Wikipedia".

<sup>188</sup> "Wikipedia:The role of policies in collaborative anarchy," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 19, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:The\\_role\\_of\\_policies\\_in\\_collaborative\\_anarchy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:The_role_of_policies_in_collaborative_anarchy)

<sup>189</sup> Lih, *The Wikipedia Revolution*, 14.

<sup>190</sup> The issue of hierarchy is complicated, and some scholars have highlighted the existence of hierarchy within the Wikipedia community: see, for example, Tkacz, *Wikipedia and the Politics of Openness*; Koerner, "Wikipedia Has a Bias Problem". Other scholars have celebrated the lack of

refers to the users themselves but also to Wikipedia articles. There are articles that Wikipedia classifies as vital or featured and are discerned from other articles because of their contents' quality and good coverage of a topic in sufficient detail.

Wikipedia includes a page that explains how its administration works.<sup>191</sup> As I mentioned above, Wikipedia belongs to the Wikimedia Foundation (WMF) and is one of several wiki-based projects that WMF operates.<sup>192</sup> The WMF is governed by a board of trustees, which is not involved in the creation or application of policies on Wikipedia.<sup>193</sup> Wikipedia constitutes a self-regulated community with its own members and structures. Wikipedia users, who contribute to its contents, can be categorized into editors, stewards, the arbitration committee, bureaucrats, and administrators (Figure 3).<sup>194</sup>

Human administration
Wikimedia Board of Trustees
Wikipedians
Wikimedia staff
Stewards
Arbitration Committee
Bureaucrats
Administrators

**Figure 3:** Screenshot of Wikipedia administration, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedians>.

Editors are also called Wikipedians and are volunteers who write and edit Wikipedia pages.<sup>195</sup> Some of them can be registered users and include personal information on their profiles, and others can be unregistered.<sup>196</sup> In contrast to readers, editors actively engage with Wikipedia's contents. Even though all editors are theoretically equal, some editors have some "extra privileges," which are determined

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hierarchy within Wikipedia: see Yochai Benkler, "From Utopia to Practice and Back," in *Wikipedia* @20.

<sup>191</sup> "Wikipedia:Administration," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Administration>

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.* See "Board of Trustees," *Wikimedia Foundation*, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://wikimediafoundation.org/role/board/>

<sup>194</sup> "Wikipedia:Administration".

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* For more details, see "Wikipedia:Wikipedians," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedians>

<sup>196</sup> "Wikipedia:Administration".

by the age of the account and the number of edits.<sup>197</sup> Wikipedia provides those privileges automatically or upon request.<sup>198</sup> For example, a user becomes an “auto-confirmed” user when their account is older than four days. On the other hand, an editor has the right to revert changes, remove a page, edit a template, and also to check users’ IPs – though only after sending a request to an administrator, bureaucrat, or the arbitration committee.<sup>199</sup> As Wikipedia states, the English Wikipedia has 40,310,425 registered users and only 129,681 of them contribute frequently.<sup>200</sup> There is also an unknown number of unregistered users, though Wikipedia does encourage users to register.<sup>201</sup> Registered users have some benefits, they can create pages, not only edit but also upload media, and can do so without making their IPs visible to the public.<sup>202</sup>

Stewards are volunteer editors who have full access to the wiki interface on all Wikimedia wikis.<sup>203</sup> Stewards can change the permissions that are provided to different user groups.<sup>204</sup> They have “check user rights” and “oversight rights,” which means that they can check users’ IPs and can delete information from any page, edit, or entry.<sup>205</sup> Their tasks include “technical implementation of community consensus, dealing with emergencies, and intervening against cross-wiki vandalism”.<sup>206</sup> Stewards are elected by the global Wikimedia community annually.<sup>207</sup> In addition to stewards, there is the arbitration committee (ArbCom or Arbs), who are volun-

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. For some of the editors’ rights, see “Wikipedia:Rollback,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Rollback>; “Wikipedia:Page mover,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 19, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Page\\_mover](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Page_mover); “Wikipedia:Template editor,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 19, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Template\\_editor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Template_editor)

<sup>200</sup> “Wikipedia:Administration”.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. For more details, see “Stewards,” *Wikimedia Meta-Wiki*, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Stewards>

<sup>204</sup> “Wikipedia:Administration”. About these permissions, see “Manual:User rights,” *MediaWiki*, accessed November 19, 2020, [https://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/Manual:User\\_rights](https://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/Manual:User_rights)

<sup>205</sup> “Wikipedia:Administration”. For more details, see “Wikipedia:CheckUser,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:CheckUser>; “Wikipedia:Oversight,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Oversight>

<sup>206</sup> “Wikipedia:Administration”.

<sup>207</sup> See “Stewards/Election,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Stewards/Elections>

teer editors assigned to find solutions to unresolved “conduct disputes”.<sup>208</sup> Arbitrators can impose sanctions to resolve conduct disputes. They are elected annually, and the first committee was appointed by Jimmy Wales in 2003.<sup>209</sup>

The fourth category of Wikipedia editors is the bureaucrats, who are also volunteer editors.<sup>210</sup> Bureaucrats have the abilities to “promote other users to administrator or bureaucrat status,” “remove the admin status of other users,” or “grant and revoke an account’s bot status”.<sup>211</sup> However, in contrast to stewards, bureaucrats do not have “oversight” and “check user rights”.<sup>212</sup> As Wikipedia states the total number of bureaucrats on the English Wikipedia is nineteen.<sup>213</sup> Administrators (admins or sysops) are editors who have access to specific technical functions, such as protecting and deleting pages, and blocking other editors.<sup>214</sup> Admins are not elected but appointed after a review process by bureaucrats.<sup>215</sup> The current English version of Wikipedia has 1,123 administrators.<sup>216</sup> Admins should use their privileges in disputes with other editors. The privileges of admins can be removed only by Jimmy Wales and the arbitration committee, and the removal should be authorized by bureaucrats or stewards.<sup>217</sup>

In the last years, because of the claims that Wikipedia’s contents are biased and that there is an important gender gap within the Wikipedia community, Wikipedia has added two more categories of editors: Wikipedians in residence, and educators and students of the Wikipedia education program.<sup>218</sup> Wikipedians in residence are volunteer editors who have been placed into educational or cultural institutions by

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<sup>208</sup> “Wikipedia:Administration”. For more details on the arbitration committee, see “Wikipedia: Arbitration Committee,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 19, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Arbitration\\_Committee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Arbitration_Committee)

<sup>209</sup> “Wikipedia:Administration”.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. For more details on bureaucrats, see “Wikipedia:Bureaucrats,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Bureaucrats>

<sup>211</sup> “Wikipedia:Administration”.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. For more details on administrators, see “Wikipedia:Administrators,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Administrators>

<sup>215</sup> “Wikipedia:Administration”.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Regarding the contents bias and gender gap within Wikipedia community, see Ford and Wajcman, “Anyone can edit, not everyone does: Wikipedia’s infrastructure and the gender gap,” 511–27; Koerner, “Wikipedia Has a Bias Problem”; Evans, et al., “What We Talk About When We Talk About Community”; Massa and Zelenkauskaitė, “Gender Gap in Wikipedia Editing: A Cross-Language Comparison,” 85–96; Bourdeloie and Vicente, “Contributing to Wikipedia: A Question of Gender,” 147–60.

Wikipedia, such as art galleries, archives, libraries, museums, or universities, and try to improve Wikipedia's coverage of related topics.<sup>219</sup> Those editors should use the resources and material offered by their involved institution and work on the improvement of related Wikipedia pages.<sup>220</sup> They should also communicate their work to the public and organize workshops and training for other editors.<sup>221</sup> Some of the institutions that have hosted Wikipedians in residence are the National Library of Wales, the British Museum, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the British Library, the Smithsonian Institution, the Royal Society of Chemistry, UC Berkeley, Columbia University, the University of Toronto, the National Library of Norway, the Federal Archives of Switzerland, and smaller venues like the Derby Museum and Art Gallery and The New Art Gallery Walsall, and many others.<sup>222</sup>

The last category of editors relates to educators and students, who are part of the Education Program.<sup>223</sup> Since its foundation, educational institutions, schools, colleges, and universities, perceived Wikipedia as a threat to education.<sup>224</sup> In 2010, as a response to all those claims, Wikipedia established the Education Program, which aimed to bring educators and students closer to Wikipedia.<sup>225</sup> At the same time, several teachers and university professors started to use Wikipedia in course assignments to make students more familiar with the encyclopedia, help understand the process of knowledge production, and how editing on Wikipedia works.<sup>226</sup> Therefore, the Education Program constituted an institutional effort by Wikipedia to connect Wikipedia to education and change its perception as a

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<sup>219</sup> “Wikipedia:Administration”.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. For more information on Wikipedians in residence, see “Wikipedian in residence,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedian\\_in\\_residence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedian_in_residence) For the broader collaboration between Wikipedia and institutions, see “Wikipedia:GLAM,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:GLAM>

<sup>221</sup> “Wikipedia:Administration”.

<sup>222</sup> “Wikipedian in residence”. For a list of the collaboration projects, see “Wikipedia:GLAM/Projects,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:GLAM/Projects>

<sup>223</sup> “Wikipedia:Administration”.

<sup>224</sup> On Wikipedia as a threat to education, see Chandler and Gregory, “Sleeping with the Enemy: Wikipedia in the College Classroom”.

<sup>225</sup> “Wikipedia Education Program,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2020, [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia\\_Education\\_Program](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_Education_Program)

<sup>226</sup> On the use of Wikipedia in education, see Robert E. Cummings and Matt Barton, *Wiki Writing: Collaborative Learning in the College Classroom* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Robert E. Cummings, “The First Twenty Years of Teaching with Wikipedia: From Faculty Enemy to Faculty Enabler,” in *Wikipedia @20*; Benjamin Mako Hill and Aaron Shaw, “The

threat or enemy to students and educators.<sup>227</sup> The members of that program are assigned to fulfill course-related assignments and, in that way, to improve Wikipedia's topics and promote gender diversity.<sup>228</sup>

All those hierarchical categories refer to the registered Wikipedia editors and do not include the unregistered users, who are also able to edit Wikipedia pages. The unregistered users are users who have not logged in and are named by their IP addresses and not with their usernames.<sup>229</sup> Those users can edit all pages except for the “protected” pages; they can create “talk pages,” but they cannot upload media, such as files and images.<sup>230</sup> It is interesting that Wikipedia has created a page with the name “IPs are human too,” which clarifies that unregistered users should not be discouraged from participating in Wikipedia nor be perceived as inferior users.<sup>231</sup> Wikipedia points out that most edits by unregistered users do not lead to vandalism. To deal with common misconceptions about unregistered users, Wikipedia argues that unregistered users have the same rights as registered users.<sup>232</sup>

Apart from the users' hierarchy within the Wikipedia community, Wikipedia has created a hierarchical system for the assessment of its articles, which motivates users to make more and better contributions. Wikipedia has established a system of content assessment, which evaluates how good the quality of an article is.<sup>233</sup> That system is not only based on the quality but also on the language and the layout of the article.<sup>234</sup> Wikipedia divides its articles into different categories by using a grading scheme (Figure 4). The most complete articles are those that have been marked with the “A-class”. Below that grade category, there are the following categories: “Good articles/GA,” articles marked as “B-class,” “C-class,” “Start-class,” “Stub-class,” and “List-class”. “Lists” and “Stubs” are the most incom-

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Most Important Laboratory for Social Scientific and Computing Research in History,” in *Wikipedia @20*.

227 “Wikipedia Education Program”.

228 *Ibid.*

229 “Wikipedia:User access levels,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:User\\_access\\_levels#Unregistered\\_\(IP\\_or\\_not\\_logged\\_in\)\\_users](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:User_access_levels#Unregistered_(IP_or_not_logged_in)_users).

230 *Ibid.* On these “protected” pages, see “Wikipedia:Protection policy,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Protection\\_policy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Protection_policy)

231 “Wikipedia:IPs are human too,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:IPs\\_are\\_human\\_too](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:IPs_are_human_too)

232 *Ibid.*

233 “Wikipedia:Content assessment,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Content\\_assessment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Content_assessment)

234 *Ibid.*



**Figure 4:** Screenshot of grade categories, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Content\\_assessment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Content_assessment).

plete articles, which need further editing.<sup>235</sup> Articles that have reached “A-class” can be improved even more and become “Featured articles/FA,” and more developed lists can become “Featured lists/FL”.<sup>236</sup>

The articles that belong to the “List-class,” do not offer adequate coverage of a topic, they just contain links to other related articles.<sup>237</sup> This is the category with the most incomplete articles that need the attention of editors. Articles that are a little bit better than “Lists” articles but just include a brief description of the topic are the “Stub-class” articles. They are short articles that need a lot of editing to become meaningful articles.<sup>238</sup> As Wikipedia states, they can be well-written, but they can also have important content issues.<sup>239</sup> They do not offer an extensive narrative but a brief definition of the topic. In a better position, there are articles marked as “Start-class,” which are more developed than the “List-class” articles, but they are still incomplete.<sup>240</sup> Usually, their sources are not reliable, or their

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. Wikipedia has a specific page which includes all Wikipedia “List-class” articles. See “Category:List-Class articles,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:List-Class\\_articles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:List-Class_articles)

<sup>238</sup> “Wikipedia:Content assessment”. For the list of “Stub-class” articles, see “Category:Stub-Class articles,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Stub-Class\\_articles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Stub-Class_articles)

<sup>239</sup> “Wikipedia:Content assessment”.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. For the list of “Start-class” articles, see “Category:Start-Class articles,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Start-Class\\_articles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Start-Class_articles)

prose is not encyclopedic.<sup>241</sup> Those articles need improvement in content and organization.<sup>242</sup>

The articles become more important when they reach a “C-class” grade. Those articles offer significant coverage of the related subject but still miss content or materials.<sup>243</sup> These articles need more editing to improve their clarity, balance, or prose, or to face problems, such as content bias, or original research.<sup>244</sup> “B-class” articles are almost complete, they do not have serious problems, but they need a little bit more editing to become “good articles”.<sup>245</sup> Those articles should deal with few problems in terms of content and structure.<sup>246</sup> “Good articles” are characterized by Wikipedia as “well written, verifiable, with no original research, broad in coverage, neutral, stable, and illustrated”.<sup>247</sup> These articles just need some help from subject and style experts to become even more professional.<sup>248</sup> The most complete articles are in the “A-class” category. They are well-written, well-organized, and well-illustrated articles with clear structure and no copyright problems.<sup>249</sup> The only issues are a few style problems, which should be ironed out to allow articles to become “featured article” candidates.<sup>250</sup> The next category is the “featured list” articles, which contains articles with extensive and good quality lists of items. They are characterized by good prose, engaging lead, comprehensiveness, structure, style, and stability.<sup>251</sup> The last category includes the “featured articles,” which fulfill all the professional standards required by Wikipedia.<sup>252</sup> They are “well-written, comprehensive, well-researched, neutral, sta-

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241 “Wikipedia:Content assessment”.

242 Ibid. For the list of “C-class” articles, see “Category:C-Class articles,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:C-Class\\_articles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:C-Class_articles)

243 “Wikipedia:Content assessment”.

244 Ibid.

245 Ibid. For the list of “B-class” articles, see “Category:B-Class articles,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:B-Class\\_articles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:B-Class_articles)

246 “Wikipedia:Content assessment”.

247 Ibid. For the list of “Good articles,” see “Category:GA-Class articles,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:GA-Class\\_articles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:GA-Class_articles)

248 “Wikipedia:Content assessment”.

249 Ibid. For the list of “A-Class articles,” see “Category:A-Class articles,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:A-Class\\_articles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:A-Class_articles)

250 “Wikipedia:Content assessment”.

251 Ibid. For the list of “FL-Class articles,” see “Category:FL-Class articles,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:FL-Class\\_articles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:FL-Class_articles)

252 “Wikipedia:Content assessment”.

ble” articles with a “lead section, appropriate structure, consistent citations,” they also contain media, such as images and videos, and are of an adequate length.<sup>253</sup>

The question is how the assessment of Wikipedia contents takes place and who is responsible for that process. The evaluation of content quality is a task that the members of WikiProjects have taken over, such as those involved with WikiProject History, WikiProject Chemistry, or WikiProject Technology. The members of those projects are responsible for checking and evaluating the related articles by tagging their talk pages.<sup>254</sup> A bot then collects all the tags and determines the average rating of the article.<sup>255</sup> If several WikiProjects are involved in an article, the bot keeps the best rating.<sup>256</sup> However, for the assessment of a “Good article” or a “Featured article,” independent editors are responsible and not WikiProjects.<sup>257</sup> More specifically, there is a single editor who reviews potential “Good articles,” while a panel is responsible for reviewing potential “Featured articles”.<sup>258</sup>

The process of assessment is always a subjective process, and it varies according to the involved WikiProject(s).<sup>259</sup> Wikipedia has established a list of criteria for each ranking of articles; however, each member of a WikiProject can prioritize different criteria and will have different opinions. Therefore, each WikiProject tries to reach a consensus.<sup>260</sup> Some WikiProjects have also created their own systems of assessment based upon their own logic and levels of ranking. Wikipedia allows WikiProjects to differentiate themselves from the established rules, policies, and regulations, if, by doing so, they will engage more with the editing of Wikipedia’s contents.<sup>261</sup> At the same time, the system of assessment determines the quality of each article and, thus, assigns users a topic they need to develop more, improve its coverage, its structure, or its prose. Therefore, Wikipedia creates a self-regulated community, which is based on the users’ self-engagement with the online encyclopedia.

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid. For the list of “FA-class articles,” see “Category:FA-Class articles,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:FA-Class\\_articles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:FA-Class_articles)

<sup>254</sup> “Wikipedia:Content assessment”.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> For example, see the WikiProject Military history that has its own criteria of assessment: “Wikipedia:WikiProject Military history/Assessment,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 27, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Military\\_history/Assessment#Quality\\_scale](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Military_history/Assessment#Quality_scale)

In addition to that system of content assessment, Wikipedia has created a rewards system that this time does not focus on the articles but on broader users' contributions to the online encyclopedia. That system works with "barnstars," which are digital awards attributed to an editor by another editor. To give that award, an editor should attach the image of "barnstar" to the other editor's talk page and explain why this award is given. There are several standardized types of "barnstars" provided by Wikipedia, but the users can also create new "barnstars" if the existing ones do not necessarily reflect what the users wish to applaud.

There are three categories of "barnstars": general, topical, and Wikipedia-space "barnstars".<sup>262</sup> The "general barnstars" are those awards that do not focus on a specific topic but on broader themes, such as "The Original Barnstar," "The Editor's Barnstar," "The Tireless Contributor Barnstar," "The Photographer's Barnstar," "The Anti-Vandalism Barnstar," etc.<sup>263</sup> The "topical barnstars" refer to a specific topic or subject of interest.<sup>264</sup> Some of these include: "The Society Barnstar," "The Science Barnstar," "The LGBT Barnstar," "The Human Rights Barnstar," "The Women's History Barnstar," "The BLM Barnstar," and several others.<sup>265</sup> The "Wikipedia-space barnstars" are given to editors for their contributions that have taken place behind the scenes, such as "The Copyright Barnstar," "The Template Barnstar," "Excellent User Barnstar," "The Main Page Barnstar," "The Reviewer's Barnstar," etc.<sup>266</sup> All those awards create a hierarchical environment within Wikipedia and, most importantly, motivate editors to make more and better contributions to Wikipedia.

As shown above, Wikipedia has established two different systems of assessment, one focused on the content itself and another focused on the users' engagement with the encyclopedia. Both systems of assessment contribute to the enhancement of users' agency within the Wikipedia community. This means that Wikipedia has created a digital space, which allows for, unconsciously or not, the development of subjectivities and personal reflections, even if its main protocol promotes the concept of neutrality in the production of knowledge. Wikipedia does not aim to impose its rules on the users but to provide them with power to actively engage with their content by creating, writing, editing, and improving Wikipedia articles. However, the agency of users does not stand alone, but it goes through the system of massive bureaucracy that Wikipedia has established.

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<sup>262</sup> "Wikipedia:Barnstars," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Barnstars>

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

## History as a content category and WikiProjects related to history

Wikipedia as an encyclopedia has developed multiple systems for the categorization of its contents. Most users use search engines, such as Google, to look for a specific page and then they visit the page through Google.<sup>267</sup> However, Wikipedia has also classified its contents into several portals and categories, such as “Culture and the arts,” “Geography and places,” “Health and Fitness,” “History and events,” etc.<sup>268</sup> By clicking on the history portal, the users see the following definition of what history is according to Wikipedia:

History (derived from Ancient Greek *ἱστορία* (*historía*) “inquiry; knowledge acquired by investigation”) is the systematic study and documentation of the human past.

The period of events before the invention of writing systems is considered prehistory. “History” is an umbrella term comprising past events as well as the memory, discovery, collection, organization, presentation, and interpretation of these events. Historians seek knowledge of the past using historical sources such as written documents, oral accounts, art and material artifacts, and ecological markers. History is incomplete and still has debatable mysteries.<sup>269</sup>

That definition presents history as “the systematic study and documentation of the human past” and connects it to multiple historical approaches and sources. For Wikipedia, it is not only what is written about the past that is important, but also people’s memories, which reveal information about past events as people remember them.<sup>270</sup> If a user clicks on the full article, the Wikipedia page about history will appear, which contains more details about history as a subject of study.<sup>271</sup> The article provides a more extensive definition of what history is, refers to the development of historiography, different historical methods, areas of study, important historians, and the teaching of history.<sup>272</sup> The page is well-written and well-researched, as it covers several aspects of historical study. It is interesting that Wikipedia does not offer a dry overview of what history is but rather a theoretical essay about how historians approach the past and how this approach has changed

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<sup>267</sup> Brian Keegan, “An Encyclopedia with Breaking News,” in *Wikipedia @20*.

<sup>268</sup> See “Wikipedia:Contents/Portals,” *Wikipedia*, accessed September 27, 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Contents/Portals>

<sup>269</sup> “Portal:History,” *Wikipedia*, accessed September 27, 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:History>

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> For the full article of history, see “History,” *Wikipedia*, accessed September 27, 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History>

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

since the professionalization of history in the nineteenth century. The page includes references to important historians and theorists of history, such as Georges Lefebvre, Fernand Braudel, Eric Hobsbawm, E. P. Thompson, Michael-Rolph Trouillot, but also contemporary historians, such as Constantin Fasolt, William Cronon, Lynn Hunt, and Natalie Zemon Davis.<sup>273</sup>

Moreover, the page mentions different historiographical approaches that historians have followed since the early ancient period and includes more extensive details on how these methods have been developed over time.<sup>274</sup> There is also information on the different ways historians categorize history, namely according to chronological period, geographical region, and thematic area.<sup>275</sup> In addition, the page offers a historiographical overview of each historical discipline, such as social history, cultural history, economic history, gender history, public history, LGBTQ+ history, intellectual history, etc.<sup>276</sup>

The article relating to history, like all Wikipedia articles, has a “talk page,” which contains all the discussions of the editors about the topic, the questions that have been raised, the debates that have taken place, and the various opinions of the editors on what to add or remove from the page. On the “talk page” of history, users discuss what history is, if history is a social science or part of the humanities, what history does and what sources historians use, how historical writing has changed over time, how they can divide history, differences between history and story, what makes someone a historian, if there is only academic history, if amateurs interested in history can also be historians, etc.<sup>277</sup> All that discussion aims to improve the content of the page and provide a more clarified and updated coverage of the topic. Several editors who have contributed significantly to the development of the page claim to have studied history either at an undergraduate or graduate level.<sup>278</sup> However, most involved editors do not have any educational background in history, but they actively participate in the discussions and make their own arguments about history as a discipline.<sup>279</sup> Overall, the discussion is both serious and relevant, and the users are concerned with research

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> See all three archives of the “talk page,” “Talk:History,” *Wikipedia*, accessed September 27, 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:History>

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> For example, this user has studied history and participates in discussions about history: “User:Ishmaelblues,” *Wikipedia*, accessed September 27, 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Ishmaelblues> However, most users have not studied history; they are just interested in history.

questions and historical topics that have been the subject of study by several academic historians and philosophers of history in the last two centuries.

Apart from the definition, in the main history portal there is also a “featured article” column, namely a good quality article on a historical topic, a “featured biography,” and a “featured picture” column, which change content daily.<sup>280</sup> There is also an “On this day” column, in which there are references to historical events that happened on this day in the past, and a “Did you know . . .” column.<sup>281</sup> At the bottom of the same page, there is a column which includes different sub-categories of history. There are classifications of history by ethnic groups, location, period, and topic.<sup>282</sup> There are also history-related lists: historical timelines, outlines of history and events, historians, fields of history, history awards, historical controversies, historiography, oral history, philosophy of history, etc.<sup>283</sup> Each subcategory is in the form of a hyperlink, so by clicking these links the users can explore the Wikipedia articles that are related to history. Another column on the page is the “Things you can do,” which mentions all the tasks that Wikipedia editors should do on articles related to history in order to improve them.<sup>284</sup> Those tasks include the creation of new articles, the improvement of grammar and spelling mistakes on existing articles, the further development of articles listed as “stubs,” the placement of images, or the merging of two pages into a single page.<sup>285</sup>

Furthermore, the page includes a list of “Wikipedian historians,” namely all those users who have studied/study history or/and are interested in history.<sup>286</sup> Wikipedia allows users to define themselves as they wish on their profile pages, where users can include descriptions of their education, occupation, relation to history, etc. By examining the profile pages of those users more closely, we notice that some of the users are educated in history at a university level, and others are just interested in learning and writing about history. On their profile pages, Wikipedia users also define their relation to history. Some of them are editors with degrees in history, a few of them are professors and scholars of history, many users characterize themselves as history enthusiasts, and there are also teachers of history, archivists, and librarians. Wikipedia encourages all those “Wikipedian

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<sup>280</sup> “Portal:History”.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid. For the list of “Wikipedian historians,” see “Wikipedia:Wikipedian historians,” *Wikipedia*, accessed September 27, 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Wikipedian\\_histories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Wikipedian_histories)

historians” to take an active part in the Wikipedia community and to engage with articles related to historical topics.<sup>287</sup> Both professional and amateur historians collaborate to collect, produce, and disseminate historical knowledge.

In this way, Wikipedia does not appear as a single unified community but a broader community that consists of several other smaller communities. It looks like an ocean containing several small islands. There are not only articles related to different subjects, such as history, technology, mathematics, but also several communities of users engaged with those subjects. Wikipedia has named those communities WikiProjects. WikiProjects are “groups of contributors who want to work together as a team to improve Wikipedia”.<sup>288</sup> These groups of users can focus on a specific content topic, a process within the encyclopedia, or a specific task.<sup>289</sup> The WikiProjects take the name of the subject on which they focus. For example, there are WikiProjects such as the WikiProject History, WikiProject Feminism, WikiProject Black Lives Matter, etc.<sup>290</sup> In other words, each WikiProject constitutes a separate community of people, who share common interests and goals, and exist within the Wikipedia community.

The history portal mentions which WikiProjects are related to history.<sup>291</sup> Specifically, it references three main projects: the WikiProject History, the WikiProject Time, and the WikiProject Biography.<sup>292</sup> The WikiProject History is the broadest group and focuses on the improvement of Wikipedia’s contents relating to history.<sup>293</sup> The WikiProject History includes several other WikiProjects that are dedicated to more particular areas of history, such as the WikiProject Ancient Near East, the WikiProject Australian History, WikiProject Dacia, the WikiProject Classical Greece and Rome, the WikiProject Chinese History, the WikiProject European History, the WikiProject Middle Ages, the WikiProject Military History, the WikiProject History of Science, etc.<sup>294</sup>

The WikiProject Time is also connected to history but in broader terms. It aims to better organize articles related to time and supervise how “temporal con-

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287 “Portal:History”.

288 “Wikipedia:WikiProject,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject>

289 *Ibid.*

290 *Ibid.*

291 “Portal:History”.

292 *Ibid.*

293 For the WikiProject History, see “Wikipedia:WikiProject History,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 26, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_History](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_History)

294 “Portal:History”.

cepts” are approached on Wikipedia.<sup>295</sup> The WikiProject Time consists of two other related projects, the WikiProject Days of the Year and the WikiProject Years. The former focuses on how to make all the historical anniversary pages consistent both in style and content and the later aims to improve all year-related pages.<sup>296</sup> The last mentioned project is the WikiProject Biography, which is dedicated to the development of articles related to biographies not just of persons but also of organizations, groups, and associations.<sup>297</sup> The WikiProject Biography is the parental project of the WikiProject Composers, the WikiProject Biography/Politics and Government, the WikiProject Saints, and the WikiProject United States Presidents.<sup>298</sup> All those projects divide history into different smaller groups of editors, who collaborate to accomplish specific tasks and are devoted to particular historical areas. At the same time, these projects do not just aim to improve Wikipedia’s content but also to construct specific policies and guidelines on how to write a historical article on specific thematic areas and provide space for discussion between users interested in common historical topics.<sup>299</sup>

To better understand how WikiProjects work, Wikipedia provides a very intriguing definition. It points out that “a WikiProject is fundamentally a social construct; its success depends on its ability to function as a cohesive group of editors working towards a common goal”.<sup>300</sup> According to that definition, WikiProjects seem to incarnate what Benedict Anderson has called “imagined communities”.<sup>301</sup> These users do not know each other, but they feel part of an “imagined community” of editors. Their interests in specific topics, tasks, or broader processes make them part not only of Wikipedia but of smaller digital “imagined” communities, the WikiProjects. As mass vernacular newspapers made people look beyond their own differences and imagine themselves within the same national community, Wikipedia articles and interests in different subjects allow editors to

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295 “Wikipedia:WikiProject Time,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Time](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Time)

296 See “Wikipedia:WikiProject Days of the Year,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Days\\_of\\_the\\_year](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Days_of_the_year); “Wikipedia:WikiProject Years,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Years](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Years)

297 “Wikipedia:WikiProject Biography,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Biography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Biography)

298 “Portal:History”.

299 For example, see the goals of the WikiProject History, “Wikipedia:WikiProject History”.

300 “Wikipedia:WikiProject Council/Guide,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Council/Guide](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Council/Guide)

301 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2006).

imagine themselves as members of WikiProjects and enable them to develop ties with other Wikipedians.<sup>302</sup>

On the English Wikipedia, there are more than 2,000 WikiProjects and 1,000 of them are controlled by 30–2,000 editors.<sup>303</sup> However, all the collaborators on a project are not involved in the same way: they have different roles, focus on different tasks, and have different experiences. The WikiProjects are not provided by Wikipedia; instead, any group of editors can create a new project at any time.<sup>304</sup> Wikipedia encourages that process and offers guides and instructions on how editors can propose and create a new WikiProject.<sup>305</sup>

The WikiProjects can become semi-active or inactive if the involved editors do not engage with the project any longer or if the project does not live up to their initial expectations.<sup>306</sup> From the WikiProjects related to history, which were mentioned above, the WikiProject History is considered to be semi-active or to work slower than it used to.<sup>307</sup> The WikiProject Middle Ages, the WikiProject Biography/Politics and Government are inactive, while the WikiProject Dacia is completely inactive.<sup>308</sup> All the other projects are active. Some of them are more developed than others; however, all mention on their main page that they are based on the collaboration between Wikipedians and encourage new users to participate in their project. Their pages include tips, suggestions on how the involved members should approach the related articles, specific templates for how to edit existing articles, and open tasks that should be accomplished. They also contain lists with “featured articles,” which work as examples for the creation and development of other related articles. There is a list of the involved members of the project and a discussion section, in which the members of the project can share their worries and problems about editing, find solutions, and decide which articles they should develop further. Lastly, the WikiProjects have assessment tables with their articles graded according to their quality and importance.

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302 “Wikipedia:WikiProject Council/Guide”.

303 “Wikipedia:WikiProject”.

304 *Ibid.*

305 On how editors can propose a new WikiProject see, “Wikipedia: WikiProject Council/Proposals,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Council/Proposals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Council/Proposals)

306 “Wikipedia:WikiProject”.

307 “Wikipedia:WikiProject History”.

308 See “Wikipedia:WikiProject Middle Ages,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Middle\\_Ages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Middle_Ages); “Wikipedia:WikiProject Biography/Politics and Government,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Biography/Politics\\_and\\_government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Biography/Politics_and_government); “Wikipedia:WikiProject Dacia,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Dacia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Dacia)

To facilitate the production of historical knowledge, Wikipedia provides educational resources to Wikipedians. I mentioned above the Wiki Education Program which aims to create partnerships between Wikipedia and educational institutions, such as universities, archives, and libraries.<sup>309</sup> This program belongs to the Wiki Education Project, which was created in 2003 in order to encourage Wikipedia editors to use educational resources, such as an archive or a research collection to improve the contents of Wikipedia.<sup>310</sup> As Ian Ramjohn and LiAnna Davis, both founders of Wiki Education Project, argue, they created that project to face up to the problems of “systematic bias,” “racial realism,” “white pride,” and harassment against women, which were detected within the Wikipedia community.<sup>311</sup> By developing partnerships between its editors and educational institutions, Wikipedia aims to train its editors on how to make better contributions to specific topics and, thus, offer better knowledge to the public. In 2019, 20 percent of all new editors on English Wikipedia came from the Wiki Education Project.<sup>312</sup>

Another resource that Wikipedia has created to enhance the production of knowledge is the Wikipedia Library. This project appeared as a response to the critiques that Wikipedia’s contents are not based on reliable sources and are biased.<sup>313</sup> The Wikipedia Library is a research place for active Wikipedia editors, where they can find reliable sources for their work and use them in their edits.<sup>314</sup> As several academic papers, books, and resources are only accessible to those affiliated with universities or other cultural and educational institutions, Wikipedia provides active editors free access to these resources. In that way, editors can find more and better-quality sources and produce more accurate historical knowledge.

As shown in this chapter, Wikipedia has established itself as an important landmark in the history of knowledge and, even more importantly, has signified a broader epistemological shift from knowledge produced by experts to knowledge produced by amateurs and non-professionals. Its public and digital character has led Wikipedia to set out a consensus-based approach to its policies and guidelines, which determine the production of knowledge and the users’ behavior

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<sup>309</sup> “The Wiki Education Project,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 30, 2020, <https://wikiedu.org/>. For an analysis of the Wiki Education Project, see Ramjohn and Davis, “Equity, Policy, and Newcomers,” in *Wikipedia* @20.

<sup>310</sup> “The Education Project, About Us,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 30, 2020, <https://wikiedu.org/about-us/>

<sup>311</sup> Ramjohn and Davis, “Equity, Policy, and Newcomers”.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>313</sup> Orlowitz, “How Wikipedia Drove Professors Crazy, Made Me Sane, and Almost Saved the Internet”.

<sup>314</sup> “The Wikipedia Library,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 30, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:The\\_Wikipedia\\_Library](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:The_Wikipedia_Library)

within the Wikipedia community. All these policies initially seem to restrict the agency of Wikipedia users and make editors passive receptors of established rules, methods, and guidelines. However, by closely examining the wider Wikipedia system, those policies constitute principles that form a framework of interaction between editors, and between editors and Wikipedia contents. They do not restrict users' agency but enhance the active role of users within the community by making it clear that users should prioritize their own involvement in the encyclopedia and not adhere to the meticulous application of all established rules. Wikipedia promotes creativity and active engagement, not the accomplishment of written tasks.

At the same time, each subject category of Wikipedia constitutes a group of collaborators who are interested in a common topic. The members of these groups focus on a specific subject and participate in discussions about the articles related to that subject; they share their worries and their goals about which articles to create or improve, and what to add or remove in relation to the articles' contents. Each subject also consists of other sub-groups of users, the WikiProjects that focus on even more particular thematic areas. Therefore, Wikipedia allows users to place themselves into groups of collaborators according to what they are interested in, but not necessarily to what they have studied. Professors of history, archivists, and librarians collaborate with history enthusiasts to produce historical knowledge, cover historical topics, create and edit historical articles. Their hierarchical positions on Wikipedia are not based on their degrees or their knowledge about the subject but on their experience and the quality of their contributions on Wikipedia. Even though Wikipedia shares many common epistemological characteristics with historical scholarship, it constitutes a separate world with its own rules, principles, and ways to engage the public to produce historical knowledge.

Overall, my analysis does not imply that Wikipedia should be regarded as a "perfect" community in which anyone can take part and contribute equally to the production of history. There are several studies that have highlighted the various problems Wikipedia has, such as its biased content, the perceived gender gap, its predominantly white and male-centered character, and which have made suggestions to Wikipedia about how to deal with these challenges.<sup>315</sup> In contrast, in this chapter, I have shown how Wikipedia has managed to become a public space that allows people to produce, discuss, and debate history. Of course, the digital set-up of Wikipedia, including its policies, guidelines, rules, and hierarchy, creates a

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<sup>315</sup> See Massa and Zelenkauskaite, "Gender Gap in Wikipedia Editing: A Cross-Language Comparison," 85–96; Bourdeloie and Vicente, "Contributing to Wikipedia: A Question of Gender," 147–60; Vrana, et al., "Towards a Wikipedia For and From Us All"; Evans, et al., "What We Talk About When We Talk About Community".

complicated and multilayered system of bureaucracy and surveillance that defines which ideas and contributions will end up in the main articles. However, the main logic behind Wikipedia, at least on a basic level, is to encourage its users to become active participants in the production of historical knowledge by taking part in projects related to their interests, discussing how history should be represented in the Wikipedia articles, making accurate and reliable contributions, and thus, become experienced users eligible for awards and recognition within the Wikipedia community. The question of how Wikipedia users engage with history, while they try to construct historical knowledge, I will answer in the following chapter.