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Zanotti, Agustín.

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The Trajectory of Ibero-American Wikimedia Chapters: Open Knowledge and Peer Governance*

*Trayectoria de capítulos iberoamericanos de Wikimedia. Conocimiento
abierto y gobernanza de pares*

 Agustín Zanotti**



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** Universidad Nacional de Villa María, Córdoba, Argentina, azanotti@unvm.edu.ar

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Abstract: The Wikimedia movement is a global community of individuals and organizations that contribute to open, collaborative projects such as Wikipedia, Wikimedia Commons, and Wikidata. These projects operate under a non-profit model, led by the Wikimedia Foundation (WMF) and a network of local affiliates. In this context, this paper aims to characterize Ibero-American Wikimedia organizations with the goal of promoting the communities associated with these projects. More specifically, the study focuses on the Wikimedia chapters in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Spain, as well as the Wikimedia user group in Uruguay. Using a quantitative and qualitative approach, data were gathered from various sources, including Wikipedia, Meta-Wiki, Wikimedia statistics, institutional websites, and articles from the Diff blog. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders. The findings indicate that the establishment of chapters and user groups enables local volunteers to create fairly complex organizations with resources, personnel, and action plans. These organizations provide a local and regional identity to the movement while maintaining collaborations among themselves and with the global WMF. Additionally, they build alliances with educational, cultural, governmental, and civil society institutions. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that Wikimedia affiliates have gradually expanded in the region, supporting local editor communities and enhancing the reach, diversity, and quality of project content.

Keywords: digital platform, non-governmental organization, online community, open access, open knowledge.

Resumen: el movimiento Wikimedia constituye una comunidad global de personas y organizaciones que contribuyen con proyectos abiertos y colaborativos como Wikipedia, Wikimedia Commons y Wikidata. Los proyectos son sostenidos bajo un modelo sin fines de lucro, liderado por la Wikimedia Foundation (WMF) y una red de afiliados locales. El objetivo de este artículo fue caracterizar las organizaciones iberoamericanas de Wikimedia, con el fin de promover las comunidades vinculadas a estos proyectos en el ámbito nacional. Entre ellas, se seleccionaron los capítulos de Argentina, Chile, Colombia y España, así como el grupo de usuarios Wikimedistas de Uruguay. La estrategia metodológica combinó un abordaje cuantitativo y cualitativo. Para ello, se relevó información de Wikipedia, Meta-Wiki y Estadísticas de Wikimedia, se revisaron sitios institucionales y artículos de prensa del blog Diff y se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas a referentes clave. Los resultados comparados indicaron que la conformación de capítulos y grupos de usuarios permite a voluntarios locales dotarse de un esquema organizacional más o menos complejo, con recursos, personal y planes de acción. Estos otorgan una impronta local y regional al movimiento, manteniendo asociaciones entre sí y con la WMF global. Además, desarrollan alianzas con instituciones educativas, culturales, gubernamentales y de la sociedad civil. Se concluye que las organizaciones afiliadas a Wikimedia se han desplegado progresivamente en la región y contribuyen a sostener las comunidades de editores locales, apostando con ello a incrementar la cobertura, diversidad y calidad en los contenidos de los proyectos.

Palabras clave: plataforma digital, organización no gubernamental, comunidad en línea, acceso abierto, conocimiento abierto.

INTRODUCTION

The Wikimedia movement is a global community composed of individuals and organizations dedicated to developing open and collaborative projects, including Wikipedia, Wikimedia Commons, and Wikidata¹. Its primary objective is to empower people worldwide by facilitating access to and participation in the creation of free and educational content. Wikipedia, the movement's flagship project, currently hosts over 63 million articles in more than 330 languages, with approximately 200,000 new articles added each month ("Estadísticas de Wikimedia," 2024).

These projects operate under a non-profit model led by the Wikimedia Foundation (WMF) and supported by a network of local affiliates, which include Wikimedia chapters, thematic organizations, and user groups. Wikimedia chapters are independent non-profit entities established to support and promote Wikimedia projects within a specific geographic region, typically at the national level. These chapters use the Wikimedia name for their activities, public outreach, and fundraising efforts. Wikimedia user groups, for their part, are more flexible and informal affiliates, comprising open membership groups with a demonstrated history of project development. Official recognition grants them the right to use Wikimedia trademarks and apply for funding ("Wikimedia Movement Affiliates," 2024).

Despite the existence of certain trends identified in the literature, research on the organizations that constitute the Wikimedia movement in the Global South—particularly in the Ibero-American region—remains limited. In response to this gap, the present study aims to characterize such Wikimedia-affiliated organizations. Specifically, it examines Wikimedia chapters in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Spain, as well as the Wikimedia user group in Uruguay.

The analysis is structured as follows: first, key theoretical perspectives are introduced to contextualize Wikimedia within a complex and dynamic informational ecosystem. Subsequently, the trajectories of the selected affiliates are explored, focusing on their organizational structures, major initiatives, and engagement within the broader Wikimedia network. Particular attention is also given to their collaborations with educational, cultural, governmental, and civil society institutions. Ultimately, the study seeks to examine the governance models that emerge within a commons-based peer production framework, which can be conceptualized as *peer governance*.

¹ As of 2024, the Wikimedia movement encompasses several content projects. These include Wiktionary, an online dictionary and thesaurus; Wikibooks, a collection of open-access books; Wikiquote, a repository of notable quotations; Wikivoyage, a collaborative travel guide; Wikisource, a digital library; Wikimedia Commons, a media repository; Wikispecies, a taxonomic catalog of species; Wikinews, an online news platform; Wikiversity, which facilitates tutorials, courses, and research coordination; Wikidata, a structured knowledge base; and Wikifunctions, a catalog of computational functions ("Anexo:Proyectos Wikimedia," 2024).

Wikimedia and the information ecosystem

Manuel Castells is a key figure in the analysis of the development of information and communication technologies. In his book entitled *La era de la información: economía, sociedad y cultura* [*The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*] (Castells, 1996), he examines the transition to an informational mode of development and its profound impacts on the economy, society, and culture. More recent approaches have distinguished two distinct phases within this evolution. The first, referred to as the *network phase*, extends until the mid-2000s and is characterized by the global popularization of the Internet. The second phase, known as the *platform phase*, begins with the emergence of Web 2.0 and continues to the present (Zukerfeld & Liaudat, 2024).

Wikipedia, launched in 2001, was among the first platforms to enable online participation, interaction, and collaboration. Its foundational principles—providing free access to the sum of human knowledge and allowing anyone to edit—were groundbreaking within the knowledge institutions of the time (Lorente, 2020). Over the years, Wikipedia has been widely recognized as a successful example of commons-based peer production (van Dijck et al., 2018).

At its core, Wikimedia is an online community that operates under collaborative production principles. Like other similar initiatives, it has developed internal hierarchies based on user participation and longevity within the platform (Benkler et al., 2015). Trust and transparency in the processes are essential for maintaining order (Jemielniak, 2014; Reagle Jr., 2010). Despite its digital nature, face-to-face interactions—ranging from informal gatherings to structured projects—also play a crucial role (Schwitter, 2022).

Wikipedia can be understood as an evolving socio-technical system, which combines technological infrastructure with the collaborative efforts of users and editors (Niederer & van Dijck, 2010). In line with Latour (2008), the interplay between human and non-human agents is fundamental to its operation. Content is edited by both registered and anonymous users, as well as by administrators and bots, which perform automated maintenance tasks.

The Wikimedia movement has adopted a model of *peer governance* (Zanotti, 2022). As defined by Bauwens (2005), this approach involves bottom-up participatory decision-making, with no strict hierarchies of command and control (Bruns, 2008). Konieczny (2010) characterizes it as an adhocracy, an organizational structure in which members self-assign tasks.

Financial sustainability was formalized with the establishment of the WMF in 2003. By 2021, the foundation was funded primarily through micro-donations from nearly seven million individuals, supplemented by corporate contributions (“Wikipedia celebra 20 años de información libre y confiable para el mundo,” 2021). The WMF is responsible for maintaining the technological infrastructure, advocating for the movement’s interests, and funding a range of initiatives (Lorente, 2020). Wikimedia identifies itself as a grassroots movement in which decisions regarding resource allocation, strategic planning, and program development are made collaboratively (Cruz, 2017).

The *Movement Strategy* represents the most ambitious planning process undertaken to date. This initiative is synthesized into two overarching goals:

- **Knowledge as a service** - Establishing Wikimedia as a platform that delivers knowledge in multiple formats and develops tools for all stakeholders.
- **Knowledge equity** - Prioritizing the inclusion of knowledge and communities that have historically been marginalized due to systemic structures of power and privilege ("Estrategia de Movimiento," 2024).

Over time, the increasing scale and complexity of Wikimedia projects have resulted in a process of bureaucratization and functional specialization. Rijshouwer et al. (2023) describe this as *self-organizing bureaucratization*, a model designed to preserve the movement's participatory ethos while accommodating a growing diversity of contributors. Consistent with this perspective, McDowell and Vetter (2021) argue that Wikimedia's dynamism is perhaps one of its greatest strengths. This dynamism applies both to its core content, which is constantly evolving, and to the emergence of new projects.

Despite its global reach, significant disparities exist among the different language editions of Wikipedia. The largest, English Wikipedia, contains nearly 6.9 million articles and has a community of approximately 115,000 active editors as of mid-2024. In contrast, Spanish Wikipedia ranks eighth, approaching 2 million articles, with around 13,000 active editors ("List of Wikipedias," 2024).

The number and diversity of editors are critical factors influencing both the breadth and quality of Wikipedia's content (Zanotti, 2022). While Spanish Wikipedia is characterized by a strong multicultural foundation, substantial thematic gaps remain due to disparities in technological access and broader economic or political constraints (Archuby et al., 2022). Furthermore, participation is shaped by cultural and organizational factors, including the local community's approach to welcoming new editors and resolving conflicts. The presence or absence of local Wikimedia chapters and affiliates also plays a decisive role in this (Graham et al., 2014).

METHODOLOGY

This paper considers the diversity of trajectories within the Wikimedia movement, taking into account regional differences and periods of activity. These variables are expected to influence the organizational structures of the collectives, as well as their networks and strategic actions. To frame the analysis, Álvarez Azcárraga's (2018) thesis on the case of Wikimedia México provided a valuable reference.

The study relies on both quantitative and qualitative data from various sources. For the quantitative analysis, data and tables were extracted from the interactive *Wikimedia Statistics* portal, as well as infographics and datasets available on Wikipedia and Meta-Wiki—the movement's central coordination platform. For the quantitative analysis, semi-structured interviews

were conducted with key representatives from the selected Wikimedia chapters. These participants, occupying roles as executive directors (staff) or board members (volunteers), were contacted through official channels and provided with an initial set of questions. The interviews were conducted via videoconference, recorded, and transcribed. To ensure confidentiality, participants' identities were anonymized, while preserving their institutional affiliations.

Additionally, data were collected from various sources. First, the official websites of the selected organizations were reviewed to examine their staff composition, strategic actions, and contact information. Press articles from the Diff community blog, a platform frequently used for disseminating movement-related news, were analyzed through keyword searches in the Spanish-language edition. Furthermore, relevant Meta-Wiki entries on Wikimedia projects were examined. The selection of materials covered the period from 2022 to the first half of 2024, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of ongoing activities and initiatives.

This study is situated within an action-research framework (Paño Yáñez et al., 2019), involving active engagement with Wikimedia projects. In this context, approximately ten thousand interventions were carried out, encompassing the creation and revision of encyclopedic articles, the uploading of digital objects, and the development of thematic portals and WikiProjects (Zanotti Gordillo, 2022). In addition, a series of workshops, outreach talks, and collective editing sessions were organized.

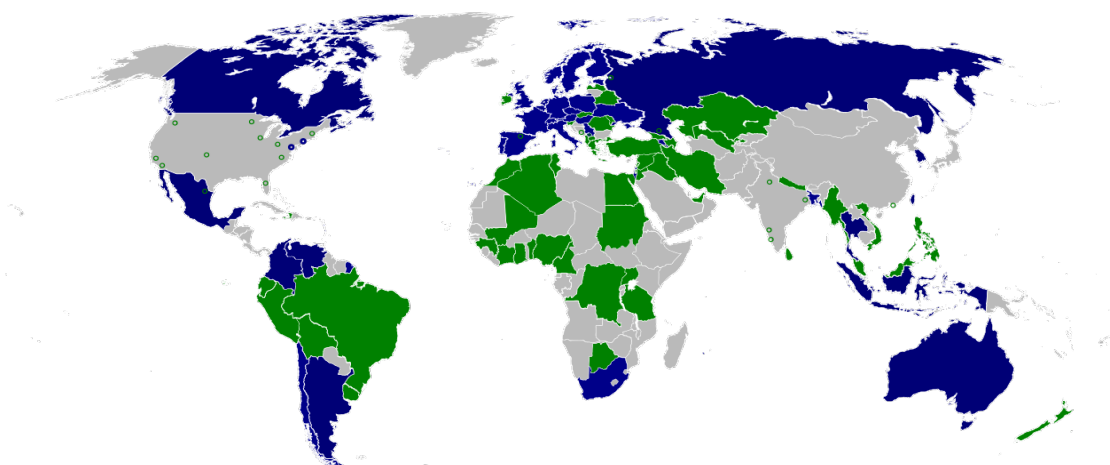
RESULTS

Wikimedia and local affiliates in Ibero-America

As anticipated, beyond the WMF, a network of organizations and collectives has emerged to promote the movement both thematically and locally. This network has been progressively expanding, and by 2024, it comprised 37 Wikimedia chapters, 2 Wikimedia thematic organizations, and 153 Wikimedia user groups ("Wikimedia movement affiliates," 2024).

Applications for chapter status are reviewed by the WMF Affiliations Committee. If the required conditions are met, the Board of Trustees grants official recognition, which is automatically renewed each year. However, recognition may be suspended or revoked if a group becomes inactive or fails to meet its objectives ("Wikimedia movement affiliates," 2024).

Disparities in the distribution of Wikimedia chapters between the Global North and South have been previously noted. Álvarez Azcárraga (2018) highlighted this imbalance, which remains evident in 2024, with 26 chapters located in the Global North and 11 in the Global South, totaling 37 worldwide. Meanwhile, 26 chapters are currently under discussion, and 8 have lost their recognition ("Wikimedia movement affiliates," 2024). In contrast, the number of user groups has increased significantly in recent years, contributing to broader geographic coverage, particularly in countries of the Global South (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Map of Wikimedia chapters (blue) and user groups with a regional focus (green), 2021

Source: Taken from “Wikimedia movement affiliates” (2024) by Effeetsanders.

Focusing on the Ibero-American region (see Table 1), significant variations can be observed in the number of active editors in each country and relative to their total population.

Table 1. Countries with the largest number of active editors² and affiliates to the Spanish Wikipedia (July 2023)

Country	Active editors (2024)	Population (2022)	Editors per million	Local organization	Type of organization	Period of activity
ES	2150	47 615 030	45	Wikimedia España	Chapter	2011-
AR	1260	46 234 830	27	Wikimedia Argentina	Chapter	2007-
MX	1190	12 750 412 5	9	Wikimedia México	Chapter	2011-
CL	810	19 603 733	41	Wikimedia Chile	Chapter	2011-
CO	780	51 874 024	15	Wikimedia Colombia	User group, chapter	2014-2019 2019-
PE	650	34 049 588	19	Wikimedistas de Perú	User group	2019-
US	240	333 287 56 0	1			

² Wikimedia defines active editors as those who have made five or more edits within the past month.

Country	Active editors (2024)	Population (2022)	Editors per million	Local organization	Type of organization	Period of activity
UY	230	3 422 794	67	Wikimedia Uruguay Wikimedistas de Uruguay	Chapter, user group	2011-2020-2020-
EC	190	18 001 000	11	Wikimedistas de Ecuador	User group	2015-
CR	110	5 180 829	21			
BO	100	12 224 110	8	Wikimedistas de Bolivia	User group	2018-
PY	100	6 780 744	15			

Source: Estadísticas de Wikimedia (2023) and World Bank Group (2024).

In the context of the Spanish Wikipedia, Spain has the highest number of active editors, while Uruguay exhibits the highest participation relative to its population size. Additionally, contributions are made from countries outside the Ibero-American region, such as the United States. Notably, countries with the most active publishing communities tend to have at least one officially recognized Wikimedia affiliate.

Formation and structure

This section examines the formation and organizational structure of Wikimedia chapters in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Spain, as well as the Wikimedia user group in Uruguay. Among these affiliates, Wikimedia Argentina is the oldest, established in 2007, while Wikimedia Colombia is the most recent, founded in 2019. The chapters in Chile and Spain, along with Wikimedia Uruguay, were created in 2011. Importantly, Wikimedia Uruguay initially operated as a chapter but transitioned to a user group in 2020.

Wikimedia chapters typically emerge from local activist groups or pre-existing user communities. Establishing a chapter as a civil association provides these collectives with greater institutional presence, enabling them to hire staff, distribute tasks and responsibilities, manage financial resources, and form strategic alliances. One interviewee described this process as follows:

... it was a group of volunteers, of very active people. There were many of them in Argentina and particularly in the province of Buenos Aires. It was a time when the movement was beginning to grow—Wikimedia Germany was already established, and some of the first chapters, particularly in Europe, had been created. They decided to take the step toward a more formal constitution within the movement and, at the same time, to establish themselves as an organization under Argentine law. I believe this stemmed from a desire to institutionalize the volunteer work that was already being carried out locally. (Wikimedia Argentina, personal communication, October 12, 2023)

Affiliates highlight the vital role of community engagement in their activities, actively encouraging the participation of editors and volunteers. However, being part of a chapter comes with a distinct set of responsibilities that go beyond content creation. These include preparing reports, managing grants and finances, coordinating with external partners, and organizing event logistics, among other tasks.

Wikimedia chapters are structured around a Board of Directors and an Executive Board. The Board of Directors, elected by an assembly of members composed of volunteers involved in Wikimedia projects, convenes regularly to set objectives and make strategic decisions. For its part, the Executive Board is responsible for implementing the work plan and coordinating activities.

The work of these chapters combines voluntary contributions with paid staff positions. Employees may be hired on a full- or part-time basis, and in some cases, members receive compensation for tasks that are typically carried out on a voluntary basis. The size of staff teams varies, ranging from a few individuals to a dozen employees, with roles covering executive management, program coordination and support, institutional development, administrative tasks, and staff allocation for specific projects.

Institutional communication represents another critical function, aimed at disseminating information about international activities, events, and campaigns. Communication efforts are carried out through multiple channels, including official websites, social media platforms, blogs, and WMF communication channels.

Individuals in executive management roles come from diverse professional backgrounds. Some have held their positions for multiple terms, often selected based on their technical expertise and experience in civil society organizations rather than prior involvement in the Wikimedia movement. Others bring a combination of long-standing engagement with communities and expertise in managing this type of organization.

Variations in management styles are also evident across Wikimedia chapters. While some prioritize flexibility and responsiveness to emerging opportunities, others adopt a more structured and systematic approach to planning. The latter approach is particularly notable in the cases of Wikimedia Chile and Wikimedia Colombia:

It is known as the Wikimedia Colombia Crece 2023–2024 Strategic Plan. We developed this plan with the community. It was a very demanding process because, first, we consulted the volunteer community and organized thematic working groups for each program. Then, we conducted semi-structured interviews with other groups in the region, asking them how they envisioned the future of the Colombian community. The WMF also provided its perspective. (Wikimedia Colombia, personal communication, October 10, 2023)

Overall, there is a noticeable trend toward greater planning, in line with the WMF requirements and funding expectations. Nevertheless, all affiliates emphasize the importance of continuous learning and reflective practices. This approach enables them to identify effective

strategies while recognizing actions that have been less impactful or have reached their operational limits.

Another key difference across affiliates lies in the role of members within the organization. In some chapters, members play an active role in decision-making and daily activities, while in others, their participation is more nominal, primarily serving accountability functions. Some chapters, such as Wikimedia Chile, have restructured their bylaws to differentiate between two categories of members: active and adherent. This distinction allows for varying levels of participation, with a core group and a more peripheral group, which remains informed and has opportunities to engage in activities as well.

Some chapters have a larger participant base³, which significantly affects their working dynamics (Schwitter, 2022). Larger chapters tend to have more frequent local and thematic meetings:

Unlike other chapters, Wikimedia España has a very large membership base, and its members are highly engaged. Those who want to organize something in their city take the initiative, plan a weekend outing to take photographs, and then publish a post on the association's blog. [...] People enjoy participating in activities, and we have a chat group where discussions are ongoing. One member is passionate about photographing silos, another focuses on train stations, another on libraries—there is a wide variety of interests. (Wikimedia España, personal communication, October 13, 2023)

The primary source of funding for Wikimedia affiliates comes from the WMF, which centralizes fundraising through annual micro-donations and corporate contributions. The decision to centralize financial resources was a topic of debate during the early years of the Wikimedia movement, as it aligns with broader policies on transparency and financial diversity (Rijshouwer et al., 2023). A portion of these funds is allocated to WMF's own operational costs and the maintenance of its technological infrastructure.

To support affiliate organizations, the WMF provides annual grant programs, covering expenses related to staff salaries, contractor fees, and program operations ("Grants: APG," 2024). In return, funded chapters are required to submit reports detailing project outcomes and financial accountability, which are evaluated based on predefined performance indicators. Although some chapters collect annual membership fees, these contributions are largely symbolic. Additional funding is often secured through partnerships with external organizations or through service provision.

³ The largest Wikimedia chapter worldwide is Wikimedia Deutschland, the German chapter. Established in 2004 as the first Wikimedia chapter, it now has more than 100,000 members ("Wikimedia Deutschland," 2024).

Contribution of local communities

Affiliates within the Wikimedia movement can be characterized by their implementation of common action programs. While the specific names of these programs vary across cases, their activities can generally be categorized into three main areas: (1) education, (2) culture, and (3) community development.

Educational programs aim to generate resources that promote free knowledge within educational communities at various levels. These initiatives include teacher training and digital literacy efforts, with a particular emphasis on fostering engagement with Wikimedia projects not only as consumers but also as content creators. In the cultural sphere, affiliates organize events and collaborate with GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) institutions, undertake digitization projects of local cultural collections, and advocate for open access policies. Regarding community development, efforts are focused on identifying content gaps and ensuring equitable representation within Wikimedia projects. To achieve this, partnerships are established with civil society organizations, particularly in relation to thematic areas such as gender and identity, local content, and digital activism.

Beyond these general guidelines, each chapter develops its own agenda in response to specific priorities and local contexts. This is exemplified by the case of Argentina, where issues related to historical memory, crimes against humanity, and democracy are addressed through initiatives such as the Education and Human Rights Program (Ferrante et al., 2024). Additionally, projects such as *Wikilesa*, which later expanded across Latin America, and the *Wiki for Human Rights* campaign further illustrate this approach.

Building on this foundation, the WMF signed a collaboration agreement with the United Nations to enhance the visibility of human rights issues across Wikimedia projects. In recent years, with support from Wikimedistas de Uruguay and other chapters, the *Wiki for Human Rights* campaigns have increasingly focused on promoting access to information related to climate change, environmental issues, and sustainable development.

Another particularly noteworthy area of work has involved indigenous communities. The collaboration between Wikimedia Venezuela and Wikimedia Colombia played a key role in the development of the Wayuunaiki version of Wikipedia. Initiated in 2008, this effort culminated in 2012 with the official launch of the first Wikipedia edition in this language, which now comprises over 500 articles. Native speakers actively participated in translating the interface, developing content, and conducting workshops for women leaders in the region, with support from civil society organizations and universities. In 2024, the project received recognition when one of its most outstanding editors was named Wikimedian of the Year ("Wikimedista del año," 2024).

The experience of the Wikimedistas Wayúu has since been shared with the Chilean chapter, which has sought to incorporate the Mapuche people into Wikimedia initiatives. In collaboration with UNESCO and the Chilean Ministry of Education, linguistic immersion experiences have been carried out in various localities in southern Chile.

Moreover, several Wikimedia chapters have played an important role in documenting current events, supporting social movements, and monitoring legislative and judicial processes. A notable example is Wikimedia México, which contributed to increasing the visibility of the protests surrounding the 2014 forced disappearance of 43 students in Ayotzinapa, Mexico (Álvarez Azcárraga, 2018). Similarly, Wikimedia Chile made a significant contribution through the placement of a Wikimedian in residence during the drafting of Chile's new Constitution. Through an agreement with the Constitutional Convention, a volunteer editor was granted access to the drafting process, enabling the documentation and dissemination of key developments via Wikimedia projects.

Another distinctive example is Wikimedia España, which collaborates with diverse linguistic communities. Given Spain's multilingual landscape, Wikipedia exists in not only Spanish but also Catalan, Basque, Asturian, and Galician⁴. The case of Catalan is particularly notable due to the efforts of Amical Wikimedia, a non-profit organization founded in 2008 and later recognized as a thematic organization by the WMF ("Amical Wikimedia," 2024). Representatives of the Basque-speaking community have also maintained consistent collaboration with Wikimedia España, exchanging knowledge and experiences. Meanwhile, collectives working to promote the Asturian and Galician languages—despite not seeking formal recognition as official groups—have received support from the chapter for various projects.

At the same time, there are communities dedicated to reducing the gender gap, such as Wikiesfera, Cuarto Propio, and WikiEmakumeok. In some cases, Wikimedia España acts as a liaison, providing logistical and organizational support for events. Additionally, contests such as *Wiki Loves Monuments* and *Wiki Loves Folk* contribute to heritage documentation, while initiatives such as *Municipios sin foto* and *Wiki Takes* encourage the creation of visual content related to underrepresented locations.

Overall, affiliates share the vision of a "mestizo Wikipedia," where each organization can highlight issues relevant to its region, amplify diverse voices, and influence global agendas. In doing so, contributions from the Global South play a crucial role in fostering greater equity within the content of Wikipedia and its sister projects. As articulated by a representative from Wikimedia Colombia:

So, we have tried to reach different places to ensure a more diverse range of voices. There are many controversies surrounding Wikipedia, as it has historically been shaped by a predominantly white perspective from the Global North. That is precisely our goal. If you were to ask me how I would characterize our community, I would say that, in the end, our work is about making Wikipedia more mestizo. (Wikimedia Colombia, personal communication, October 10, 2023)

⁴ These projects operate on a large scale, with the Catalan Wikipedia being particularly notable, comprising 759,000 articles and supported by 1,300 active editors. The Basque Wikipedia follows, featuring 443,000 articles and 541 active users. Meanwhile, the Galician Wikipedia includes 214,000 articles, and the Asturian Wikipedia has 136,000 articles.

Links with the Wikimedia movement

The relationship between local organizations and the Wikimedia movement can be analyzed on three levels: (1) connections with the local community, (2) collaboration with other affiliates, and (3) engagement with the WMF at the global level.

Regarding the first level, affiliates play a key role in fostering and supporting the local communities. Given that Wikimedia has been active for over two decades, its projects have been shaped by successive generations of contributors. Even though affiliates highly value the continued participation of their editors, they also emphasize the importance of attracting new contributors to ensure the community's long-term sustainability:

It has been increasingly difficult to bring in new people, and generational renewal is one of our main challenges for the coming years. In general, we do not have contributors under the age of forty, which presents a significant issue. We have been engaging with senior citizens, who have time and resources that we should fully take advantage of, but they still belong to an older demographic. (Wikimedia España, personal communication, October 13, 2023)

Participation in the Wikimedia movement is driven by diverse motivations. While some editors contribute sporadically, others become more actively involved, taking on leadership roles or gaining recognition within their local communities due to their long-standing presence, their roles within the wiki ecosystem, or their contributions to specific thematic areas. In some cases, editors establish communication channels outside the wiki environment to coordinate efforts and share information. However, not all contributors are interested in going beyond editing a specific entry or topic:

We are aware that there are many editors in Chile who are not affiliated with Wikimedia Chile. This demonstrates that while many people contribute, they do not necessarily feel compelled to join the community. They may not be particularly interested in the movement, the principles of open knowledge, or international governance. Instead, they simply enjoy editing, sharing knowledge, expressing their perspectives, and engaging in meticulous work. (Wikimedia Chile, personal communication, October 14, 2023)

As observed in Wikimedia España, multiple collectives may coexist within a single chapter, maintaining relationships of collaboration, independence, or even competition. At times, conflicts arise between editors or with the affiliate organization. Such tensions were evident in the case of Wikimedia Uruguay, which experienced internal conflicts that ultimately led to the dissolution of the chapter and its subsequent reorganization as a user group in 2020. According to one interviewee, this restructuring provided greater flexibility and improved collaboration with other organizations:

At present, I do not see a significant difference between being a user group and being a chapter. For us, forming a civil association simply to function as a group of volunteers did not make sense—because that is what we were in 2021. In Uruguay, there is strong synergy between various organizations, which may not be the case in other countries. Moreover, these organizations are made up of more or less the same people. Additionally, our small numbers

make it challenging to tackle such a broad agenda of topics. (Wikimedistas de Uruguay, personal communication, October 13, 2023)

Another key challenge for local Wikimedia communities is territorial coverage. In most cases, volunteer participation is concentrated in major urban centers and capital cities, such as Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Madrid, Santiago, and Montevideo, where affiliates are also headquartered. To organize in-person activities outside these cities, teams must travel. As an alternative, affiliates often support initiatives led by local organizations or conduct virtual events, such as online training sessions.

With respect to the second level, there is a general consensus on the strong connections among organizations in the region. The main space for collaboration is Iberocoop (the Regional Cooperation Initiative for Ibero-America), a network established in 2010 as the first regional cooperation initiative. Comprising sixteen nodes, Iberocoop has played a pivotal role in advancing the regionalization of Wikimedia. In addition to Spanish-speaking chapters and user groups, it includes Wikimedia Portugal, Wikimedia Sweden, Wikimedia Italy, WikiDonne, and Wikimujeres.

A key event within this network is Iberoconf, a biannual regional conference designed to strengthen collaboration, foster alliances, and facilitate knowledge sharing among affiliates. The seventh edition was held in Bogotá in 2023, following previous gatherings in Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, and Mexico City ("Iberocoop: Portada," 2024).

The creation of Iberocoop, along with other groups formed later—such as Wikimedia Central and Eastern Europe, WikiConference North America, and the Regional Cooperation for East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific—laid the groundwork for a hub policy. Collectively, these initiatives seek to decentralize power and decision-making while giving greater prominence to the communities involved ("Hubs," 2024).

Beyond regional spaces, affiliates also coordinate joint activities. A notable example is the GLAM Wiki Conference, organized in 2023 through the collaboration of Wikimedia Argentina, Wikimedia Chile, Wikimedia Uruguay, and Wikimovimento Brasil ("GLAM Wiki 2023," 2024).

We engage in a great deal of spontaneous coordination, often organized around subunits and shared interests. [...] In other words, we are constantly working on different projects, though not all of them necessarily align with broader strategic objectives. However, our relationships with other chapters are excellent, and we have a strong capacity to coordinate tactical efforts on many fronts. (Wikimedistas de Uruguay, personal communication, October 13, 2023)

As for the third level, the WMF defines its relationship with local affiliates as a partnership aimed at advancing its mission and facilitating the implementation of activities in different regions. The foundation operates through development programs and community projects, which often serve as the primary link with local groups. Additionally, some interviewees noted that the WMF is sometimes involved in resolving internal conflicts or addressing staff management issues.

A key global gathering for the movement is Wikimania, the annual conference organized by the WMF. This event brings together movement leaders and affiliate representatives. Each year, the conference is hosted in a different region, ensuring the involvement of local and regional communities. Beyond providing a space for discussion on emerging issues, Wikimania also serves as a platform for strengthening networks and advancing projects.

Furthermore, several local community leaders have either worked or are currently working in various areas of the WMF, including serving on its Board of Trustees. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the specific needs and conditions of the Ibero-American region. For instance, projects can now be submitted in Spanish, and WMF staff from the region bring valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by different countries.

Alliances and vision for the future

The interviewees highlighted strategic alliances between Wikimedia affiliates and a range of organizations, including educational, cultural, governmental, and civil society institutions. These collaborations play a crucial role in ensuring that Wikimedia projects and content remain relevant and accessible to a broad audience, thereby fostering more inclusive and sustainable knowledge. Given the extensive list of partnerships mentioned in the interviews and analyzed sources, this section outlines some of the most significant ones.

In the educational sector, collaborations focus on developing educational resources, training teachers, and integrating Wikimedia content into curricula. Notable examples include the memorandum of understanding between Wikimedia Colombia and the Colombian Ministry of Education. Similarly, Wikimedia Argentina prioritizes work with teachers in public schools, colleges, and universities, while Wikimedia Uruguay collaborates with *Plan Ceibal*, a national program promoting digital inclusion through laptop distribution and IT training for students.

Wikimedia Chile has also advanced science communication initiatives, organizing workshops in various fields and producing visual content. In partnership with the Center for Science Communication at the Universidad Autónoma de Chile, it developed a document aimed at combating misinformation. Meanwhile, Wikimedia España has improved science and innovation content through *Wikipedia Clubs*—workshops for students and educators at the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos and the Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

In the cultural sector, Wikimedia Uruguay partners with heritage institutions and the Universidad de la República to promote free culture and open access to information. Wikimedia Argentina collaborates with provincial ministries of culture and underrepresented archives, such as the transgender archive, which preserves and brings to light the history of Argentina's trans community.

Additionally, the Wikimedia movement works on creating and disseminating content related to historical memory. In collaboration with the Fundación Karisma, Wikimedia Colombia contributes to projects that promote community rights and provide training on the safe and ethical use of digital technologies. Wikimedia Argentina, for its part, has established

partnerships with prominent human rights organizations, including Parque de la Memoria, Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, and Amnesty International.

Affiliates also engage with regional organizations that share the goals of advancing free knowledge and digital rights. Examples include Creative Commons, Data Uruguay, and Ártica. Wikimedia Chile, in partnership with the Instituto de Fomento Pesquero, has contributed to Wikidata by documenting marine species to support conservation efforts. Wikimedia España collaborates with the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology and the Foundation for Knowledge Madri+d, among other institutions.

The perspectives shared by affiliates align with the Wikimedia Movement's Strategy 2030. A key concern is the need to adapt to technological changes to maintain relevance in an evolving information ecosystem. The rapid pace of technological innovation raises concerns about the potential displacement of Wikimedia projects or threats to their funding. While the WMF invests in upgrading its technological infrastructure and developing innovative tools, including responses to disruptive technologies such as generative AI, affiliates reflect on how these transformations affect local contexts.

Wikimedia projects also hold critical value in an era of widespread misinformation, where trust and knowledge validation are essential. Beyond ensuring access to information, it is increasingly important to provide context and track ongoing developments. Affiliates remain committed to incorporating new voices into Wikimedia, ensuring that Strategy 2030 is adapted to local realities. By doing so, they help represent the knowledge of communities in the Global South, fostering a more inclusive and diverse movement. To maintain relevance, initiatives must be recognized as valuable both within and beyond the Wikimedia ecosystem. This is evident in major projects related to indigenous peoples, gender equity, education, and cultural heritage. Addressing pressing global challenges—such as climate change—and reaching marginalized communities is crucial for achieving greater impact.

Another shared priority among affiliates is diversifying funding sources. Although financial support for local chapters and user groups has remained stable over time, securing additional resources would allow for the expansion of projects and collaborations with both local and international organizations. Affiliates also face challenges related to staff growth, which has enabled the professionalization of tasks previously carried out by volunteers. This shift contributes to the long-term sustainability of activities and allows for more robust strategic planning.

CONCLUSIONS

Given their significant impact on the information ecosystem, Wikimedia projects have been the subject of extensive research across various dimensions (Hill & Shaw, 2019; Schwitter, 2022). A considerable body of this research has focused on governance structures, highlighting Wikimedia's capacity to manage large-scale projects through a decentralized peer model. Even though the institutionalization of the WMF and its affiliated organizations has been recognized—particularly with their increasing professionalization—efforts continue

to balance this institutional growth with the open and collaborative ethos that originally defined the movement.

This paper examined the trajectories of local affiliates and their main contributions, noting their expanding presence in the region. While significant asymmetries persist, with a higher concentration of Wikimedia chapters in the Global North, recent years have seen a proliferation of user groups in the Global South. These groups, which adopt a more flexible approach, aim to empower historically marginalized communities.

The findings indicate that the establishment of chapters and user groups enables local volunteers to develop structured organizations with access to resources, personnel, and strategic action plans. However, differences in professionalization levels, internal conflicts, and management models reflect the diverse stages of development and varying contexts in which these groups operate. The WMF plays a crucial role in recognizing and supporting affiliates, as well as in conflict resolution, contributing to their long-term sustainability. These connections illustrate the interdependent and collaborative nature of the Wikimedia movement, where global objectives are increasingly adapted at the local level.

Affiliates emphasize that their initial connection stemmed from participation in Wikipedia, which has evolved over the years. Meanwhile, they strive to expand their community by welcoming new voices and generations of editors. Despite these efforts, organizations and communities tend to concentrate in major urban centers. To address this imbalance, affiliates are implementing strategies to cover new regions, maintaining both physical and virtual outreach efforts. These initiatives aim to close certain gaps, particularly those related to the representation of smaller populations and underrepresented groups.

Although all affiliates share a similar organizational structure centered on community and free knowledge, each one has its own specific approaches and thematic priorities. For example, Wikimedia Argentina focuses on human rights, crimes against humanity, and gender issues. Wikimedia Colombia and Wikimedia Chile have worked extensively with indigenous communities, with the latter also notable for its engagement with contemporary political processes. Wikimedia España prioritizes linguistic and cultural heritage, while Wikimedia Uruguay stands out for its work on environmental issues and digital rights.

Regional collaboration has emerged as a defining feature of Wikimedia's work, particularly in Latin America, where strengthening regional structures and cooperative initiatives remains a common goal. Affiliates frequently engage in joint projects that align with shared areas of interest and collaborate with educational, cultural, governmental, and civil society institutions. Nonetheless, it is important to note that these are just a few key aspects within a diverse field of interventions. In this regard, a limitation of this study is that it does not systematically address all of these connections. Future research should further explore the cases analyzed here while incorporating other affiliates from the region.

Wikimedia organizations face common challenges that must be addressed to ensure the long-term relevance and sustainability of their initiatives in a dynamic environment. These challenges include adapting to emerging technologies, securing financial stability, fostering inclusion and

diversity, and increasing their local impact. Ultimately, this study concludes that Wikimedia affiliates play a crucial role in sustaining local editing communities, thereby enhancing the coverage, diversity, and quality of content produced within Wikimedia projects.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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ANNEX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How long have you been involved with Wikimedia, and what were your first experiences within the movement?
2. How was the local chapter established, and what were the initial motivations behind its creation?
3. How is the chapter structured and organized internally?
4. How many individuals are actively involved, and how are responsibilities distributed between volunteers and paid staff?
5. What have been the chapter's main areas of focus, and what is its most significant contribution to the Wikimedia movement?
6. How has the chapter evolved over time, and what have been the most notable changes?
7. What are the primary sources of funding for the chapter?
8. How would you characterize the Wikimedia community in your country?
9. What is the relationship between the local Wikimedia community and the chapter?
10. Do you participate in collaborative initiatives with other chapters or user groups? If so, which ones?
11. How would you describe the relationship between the chapter and the Wikimedia Foundation?
12. What are the key institutional or organizational partnerships that have been established?
13. What future actions are planned?
14. Are there any additional aspects essential to understanding the functioning and organization of the chapter or local group?
15. Are there any key individuals who should be interviewed to gain further insights into this topic?