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EUROPE ACCORDING TO ENGLISH WIKIPEDIA: OPEN-SOURCING THE DISCOURSE ON EUROPE



АРХИВ ВОЈВОДИНЕ

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ABOUTH THIS STUDY

With the rise of Wikipedia, knowledge production has become unprecedentedly collaborative. In some cases, thousands of participants from various countries and different educational and cultural backgrounds work together to create a single Wikipedia entry. Additionally, this free encyclopaedia is being increasingly used as a substitute for more traditional encyclopaedias and other academic sources in everyday lives of ordinary people, and has come into a position to affect views and opinions of many individuals. This has led some authors to argue that, because of Wikipedia, knowledge is simply becoming an aggregation of public opinion. This research will scrutinise these claims by examining Wikipedia's history, background and modus operandi, while setting out a Foucauldian methodology for studying a single entry in this encyclopaedia.

The primary goal of this research project was to examine the nature and development of the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia by utilizing Foucauldian discourse analysis. The study found that the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia, rather than being an aggregation of public opinion, unfolds according to its own internal rules and principles, which have often led participants in the writing process to reach conclusions that could be hardly attributed to the public opinion. In this still ongoing discourse, Europe has, over time, come to be seen as a single geographical and cultural entity. Therefore, this discourse, willingly or not, provides a cultural legitimization for political integrative processes. Still, by treating both the European Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States as more or less equal, it shows that current political projects in Europe do not match the reality of the continent, as it is perceived by Wikipedia, since they divide in parts what is seen as a unified whole.

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INTRODUCION

European integration ceased being just a technical issue, and has entered into the realms of political integration. Since modern citizens pledge their allegiances to culture, not to a religion, land, or sovereign, contemporary political projects must be legitimised through strong notions of culture and identity which provide citizens with the sense of loyalty and belonging to a community (Shore 2006, 11-12). As human beings seek a metanarrative to reinforce their lived reality, the process of cultural legitimization is extremely important since it renders social developments, including political ones, meaningful by making them fit into a larger pattern (Griswold 1983, 677).

The European Union understands this and has already launched a number of cultural initiatives to support the process of political integration. Among these, knowledge production has been recognised as one of the crucial elements. Consequently, the EU has actively engaged in this process by, for instance, supporting projects that aim to rewrite European history as a story in which reason and unity prevail over nationalism and disunity (Shore 2000, 59-60). However, with the advance of online collaborative projects, especially Wikipedia, the field of knowledge production has become even more complex than before. Having in mind Wikipedia's widespread use, it is beneficial to examine the process of codification of knowledge on Europe in this controversial source, as it has the potential to shape views of a large number of people and therefore, to a certain degree, influence the process of construction of European identity and culture.

At the beginning of 2005 Jean-Noël Jeanneney, the director of the National Library of France, published the article "Quand Google défie l'Europe" in *Le Monde* criticizing the Google Books Project and calling for the institution of a European online library (Jeanneney 2006, 8). He was mainly afraid that Google's search algorithms would be biased towards Anglo-Saxon culture, which might, as a consequence, lead French children to learning only Anglo-Saxon interpretations of the French revolution and other

national historical events (Jeanneney 2006, 5-7). Even though Jeanneney's ideas were quickly materialised in the Europeana.eu project (Purday 2009, 105), that particular fear might have been misdirected considering where contemporary people are most likely going to get access to new knowledge on the Internet. Instead of going through either European or Google's online libraries, a French child would be much more likely to go to Wikipedia to learn more about the national history.

Despite the fact that Wikipedia is a relatively new phenomenon, it has already attracted a lot of interest from the academic community. Primarily its English version has been the subject of numerous studies regarding its trustworthiness, community and mode of production. Indeed, Wikipedia significantly differs from traditional encyclopaedias in so many ways, most notably in the mode of its production, distribution and use, that it has led P. D. Magnus to question the appropriateness of "pigeonholing Wikipedia as an encyclopedia" (Magnus 2011, 78). While it would probably be more appropriate to view Wikipedia as an evolved form of traditional encyclopaedias, this statement clearly shows that Wikipedia is so much different that a higher amount of caution should be exercised when researching it, since many things that are usually taken for granted when dealing with encyclopaedias may not be valid in this case.

Wikipedia's open mode of distribution enabled by the free CC-BY-SA 3.0 license has significant implications for its mode of use. Because it is available free of charge and in a convenient form, it is consulted more often than hard-copy encyclopaedias (Magnus 2011, 78). Additionally, academic publishers set the prices for accessing journal articles so high that even some academic institutions, let alone individuals, cannot afford to read them. As Guardian's columnist George Monbiot argued, such practices even "make Murdoch look like a socialist," (Guardian, 12 November 2011) but most importantly, they render scholarly works almost completely inaccessible to general audience. Therefore, it can be argued that the context of absence of free (or reasonably priced) reference or other academic works online has greatly contributed to the widespread use of Wikipedia, since it has left Internet users with no viable alternative to it.

Additionally, users will be often led to use Wikipedia through other online sources (Magnus 2011, 78). Many websites and, especially, blogs frequently advise their visitors to further their knowledge on certain subjects on Wikipedia. Likewise, from the early days of Wikipedia's existence, its entries have been highly ranked in Google's search results (Sanger 2005, 324).

Since an average Internet user rarely goes beyond the first few of the search results, Google has also played an important role in the spread of its use.

Furthermore, one cannot escape content from Wikipedia even if he or she is deliberately trying to (Magnus 2011, 78). The CC-BY-SA 3.0 license actually encourages people to use Wikipedia's content as long as properly attributed, so parts of its entries are often found on other websites. However, in many cases, that content is not accompanied the proper attribution (Magnus 2011, 78). Even though this kind of behaviour is *de facto* a copyright violation, Wikipedia does not seem to care about enforcing its copyrights, and it has never pursued a lawsuit against such violations. Copying from Wikipedia without attribution seems to have become so widespread that one does not even have to go online to encounter its content. While traditional mainstream media have been generally critical, if not hostile towards Wikipedia, several pranks have proven that they are no strangers to uncritically adopting Wikipedia's text. Perhaps most widely publicised was the case of an Irish student who managed to prove that mainstream media use contents from this free encyclopaedia by inserting a made up quote into the entry on recently deceased French composer Maurice Jarre, and it was quickly picked up and published by numerous media outlets from all over the world (Guardian, 4 May 2009). However, less publicised case in which anonymous prankster inserted "Wilhelm" into the list of names of former German minister of economic affairs Karl Theodor Maria Nikolaus Johann Jacob Philipp Franz Joseph Sylvester Freiherr von und zu Guttenberg has far more serious implications since, when the false name was picked up by German media, a user was able to reference a reputable newspaper, *Der Spiegel*, to "prove" the falsehood that originated from Wikipedia.¹ This shows that the circle can easily be completed, and that a lie coming from Wikipedia can quickly find its way into a trusted media source, which, in turn, can then be used to reinforce the very same lie in its original context in Wikipedia.

Another reason why Wikipedia is used more often than its traditional counterparts lies in much wider scope of its content, since it provides information on matters that are often not covered by hardcopy encyclopaedias (Magnus 2011, 79). As Joseph Michael Reagle Jr. argues:

¹ Nate Anderson, "Doomed: why Wikipedia will fail." (*Ars Technica*, available at: <http://arstechnica.com/web/news/2009/02/doomed-why-wikipedia-will-fail.ars>, accessed 11 November 2011).

Encyclopaedias, if they are to fit on one or two shelves of a library stack, must limit their scope. This then requires judgement about what to include in a given work, which entails asking what is essential, worthwhile, and appropriate to know. On the axis of material constraints then, Wikipedia is situated much more like paper dictionaries than encyclopaedias given its near infinite number of pages. (Reagle Jr. 2010, 139)

Wikipedia excels traditional encyclopaedias not only in breadth, but also in depth of information (Sanger 2011, 54), and this is yet another reason that contributes to the frequency of its use. Fecundity of Wikipedia's entries is often on a par with that of the specialised encyclopaedias and it has, for example, lead historian Rosenzweig to compare it in his study not only with *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* or other general purpose encyclopaedias, but with *The American National Biography Online*, which is written by the leading historians of the United States of America (Rosenzweig 2006, 128). Nevertheless, Wikipedia's fecundity does not only imply the change in quantity of its use, but in the "quality" of its use as well. While it is hard to imagine a student that would try to pass an exam by studying from *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, many have tried to accomplish that goal by consulting relevant Wikipedia entries. In addition, many professors have reported that their students occasionally cite it in their term papers. Given its widespread use, Wikipedia certainly has some power to shape views on many topics, including Europe. As it has been argued, even if a person decides not to use Wikipedia as the first place to go to get or check some information, there is a great chance that other sources they might use have already been influenced by Wikipedia's entries. Additionally, in the first month of 2012, just the entry on Europe in English Wikipedia has been viewed 367,800 times.² Undoubtedly, no other text on Europe could expect to get anywhere close to that readership. Having all this in mind, it is easy to discern how influential Wikipedia is and to realise that individual entries deserve to be studied in more detail.

² "Wikipedia article traffic statistics." (Grok.se, available at: <http://stats.grok.se/en/latest/Europe>)

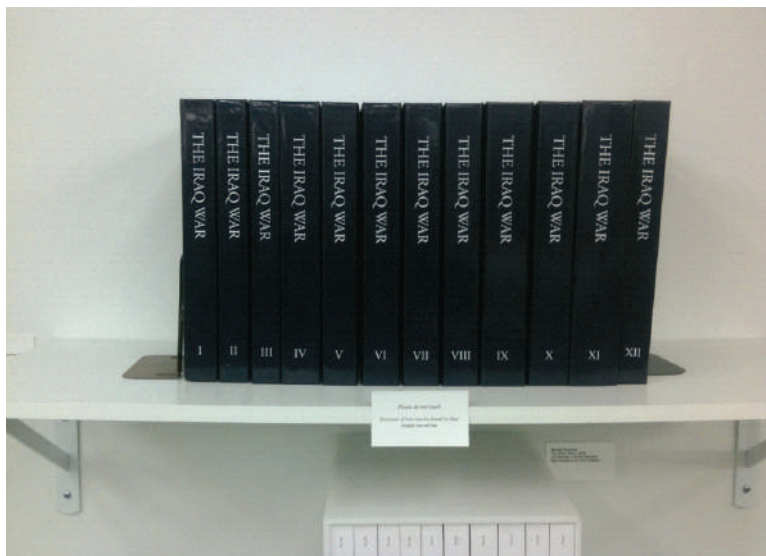


Image 1: James Bridle, *The Iraq War: Wikipedia Historiography*
Source: Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/stml/5464944920/>.

Apart from being different, Wikipedia's entries also offer new research possibilities. Their meticulous system of documentation, particularly neatly organised revision histories, provides a vast amount of material for study. In September 2010, James Bridle compiled the revision history of Wikipedia's entry on the Iraq War into 12 printed volumes [image 1] in order to draw attention to lengthy and complex debates behind Wikipedia's entries. (Bridle 2010). Wikipedia's entries on Europe that will be studied in this research have undergone roughly the same amount of edits. Additionally, in being an ambiguous concept that has constantly been reimagined and redefined, Europe, and the entries about it on Wikipedia, are particularly bound to raise many questions and incite a lot of debate.

The first chapter of this text will focus on the nature of Wikipedia and highlight its most important characteristics in order to avoid any possible misconceptions about this free encyclopaedia, while the second chapter will explain the methodology behind the research. The third chapter (published in the second part of this research) will be the focus of this study. There, by using Foucauldian discourse analysis, this research will examine the nature

of the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia by analysing how it developed; what the points of agreement and disagreement were; how disputes were solved; which arguments were kept, rejected or transformed; which changes were especially important, and how they affected the entire entry. By doing so, this study will provide better understanding of the discourse on Europe in this controversial, but undoubtedly influential encyclopaedia.

WHAT IS WIKIPEDIA?

Origins of Wikipedia

Wikipedia is an offspring of two distinct traditions, of the ancient encyclopaedism, and of the much younger Free and Open Source Software movement which appeared in the later part of the twentieth century.

While most researchers claim that encyclopaedias already existed in Ancient Rome, often pointing to *Naturalis Historia* by Pliny the Elder from 77 AD as one of the oldest preserved examples (Stakić 2009, 63a), others claim that there was no ancient literary genre that readers and writers in Roman Empire understood as encyclopaedic (Doody 2009, 3). However, this debate falls out of the scope of this research, and it is enough to say that the works of Cato, Varro, Celsus and, especially, Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* belong to the tradition of European encyclopaedism as important links in the chain because they have been received and used as encyclopaedias (Doody 2009, 4).

The tradition of writing grand scale reference works continued in the Middle Ages, the most notable example being Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Maius* (Van Ewijk 2011, 208), while the first works that actually called themselves encyclopaedias appeared in the sixteenth century (Doody 2009, 5). Still, the notion of all-encompassing encyclopaedia that sums up and organises the totality of human knowledge prevailed (Clark 1999, 96), only to be finally shattered in the later part of the eighteenth with Denis Diderot's and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* [English: Encyclopaedia or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts and Crafts]. In the fifth volume of the *Encyclopédie* Diderot proclaimed that the task of collecting all that can be known can never be completed, while all the hierarchies implicit in the systematization of knowledge represent rather cultural conventions specific for a certain time and place than an existing natural order (Van Ewijk 2011, 210).

The nineteenth century saw the rise of nationalistic encyclopaedias, a trend which continued in the twentieth century as well (Doody 2009, 5), in which the corpus of human knowledge was interpreted through a prism of a national culture and ideology (Van Ewijk 2011, 205). Arguably the best known and most influential encyclopaedia of the time was the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which was also the first encyclopaedia to employ a permanent set of staff that enabled a constant process of renewal of its content (Doody 2009, 20) and, consequently, that made it possible for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to remain relevant even today, more than two centuries after its first issue. Twentieth century also brought what Joseph Michael Reagle Jr. calls “technologically inspired visions of universal encyclopaedias”, most notably H. G. Wells’ *World Brain*, which just aimed to utilise contemporary scientific discoveries such as index cards and micro film to enhance access to universal knowledge by making encyclopaedias more compact and cheaper (Reagle Jr. 2010, 26-27). However, such visions remained unfulfilled since the technologies they advocated were not adequate for the task (Reagle Jr. 2010, 26-27).

Suitable technologies appeared in the latter part of the twentieth century, but it was only near its end, when personal computers became mainstream and started entering homes of the ordinary (rather) Western families, that traditional printed encyclopaedias, such as the abovementioned *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, got electronic supplements, usually in the form of CDs and, later, DVDs. Additionally, new projects circulated only in electronic formats were started. The most prominent of these was Microsoft’s *Encyclopedia Encarta* that was discontinued in 2009 after it had lost the battle with Wikipedia (The New York Times, 30 March 2009). While such electronic editions enhanced user experience with the abundance of multimedia content and more efficient information retrieval tools, the old style of entry writing was preserved, which held editors and writers back in keeping up with the latest advances in the worlds of science, arts, politics and other spheres of human activity (Stakić 2009, 64a). Simply, they were not able to, for instance, update the entry on Romania as soon as a new president was elected. Such changes still had to wait for a completely new edition of encyclopaedia. Furthermore, these were not philanthropic projects but commercial enterprises whose products often came with a hefty price tag that impeded the access to knowledge accumulated in these encyclopaedias so, in retrospect, they have contributed little towards the enlightenment dream of universally accessible reference works. Only

the format has changed, while the price still remained too high for some people.

Besides encyclopaedism, the Free and Open Source (FOSS) movement played an important role in setting the climate in which a project like Wikipedia could emerge. FOSS is a collaboratively produced software characterised by a subversive notion of property (Jordan 2009). Since hackers have played the crucial role in the development of FOSS (Bretthauer 2002), this movement should be viewed as one of the branches of hacking, the other one being cracking – illegally accessing and altering computers and networks (Jordan 2009).

The hacker culture emerged in the environment of American universities connected to the Internet in the 1960s (Raymond 2001, 4-5). Originally, it was offspring of the New Left but, after the failure of the 1968 revolutions, after which it was depoliticised together with the Hippie and Green movements (Söderberg 2008, 15-16). Onwards, as the wider focus shifted from head-on confrontations to creating an alternative to the system, hackers started working on bottom-up, decentralised computing (Söderberg 2008, 15-16).

The watershed year was 1984 when Richard Stallman, an MIT programmer frustrated with proprietary software, started developing GNU operating system (Bretthauer 2002). However, progress of the project was rather slow (Raymond 2001, 14), but that drastically changed in 1991 when Linus Torvalds, a student at the University of Finland, started developing Linux, a free Unix kernel. Eric S. Raymond argues that:

The most important feature of Linux, however, was not technical but sociological. Until the Linux development, everyone believed that any software as complex as an operating system had to be developed in a carefully coordinated way by a relatively small, tightly-knit group of people. (...) Linux evolved in a completely different way. From nearly the beginning, it was rather casually hacked on by huge numbers of volunteers coordinating only through the Internet. (Raymond 2001, 16)

Eric S. Raymond calls this style of development the bazaar, referring to the former style as the cathedral (Raymond 2001, 21). Linus' style of development gave the FOSS movement new vigour and at the turn of the millennium FOSS became a viable alternative to proprietary software, while in 2011 Jim Zemlin, the director of the Linux Foundation, felt confident enough to

say that the battle had already been won since and, apart from the consumer desktop segment, Linux became the dominant operating system in almost every other category of computing.³

The bazaar style of development is the most important trait Wikipedia inherited from the FOSS movement, but it is not the only one. Preoccupation with alternative copyright licences and meticulous documentation of various aspects of the project should also be regarded as its influences. Additionally, given the extensive coverage of the FOSS related topics on Wikipedia, it would not be outrageous to suggest that Wikipedia and the FOSS movement share a lot of contributors as well.

In fact, Richard Stallman, one of the pioneers of the FOSS movement, already proposed creation of a “free universal encyclopedia and learning resource” in 1999, and in 2001 the development of GNUPedia (soon to be renamed to GNE) began but, in the meantime, Wikipedia appeared and took off so quickly that GNUPedia / GNE project was abandoned even before it left the early planning stages (Reagle Jr. 2010, 37-38).

History of Wikipedia

According to Wikipedia’s co-founder Larry Sanger, the early history of Wikipedia (and its predecessor Nupedia) has been mischaracterised to the extent that only four years after the work on Wikipedia had started he felt compelled to write the memoir about early days of the projects to set the record straight (Sanger 2005, 309). However, even though his memoir denies that Wikipedia was created by accident, it cannot be said that it was a project that appeared with detailed blueprints either.

The immediate predecessor of Wikipedia was Nupedia, an encyclopaedia influenced by other open source projects that was supposed to be free of charge and open to all expert contribution (Reagle Jr. 2010, 36). The most significant difference from FOSS was that Nupedia was not created within a group of adventurous professionals, but Jimmy Wales started it under the umbrella of Bomis, his commercial company, so the ultimate goal for the encyclopaedia was to turn a profit by selling advertisements on its pages (Lih 2009, 33). Wales brought Larry Sanger, a doctor of philosophy focusing

³ Jon Brodtkin, “Bashing Microsoft ‘like kicking a puppy,’ says Linux Foundation chief.” (Network World, 5 April 2011, available at: <http://www.networkworld.com/news/2011/040511-linux-vs-microsoft.html?hpg1=bn>, accessed on 5 September 2011).

on epistemology, who in turn brought along his ambitions. Sanger not only wanted to create the greatest encyclopaedia in the history of mankind like Wales, but also the most credible one, which is why a rigorous seven-step review process for each encyclopaedic entry was introduced (Sanger 2005, 308-309).

Nupedia quickly took off and attracted a relatively large number of volunteers, most of whom were experts in their fields, while many held Ph.D. degrees (Sanger 2005, 313). Yet after a year of work, Nupedia produced only one or two dozens of articles (Lih 2009, 40-41). The biggest obstacle to procuring commitments from volunteers seems to have been Nupedia's complex editorial process. Sanger's memoir notes that: "There seemed to be a huge fund of talent, motivated to work on an encyclopaedia but not motivated enough to work on Nupedia, going to waste" (Sanger 2005, 315). However, at the time Sanger thought that it was the mailing system used for collaboration that was holding the project down, so he set out to find the solution (Lih 2009, 40-41). Ward Cunningham's WikiWikiWeb platform was chosen as the best solution that would allow the public to collaboratively develop articles to be fed into the Nupedia process, but a sound majority of the Nupedia Advisory Board did not want the project to be associated with something as anarchic as a wiki, so on the 15th of January 2001 Wikipedia was set up on its own Internet domain as experimental auxiliary tool of Nupedia (Sanger 2005, 315-317).

Wikipedia's development was stunning. By the end of January 2001 it had already produced around 600 entries (Lih 2009, 67). Larry Sanger argues that the presence of Nupedians was one of the main reasons Wikipedia got off the ground so quickly (Sanger 2005, 315-317), while Andrew Lih emphasises the influence of volunteers from the community of Slashdot, a collaboratively edited technology news website of choice among the technical elite that flooded Wikipedia in early days (Lih 2009, 69). In either case, the important thing is that communities of Nupedia and Wikipedia quickly started to diverge despite all Sanger's effort to keep two projects tied together:

(B)y the summer of 2001, I was able to propose, get accepted (with very lukewarm support), and install something we called the Nupedia Chalkboard, a wiki which was to be closely managed by Nupedia's staff. It was to be both a simpler way to develop encyclopedia articles for Nupedia, and a way to import articles from Wikipedia. No doubt due to lingering disdain for

the wiki idea – which at the time was still very much unproven – the Chalkboard went largely unused. The general public simply used Wikipedia if they wanted to write articles in a wiki format, while perhaps most Nupedia editors and peer reviewers were not persuaded that the Chalkboard was necessary or useful. (Sanger 2005, 314)

Seeing the fast growth of Wikipedia, Jimmy Wales asked Sanger, editor-in-chief of both projects, to devote more time to Wikipedia, and Nupedia slowly started to fall into neglect despite Sanger's insistence on keeping it alive (Sanger 2005, 314). Furthermore, while Sanger saw Wikipedia's good-natured anarchy as a provisional measure for determining the best rules for the projects governance, new participants saw it as the essence of the project (Sanger 2005, 319), which inevitably led Sanger into conflicts with the community (Sanger 2005, 328). In addition, Bomis heavily suffered from the effects of the Dot-com bubble, so the company had no other choice than to fire more than a half of its workers at the beginning of 2002 and Sanger was laid off at the beginning of February (Sanger 2005, 330). He continued running the project for one more month as a volunteer, and then submitted his resignation (Sanger 2005, 331). Nupedia's server crashed the next year, and that event spelled the end of the project as Bomis did not even try to put it back online (Sanger 2005, 331).

Wikipedia, on the other hand, was much more fortunate. By the end of 2001, Wikipedia had generated 19,700 entries.⁴ True internationalisation of the project had also begun in the first year of its existence. Wikipedias in Catalan, Chinese, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish were started as early as May, while versions in other languages soon followed and are continuously being added up to date.⁵ The number of entries and participants kept growing as well, while software solutions that made Wikipedia possible kept being continuously developed, so there was only one more thing remaining to be solved for this free encyclopaedia to reach the state in which it more or less exists today.

⁴ "Size of Wikipedia." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Size_of_Wikipedia, accessed 12 January 2011).

⁵ "Wikipedia: About." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About>).

It has already been mentioned that both Nupedia and Wikipedia were owned by Bomis, a company that was planning to monetise both projects by selling advertisements on their websites. However, when Edgar Sniedy learned about the threat of that possibility (that has actually never materialised) he initiated the fork of Spanish Wikipedia in 2002, which was completely possible and legal because of Wikipedia's free copyrights license (Lih 2009, 137-138). In a matter of weeks, the entire content of Spanish Wikipedia was copied to servers of the University of Seville that began hosting the Enciclopedia Libre, as the fork was named, while it took two years for Spanish Wikipedia to recover.⁶ From this incident Bomis learned about the low prospects of the idea of selling advertisements on Wikipedia's pages without upsetting the community, so in 2003 it decided to transfer Wikipedia's assets to a newly formed non-profit organisation named Wikimedia Foundation, headquartered in St. Petersburg, Florida (Lih 2009, 183-184). Onwards, this organization has been responsible for fostering Wikipedia's development, for the sake of which it has, over time, started a number of supporting projects such as Wictionary, Wikibooks, Wikiwersity, Wikinews and many others that, unfortunately, fall outside of the scope of this research.

Today, Wikipedia has 3,844,493 entries which have been edited 510,013,086 times by 16,045,282 registered users and 1,507 administrators,⁷ which makes it the largest encyclopaedia in the history of mankind. It is also the sixth most visited website on the Internet according to the Alexa.com's rankings,⁸ meaning that it has become, without a doubt, a part of everyday life for a vast number of Internet users.

⁶ Owing to Wikipedia's general popularity and because of the unawareness of the project's newcomers of the situation, the work on Spanish Wikipedia began to return to normal the next year, and it managed to surpass Enciclopedia Libre in terms of the number of articles in the fall of 2004. (Lih 2009, 138)

⁷ "Statistics." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Statistics>, accessed 12 January 2012).

⁸ These rankings are by no means 100% accurate, however, because of the lack of a better alternative, they are still used as industry's standard for measuring success of websites. See: "Top Sites: The top 500 sites on the web." (*Alexa.com*, available at: <http://www.alexa.com/topsites>, accessed 7 September 2011).

Technology behind Wikipedia

It has already been highlighted that previous plans for grand universal encyclopaedias have never materialised because the technologies proposed for their creation were not up to the task, so it might be worthwhile to briefly examine the technology behind Wikipedia not only because it made this encyclopaedia possible, but also because it carries a number of further implications regarding the way in which Wikipedia is being written, maintained and organised.

Naturally, Wikipedia would not have been possible without the ICT revolution that made personal computers and the Internet mainstream around the world. In order to better facilitate communication (and collaboration) among the rapidly increasing number of Internet users, a number of software solutions has been and is still being developed. Among these, Ward Cunningham's WikiWikiWeb concept has a special importance for Wikipedia as this encyclopaedia is based on its software iteration.

Ward Cunningham's intention behind the WikiWikiWeb was to enable people to easily publish, but primarily edit, web content without the extensive knowledge of HTML programming language (Lih 2009, 58), which in 1995, when WikiWikiWeb was launched, was not easy since the Social Web as we know it today was yet to be created. The name of the project came from Hawaiian "wiki wiki", meaning "super fast", as Cunningham wanted to emphasise the easiness and speed of editing Web pages with his software (Reagle Jr. 2010, 39). Not only did his platform not require extensive programming knowledge as its syntax was easy to learn, but it also did not require its users to register accounts to be able to make edits either (Lih 2009, 59). Equally important characteristic of Cunningham's software was that all revisions of pages were saved in a way that made it easy to compare the changes and revert them if necessary, so users did not have to be afraid of editing pages since nothing could have been permanently lost or destroyed (Lih 2009, 59).

At the beginning, Wikipedia ran UseModWiki, an iteration based on many intermediate modifications of Ward Cunningham's original Wiki Base software (Lih 2009, 62). However, Wikipedia was never a standard Wiki. As Larry Sanger notes:

Wiki pages can be started and edited by anyone, but, in "Thread Mode" (as in "the thread of this discussion") the dialogue can

become complex. In that case, or when consensus is reached, or when positions have hardened, it is considered a good idea to “refactor” pages (a term borrowed from programming), i.e., to rewrite them, but honestly, taking into account the highlights of the dialogue. Then the dialogue might be represented as in “Document Mode.” (Sanger 2005, 315-316)

Wikis were never meant for writing an encyclopaedia, they were created as a platform for online discussion, so already in early 2002 Wikimedia Foundation designed MediaWiki software specifically for Wikipedia and its other projects but, since it is a free and open source software, it has been adopted by many other websites, and it has gradually become the most widespread representative of Wiki technology (Stakić 2009, 64a). There are numerous ways in which MediaWiki differs from UseModWiki software, but only a few of these bear importance in the context of this text.

Arguably, the most significant modifications were introductions of Talk pages associated with single entries and a number of mechanisms for content protection. Talk pages are administrative spaces where users can discuss articles and coordinate their development (Lih 2009, 75). Even though Talk pages are not technologically different from pages used for writing and editing entries, because of their purpose, they are written in a different way – as threaded conversations (Lih 2009, 75-76), so they are quite similar in style to the standard, original Wikis.

The first content protection mechanism already came with UserMod-Wiki software, which is the abovementioned function to monitor and revert changes, as did the option to delete information. MediaWiki software only enhanced this feature by adding a possibility of patrolling changes which somewhat automates the process (Stakić 2009, 66a). However, from the very beginning Wikipedia's community was very careful about which users should have the responsibility of deleting content as this action results in its permanent loss, while it is absolutely necessary to remove certain data from Wikipedia's public pages, sometimes even physically from its servers, in cases of copyright violation, libellous speech and inappropriate private information about a person (Lih 2009, 94). Probably the most obvious original content protection mechanism introduced is page locking which allows Wikipedia's administrators to temporarily lock pages that are frequently vandalised. There are two levels of this measure as some of the locked pages can be only edited by administrators, while others can be modified by

registered users that are not completely new to the website since the experience has shown that, if we disregard anonymous users, most of the vandalism comes from newly registered accounts (Stakić 2009, 66a). Arguably the most severe content protection mechanism is user blocking which gives the website's administrators the ability to ban problematic users (more precisely their accounts or IP addresses) from making any edits for an arbitrary period of time or permanently (Reagle Jr. 2010, 84).

Lastly, it should be also noted that MediaWiki software has been modified to accommodate specific demands of some languages. For instance, Wikipedia in biscriptal Serbian language has an additional function that allows its user to switch between Cyrillic and Latin alphabets, while Wikipe-dias in languages that are written from right to left, like Hebrew or Arabic, have been optimised by horizontal reversion of the standard page layout in order to accommodate the specific demand of these languages.

Copyright licences

Free copyright, or copyleft licenses, as some often call them, play a very important role in the FOSS movement. In his influential *A Hacker Manifesto* McKenzie Wark refers to Richard Stallman as both software and the information politics hacker since Stallman's GNU General Public License (GPL) "uses copyright law against itself, as the instrument for creating an enforceable freedom, rather than use intellectual property law as enforceable unfreedom" (Wark 2004, note to paragraph 070) or, in Tim Jordan's words:

FOSS builds on the rights of exclusive use of property, and hence existing laws and legal frameworks, to invert "property as exclusion" and enforce distribution. This is particularly in relation [to] source code and the right to change source code but it also requires that any changes to source code have to be redistributed to the world. In this moment exclusion is turned into distribution on the basis of the owner of property's right to define what exclusion means in relation to their property. (Jordan 2009)

Even though Nupedia originally used The Nupedia Open Content License, just before Wikipedia was founded, Richard Stallman managed to persuade Jimmy Wales to switch to the GNU Free Documentation Licence

(GFDL), a version of GPL adopted to suit the needs of documentation that accompanied the software (Lih 2009, 72). Many claimed that GFDL's scope of application was too narrow as it was designed for a very specific type of texts, so a number of additional non-software content licences were created. Among these, the Creative Commons licenses for text, photographs and music, initiated by law professor Lawrence Lessig in 2001, quickly rose to prominence (Reagle Jr. 2010, 78). However, it was only in 2009 that Wikipedia's contributors decided to move its content under a more suitable label – the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported license (CC-BY-SA 3.0).⁹ One of the biggest problems was that these two licenses were not mutually compatible, and this was further exacerbated by the fact that the CC-BY-SA 3.0 license had gradually become the most dominant copyleft license on the Internet. This made lawful sharing text between Wikipedia and most of the free content on the web impossible. Additionally, the GFDL license had some perks that made releasing texts from Wikipedia's entries in print very hard or impractical. Namely, it is mandatory to print the full text of the license (around three pages) and the list of authors (and there might be hundreds of them in case of a single Wikipedia entry) alongside a text licensed under the GFDL.¹⁰ This contradicts Wikipedia's goal to provide collected human knowledge even to people without an access to the Internet (Reagle Jr. 2010, 18), so the license change was a logical move in this regard. Nonetheless, ironically, Wikipedia has so far appeared in print only in Germany (USA Today, 23 April 2008), one of the best connected countries on earth.

Wikipedia's mission

It is hard to find Wikipedia's mission statement on either Wikipedia's or Wikimedia's web pages. Those rather speak about what is being done and how it is being done. One of the few clues available is Jimmy Wales's *Letter from the Founder* of 2004 to Wikipedia's community. It states that Wikipedia's "mission is to give freely the sum of the world's knowledge to every single

⁹ "Licensing Update/Result." (*Wikimedia*, available at: http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Licensing_update/Result, accessed 8 September 2011).

¹⁰ "Licensing update/Questions and Answers." (*Wikimedia*, available at: http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Licensing_update/Questions_and_Answers, accessed 8 September 2011).

person on the planet in the language of their choice, under a free license, so that they can modify, adapt, reuse, or redistribute it, at will.”¹¹ This is seemingly at odds with the fact that Nupedia and Wikipedia were started under a for-profit corporation with the aim of earning money from advertisement placements on the website. However, the abovementioned controversy with Spanish Wikipedia’s fork clearly demonstrated that making money from a community effort would greatly jeopardise the project and, in the end, it made Jimmy Wales abandon his initial commercial goals. Therefore, Wikipedia was separated from founder’s company, and is now run by a non-profit organisation.

Wikipedia’s logo also reinforces this message. It comprises a globe built out of jigsaw pieces that represents continuous construction and development of this collaborative project,¹² while each of the puzzle pieces carries a glyph from different alphabet in order to accentuate multilingual character of Wikipedia. Additionally, since the task of making a summary of all human knowledge can never be completed, some of the puzzle pieces are missing in the logo. The link with the FOSS movement, and freedom of modification and distribution that come with it, was highlighted only in 2010 when Wikipedia dropped the proprietary Hoefler Text for The open source Linux Libertine font in its logo.¹³

Rules, policies and the community

At first, Wikipedia did not have any rules or policies. Larry Sanger explains that the first users of Wikipedia were old Nupedians with a good educational background and writing skills, who knew how a good encyclopaedic entry should look like, so establishing firm rules was not on top of the priority list and might have been even unnecessary (Sanger 2005, 317). However, later on, Wikipedia’s community has developed some norms and

¹¹ Jimmy Wales, “Founder letter/Founder letter Sept 2004.” (*Wikimedia*, available at: http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Founder_letter/Founder_letter_Sept_2004, accessed 8 September 2011).

¹² “Wikipedia: Wikipedia logos.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia_logos, accessed 8 September 2011).

¹³ “Wikimedia official marks/About the official Marks.” (*Wikimedia*, available at: http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Wikimedia_official_marks/About_the_official_Marks#What_characters_are_on_the_Wikipedia_puzzle_globe.3F, accessed 8 September 2011).

Joseph Michael Reagle Jr. uses Etienne Wenger's notion of "community of practice" to explain the process since Wenger's theory claims that people involved in pursuit of a common goal develop a common identity and understanding of their environment, creating a set of shared cultural norms and practices along the way, as it happened on Wikipedia (Reagle Jr. 2010, 47).

These are perhaps best summed up on the page describing the "Five pillars" of Wikipedia (Reagle Jr. 2010, 52). The first and the third are simple – they simply state that copyrights ought to be respected and that Wikipedia is an encyclopaedia, not a dictionary, a newspaper, "a soapbox, an advertising platform, a vanity press, an experiment in anarchy or democracy, an indiscriminate collection of information, or a web directory."¹⁴ On the other hand, stances of "Neutral Point of View" (NPOV) and respectful and civil interaction between Wikipedia's editors have far more deeper implications for many aspects of the project, to the extent that Reagle Jr. claims that these are the defining features of Wikipedia collaboration (Reagle Jr. 2010, 45). I will return to these after examining the fifth pillar of Wikipedia first.

This is the rule which states that Wikipedia does not have any firm rules.¹⁵ The fifth pillar's precise formulation shows the exact motive behind this rule: "If a rule prevents you from improving or maintaining Wikipedia, ignore it."¹⁶ This policy was introduced by Larry Sanger to encourage collaboration and bold behaviour (as nothing can be permanently lost in a wiki) in order for the community to get some experience with wikis before formulating firm rules of Wikipedia, but some of the participants took it as the very essence of the project (Sanger 2005, 318). Sanger later rejected it, while Wikipedia's community held on to it (Sanger 2005, 319). Larry Sanger is right when he claims that: "the cultures of online communities generally are established pretty quickly and then very resistant to change, because they are self-selecting; that was certainly the case with Wikipedia." Indeed, its culture pretty much reminds us of the Internet from the 1990s and early 2000s, when we still used to "join" websites to become their "members", instead of "signing up" to become their "users." Wikipedia seems to approach problems on case-by-case basis. While trying to allow the maximum amount of

¹⁴ "Wikipedia: Five pillars." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five_pillars, accessed 22 September 2011).

¹⁵ "Wikipedia: Five pillars." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five_pillars, accessed 22 September 2011).

¹⁶ "Wikipedia: Ignore all rules." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Ignore_all_rules, accessed 22 September 2011).

freedom, Wikipedia tends to enforce rules only when normal functioning of the community is jeopardised, so strict enforcement of its rules seems to be rather an exception than a rule. Indeed, in most cases, participants are able to reach consensus without making any reference to the rules in the discussion. Those seem to be enacted only when all other options fail. Hence, some articles are locked from editing for longer or shorter periods of time, while some users are temporarily, and some permanently, banned from the website – depending on the case.

Wikipedia's policy of neutrality (NPOV) also has profound effects on Wikipedia's collaborative culture. This policy states that, in case of controversial topics, editors should present all relevant points of view that have been published in trustful sources, while indicating their prominence and avoiding stating opinions as facts.¹⁷ This is of great significance for a project with many diverse participants like Wikipedia, since it has created an environment in which people with opposing views can work on a single encyclopaedia article together with relatively little conflict (Sanger 2005, 323). Each of them is led to work on the argumentation of the opinion he or she supports, instead of changing the entry back and forth ad infinitum.

Another important principle that guides the community is the "Assume good faith" convention, i.e. an assumption that others are acting with good intentions.¹⁸ First of all, this principle eases the tension of debates and keeps them from escalating. Secondly, it functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy since by assuming good faith Wikipedians are, to a certain extent, creating good faith as well (Reagle Jr. 2010, 61). Alongside expected patience, civility and even humour, as Michael Joseph Reagle Jr. notes, this policy fosters collaboration between diverse and geographically dispersed participants (Reagle Jr. 2010, 71).

In his letter from the founder of April 2005 Jimmy Wales asserted that the community does not come before the task of creating the world's greatest encyclopaedia, as the community is organised around that task.¹⁹ However, its importance should not be underestimated since, besides the administrative pages where Wikipedians can have conversations, there is a number of

¹⁷ "Wikipedia: Neutral point of view." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view, accessed 24 September 2011).

¹⁸ "Wikipedia: Assume good faith." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Assume_good_faith, accessed 24 September 2011).

¹⁹ Jimmy Wales, "Founder letter." (*Wikimedia*, available at: http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Founder_letter, accessed 24 September 2011).

off-site newsletters, discussion boards, blogs, aggregators and podcasts that service the community, as well as real life meetings and annual Wikimania conferences (Reagle Jr. 2010, 9). Not to mention that Wikimedia foundation has offices in 30 countries around the world.²⁰

Despite the fact that, generally, anyone can edit Wikipedia, most people choose not to, and even out of those that do, just 2.5 percent of the most active (logged in) contributors is responsible for half of the edits (Reagle Jr. 2010, 8). Therefore, Wikipedia is rather a community effort than “everyone’s” effort. It states that it is “an open, self-governing project,”²¹ but Wikipedia’s exact governance model is somewhat hard to describe. As the founder Jimmy Wales notes:

*Wikipedia is not an anarchy, though it has anarchistic features. Wikipedia is not a democracy, though it has democratic features. Wikipedia is not an aristocracy, though it has aristocratic features. Wikipedia is not a monarchy, though it has monarchical features.*²²

Wikipedia’s democratic, aristocratic and monarchistic elements come to fore when its power structure is more closely examined, while the anarchistic traits spring from its decision-making model. At the top of the pyramid is Jimmy Wales who bears a special title of the founder and has full access to all user rights²³. A special role of founder is common in FOSS projects, where it is often deemed preferable to the over-designed, complex system of rules (Reagle Jr. 2010, 133). Still, it must be noted that the autocratic founder’s role is kept in check in FOSS and similar projects by the abovementioned possibility of forking, so founders could not go far without acting in the best interests of the community. The Board of Trustees, currently consisting of nine elected members and Jimmy Wales in the role of permanent chairman emeritus, is the highest authority of Wikimedia foundation.²⁴ Among other

²⁰ “Contact us.” (*Wikimedia*, available at: http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Contact_us, accessed 24 September 2011).

²¹ “Wikipedia: What Wikipedia is not.” (*Wikimedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:What_Wikipedia_is_not#Community, accessed 6 October 2011).

²² Jimmy Wales, “Talk: Benevolent dictator.” (*Wikimedia*, available at: http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Talk:Benevolent_dictator, accessed 6 October 2011).

²³ “Wikipedia: User access levels.” (*Wikimedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:User_access_levels, accessed 6 October 2011).

²⁴ “Wikimedia Board of Trustees.” (*Wikimedia*, available at: http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Board_of_Trustees, accessed 6 October 2011).

things, it is responsible for oversight, raising and allocating resources, maintaining legal and ethical integrity of the project, and setting high level policies and long-term plans, but it is not to interfere in editorial policies, user disputes and day-to-day operations, except in emergencies. Settling disputes between the members is the job of the Arbitration committee, yet it is expected to act only in cases of the most serious disputes that the community itself was not able to resolve.²⁵

Below in the hierarchy are elected stewards who do not make any decisions, except in emergencies, but are responsible for implementing community decisions, mostly regarding user rights.²⁶ Similarly, bureaucrats are another type of users that only implement community decisions, however, not on all wikis run by Wikimedia foundation, but only on specific projects, such as Wikipedias in local languages, and they are mostly responsible for appointing administrators and other bureaucrats.²⁷ If a particular project does not have bureaucrats, stewards are expected to fulfil their roles.²⁸

Administrators, currently 1524 of them in English Wikipedia, are probably the most visible users with special authority since they are involved in day-to-day operations of Wikipedia.²⁹ They are the first line of defence against vandalism, and they have the power to lock, delete and restore pages and permanently or temporarily block troublesome users, but their special status does not give them any special authority in editorial disputes. In fact, they are expected not to use their administrative privileges in disputes in which they are personally involved.³⁰

At first glance, this all might look as a fairly standard organisational scheme where everybody has a place in a hierarchy, but Wikipedia's "anarchic" charter comes to fore once we realise that most of the special privileges are mostly designed to be used in extreme cases, while they are further softened by the requirements of consensus as Wikipedia's preferred

²⁵ "Wikipedia: Arbitration Committee." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Arbitration_Committee, accessed 6 October 2011).

²⁶ "Stewards." (*Wikimedia*, available at: <http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Steward>, accessed 6 October 2011).

²⁷ "Wikipedia: Bureaucrats." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Bureaucrats>, accessed 6 October 2011).

²⁸ "Stewards." (*Wikimedia*, available at: <http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Steward>, accessed 6 October 2011).

²⁹ "Wikipedia: Administrators." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Administrators>, accessed 7 October 2011).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

decision-making model in editorial disputes.³¹ This model was chosen as the community wishes to find the best possible solution, rather than find a solution quickly (Reagle Jr. 2010, 103), and indeed, some disputes such as Gdańsk/Danzig naming edit war took years to solve.³² Still, even if a consensus has already been reached, the community still reserves the right to change its mind, so all consensus policies are held as renegotiable (Reagle Jr. 2010, 104).

Voting results can be found on the administrative pages of some Wikipedia's entries, but Wikipedia makes it clear that "polling is not a substitute for discussion."³³ Instead, "it should prompt and shape discussion, rather than terminate it" (Reagle Jr. 2010, 110). Polling is therefore used only in long lasting disputes, primarily to determine the dominant view point in the debate which should serve as the starting point for reaching consensus. This is because Wikipedia believes that polling might undermine its policies of verifiability, notability and neutrality, that it could encourage group-think, render the result permanently binding and discourage consensus, while in a poll the best solution might not be even offered as one of the options.³⁴

Aggregation of public opinion?

Perhaps one of the more interesting and significant questions regarding Wikipedia is that of the nature of its content. Its co-founder, Larry Sanger, claims that Wikipedia's entries are essentially an aggregation of public opinion (Sanger 2007), and that view is even more critically upheld by Jaron Lanier who claimed that Wikipedia and Web 2.0 (also known as the Social Web) is giving rise to a new online collectivism or "Digital Maoism", as he referred to it in the title of his article (Lanier 2006). In Larry Sanger's opinion, this represents a change in the politics of knowledge since the power of

³¹ "Wikipedia: Consensus." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Consensus>, accessed 7 October 2011).

³² For further information see: Lih 2009, 121-132.

³³ "Wikipedia: Polling is not a substitute for discussion." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Polling_is_not_a_substitute_for_discussion, accessed 7 October 2011).

³⁴ "Wikipedia: Polling is not a substitute for discussion." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Polling_is_not_a_substitute_for_discussion, accessed 7 October 2011).

determining the background knowledge or society, or what is known about a certain subject, has been shifted into the hands of a new group of people:

The politics of knowledge has changed tremendously over the years. In the Middle Ages, we were told what we knew by the Church; after the printing press and the Reformation, by state censors and the licensors of publishers; with the rise of liberalism in the 19th and 20th centuries, by publishers themselves, and later by broadcast media—in any case, by a small, elite group of professionals.

But we are now confronting a new politics of knowledge, with the rise of the Internet and particularly of the collaborative Web — the Blogosphere, Wikipedia, Digg, YouTube, and in short every website and type of aggregation that invites all comers to offer their knowledge and their opinions, and to rate content, products, places, and people. It is particularly the aggregation of public opinion that instituted this new politics of knowledge. (Sanger 2007)

This would suggest that occupational and epistemic leadership roles of experts are threatened by Wikipedia, but even Larry Sanger ruled out that option since Wikipedia's own policies support inclusion of expert opinions as they require claims in an entry to be backed up by reliable scholarly sources (Sanger 2009, 62). Additionally, original research is explicitly forbidden on Wikipedia, while a tendency noted by Wikipedia's co-founder Jimmy Wales, most often in articles on history, that some editors "produce novel narratives and historical interpretations with citation to primary sources to back up their interpretation of events"³⁵, is also addressed by the same policy. "No original research" policy requires editors not to combine sources "to reach or imply a conclusion not explicitly stated by any of the sources".³⁶

Arguments that Wikipedia incites hive mind and aggregation of public opinion also fail to take into account the way in which Wikipedia's entries

³⁵ Jimmy Wales in "Wikipedia: No original research (draft rewrite 5th December 2004 to 5th February -2005)." (*Wikipedia*, available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:No_original_research_\(draft_rewrite_5th_December_2004_to_5th_February_2005\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:No_original_research_(draft_rewrite_5th_December_2004_to_5th_February_2005)), accessed 12 November 2011).

³⁶ "Wikipedia: No original research." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:No_original_research, accessed 12 November 2011).

are written and its policy of consensus. Rather than being an aggregation of public opinion, Wikipedia's entries are a product of "unending argumentation" since "(t)he articles grow not from harmonious thought but from constant scrutiny and emendation" (Shirky 2008, 139). In his research on Wikipedia's entries dealing with historical topics, Roy Rosenzweig has also concluded that Wikipedia seems to rather debunk than embrace conspiracy theories commonly found in popular history, and he also attributed that to the way in which these entries are written (Rosenzweig 2006, 131).

METHODOLOGY

This inquiry falls within domain of historical research as its goal is to show the nature of the discourse on Europe on Wikipedia, i.e. how it has come about, how it has developed, and what rules govern it. However, while most historians prefer the period- or event-based approach (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 60), due to the object of this study, it will be better to opt for the less commonly used problem-based approach. Additionally, unlike traditional historical research which aims to establish relationships of meaning between specific facts and events (Foucault 2010, 7), by utilizing discourse analysis informed by the work of French scholar Michel Foucault, this study will try to avoid the simplification of the discourse on Europe on Wikipedia to the stories of causality, and will instead attempt to present it in all its specificity. Thus, rather than being a study of “culture-as-meaning”, it is a study of “culture-as-management” or “culture-as-administration,” to put it in Gavin Kendall’s and Gary Wickham’s terms.³⁷ “Culture-as-management” approach is highly appropriate for examination of the discourse on Europe on Wikipedia since Wikipedia, like any other encyclopaedia, is a tertiary source, so it does not create new knowledge, but rather collects and organises information from secondary sources (Turabian 2007, 27).

However, the problem with Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis is that Michel Foucault did not provide a coherent methodological framework (Pentzold and Seidenglanz 2006, 62), while many of his followers have embraced “a ‘Foucauldianistic’ reticence to declare method” [original emphasis] (Graham 2005, 1). Still, by familiarizing ourselves with Foucault’s work and his notions of the ‘discourse’, ‘archaeology/genealogy’, and the ‘statement’, it will be possible to develop an adequate approach for analysing the discourse on Europe on Wikipedia, and modify Foucault’s understanding of discourse to suit the purpose of this study.

³⁷ See: Kendall and Wickham 2003, 116-142.

Discourse

Among numerous ways of doing discourse analysis, three prominent approaches stand out. While the formal approach is mainly concerned with language, and the empirical approach deals with discourse as human conversation (McHoul and Grace 2002, 27), Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis is concerned with bodies of knowledge and it is geared towards showing “the historically specific relations between disciplines (defined as bodies of knowledge) and disciplinary practices (forms of social control and social possibility)” (McHoul and Grace 2002, 26). In other words, Foucauldian discourse analysis approaches groups of statements surrounding certain subjects in the specific time and place in which they exist, and examines how they relate to each other, how the wider social context determines in which terms can the subject be thought of, and how new statements made about the subject affect the context in which they exist – whether they reinforce or transform it.

In his influential book *The Order of Things*, Foucault studied parallel development of several scientific disciplines in the European cultural context from the sixteenth century onwards, in an attempt to show that in each period “the laws of a certain code of knowledge” determined what can be considered universal truth (Foucault 1994, IX-X). In his other works, such as *The History of Madness*, *Discipline and Punish*, or *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault used the same notion of truth as socially constructed and determined to exemplify how sciences produce rather than discover certain types of personalities, such as criminals, concepts for understanding them, such as criminality, and forms of materiality, such as prison, which reinforce each other (Gutting 2011). The notion of discourse is in the centre of his inquiry, as it determines the boundaries of thinking about a specific phenomenon (Mills 1997, 17). Similarly, this research will draw on Foucault’s notion of relativity of truth and his understanding of discourse in order to investigate limits of thought about Europe in English Wikipedia, and the rules that establish those boundaries. Nevertheless, Foucauldian discourse analysis was designed for the study of entire scientific disciplines, hence, it needs some modifications in order to be applicable in the context of this research which aims to examine the discourse on Europe only in one limited domain of its existence. Therefore, the rest of this section will examine Foucault’s notion of discourse in more detail, and propose adjustments to it where necessary.

Michel Foucault himself admits that his notion of discourse is somewhat a fluid concept as he defines it “sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualisable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements” (Foucault 2010, 80). This means that the term “discourse” as “the general domain of all statements” might refer to all meaningful utterances that are effective in the real world (Pentzold and Seidenglanz 2006, 62). Thus, all the statements that bear some meaning and produce some effects in the real world together form a discourse. This is a very broad notion of discourse which, as Sara Mills notes, Foucault used only when he was analysing the very concept of discourse at the theoretical level (Mills 1997, 7). On the other hand, his second definition is far more specific. It states that discourse can be defined as “an individualisable group of statements,” “if one can show how they all derive (in spite of their sometimes extreme diversity, and in spite of their dispersion through time) from the same set of relations” (Foucault 2010, 68). In other words, discourse is conceived as group of statements which are constructed under and are subjugated to the same cluster of discursive rules, and they, therefore, form more specific discourses, such as a discourse on sexuality, a discourse on schooling or, in the case of this research, Wikipedia’s discourse on Europe. Foucault’s third definition of the term “discourse” highlights its productive character as its practices form human subjects and institutions (McHoul and Grace 2002, 38). For example, discourse on Europe produces (and transforms) Europeans, European culture, European values, European countries and so on. Therefore “discursive practices are delimiting the field of objects, defining a legitimate perspective and fixing the norms for the elaboration of concepts” (Pentzold and Seidenglanz 2006, 62). They set the conditions under which we think of concepts and consequently limit what we can think about them.

It is of utmost importance to note that, according to Foucault, discourses cannot be separated from their particular historical positions since they are discontinuous (McHoul and Grace 2002m 31). As Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace note: “Historically specific discourses (for example, medicine in the nineteenth century) are quite distinct from one another as well as from earlier and later versions of ‘themselves’ which may or may not have the same names” (McHoul and Grace 2002, 31). This means that, as new statements are introduced in the context, they slowly, or sometimes radically, change the context in which they themselves exist and, most importantly, the rules that guide formation and transformation of statements. Therefore, over a

period of time, they can become so radically different that we can no longer speak of the same discourse.

Additionally, Foucault does not use historically specific versions of discourses to establish relationships of progress or regress between them, but to “to help us see that the present is just as strange as the past, not to help us see that a sensible or desirable present has emerged (...) or might emerge” (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 4). This is because Foucault does not see the truth as something that can be known in absolute terms, but rather as a choice made by a society (Mills 1997, 18-19). It has often been argued, both before and after Foucault, that we do not have direct access to real, concrete objects, but only to their representations (Webb 2009, 6). Still, even though Foucault also sees the truth as something that is socially constructed rather than naturally given, his notion of discourse should not be confused with that of the representation (McHoul and Grace 2002, 34), since he does not try to only examine how ascertain “truth” is represented in specific discourses. He goes well beyond that to discover the set of discursive rules that enabled that certain “truth” to be considered as such. As McHoul and Grace put it, when contemporary discourses are examined in their exact historical position:

They are relativized or pluralized so that they no longer seem to have unique access to truth. Truth becomes a function of what can be said, written or thought. And Foucault's project becomes one of exposing the historical specificity – the sheer fact that things could have been otherwise – of what we seem to know today with certainty (McHoul and Grace 2002, 33).

This is highly relevant to any discourse on Europe in any context. Not only has its general identity never been clearly defined (Blockmans 2003, 17), but its eastern geographical borders have constantly been on the move as well (Pagden 2002, 47). Therefore, determining the truth about Europe (and whether Wikipedia is telling the truth about Europe) would be – to a large extent, if not entirely – an impossible enterprise. Hence, in this research, it would be far more appropriate to focus, in Foucauldian manner, on what, at a certain period of time, can be said about Europe in its Wikipedia's entry.

Additionally, before moving on to more technical details of doing Foucauldian discourse analysis, it is important to take into account one more notion Foucault's discourse analysis relies heavily upon – that of the statement. In a way, statements can be regarded as units of discourse, but it must be

emphasised that they are not fixed elements. As Foucault puts it: “statement ... is not in itself a unit, but a function that cuts across a domain of structures and possible unities, and which reveals them, with concrete contents, in time and space” (Foucault 2010, 87). This means that, during the analysis, statements can neither be separated from the context in which they operate, nor from the function they perform, because in a discourse they only exist in relation to one another, and they together determine what can be said about a specific topic in the discourse (McHoul and Grace 2002, 38). This is also the reason why they cannot be regarded as fixed elements – if the context or their function changes, statements change as well, even when their form remains the same. Also, it must be noted, non-verbal expressions should be considered statements as well, as long as they are part of the knowledge (McHoul and Grace 2002, 37). This means that in analysing the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia, the research should take into consideration not only sentences written about Europe, but also maps, tables, classificatory schemes, photographs, hyper-links, and references. Thus, to conclude, in the context of Wikipedia, statements should be defined as written or visual formulations inseparable from their own place and time and their functions which enable discursive rules to be effective.

Archaeology/Genealogy

Archaeology is Foucault’s method for “describing discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive” (Foucault 2010, 131), the archive being defined as “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements” (Foucault 2010, 130). Therefore, we can say that archaeology is the method of describing discourses as practices determined in their general system of the formation and transformation of statements, in the context whose rules determine whether a statement will be accepted, rejected or modified. But before we get into the technical know-how of archaeology, it is essential to further clarify Foucault’s the notion of the archive.

From the quoted definition, it is clear that for Foucault the archive is more than just a collection of text and other data. Those are rather just materials that enable us to reveal the archive as a historically very specific context consisting of the set of rules which, at the time and place, determine in which terms we can think about something and what will be considered as the truth about it (McHoul and Grace 2002, 31). As the statements cannot

be separated from their context and the discursive rules, the archive must contain them as well.

Archaeological investigation falls within the domain of general history which, contrary to total history,³⁸ does not seek to bring forward unity, but is focused on the detail, complexity, and multifarious relations between entities (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 4). Because of this particular orientation, according to Kendall and Wickham, archaeological research is obliged to act in accordance with the two following principles:

- In seeking to provide no more than a description of regularities, differences, transformations, and so on, archaeological research is non-interpretive.
- In eschewing the search for authors and concentrating instead on statements (and visibilities), archaeological research is non-anthropological. (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 25-26)

While description of regularities, differences, transformations, and other similar processes is a sort of interpretation as well, here it should be stressed that Foucauldian discourse analysis is non-interpretive in a way that it does not seek to find deeper hidden meanings behind the studied processes, apart from the set of rules that guide them. Similarly, in its attempt to be non-anthropological, discourse analysis is trying to avoid the search for a deeper meaning in personal motives of subjects that have, for instance, introduced a statement to the discourse (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 26). This is because a statement will ultimately be kept, rejected or transformed due to the rules that shape the discourse, not because a specific human being that stands behind it.

Both of these two principles are quite appropriate to the study of the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia. Since one could hardly say what the truth about Europe is, it is better to concentrate on the process of defining Europe and avoid making judgements about whether what has already been defined is true, as the former principle requires. On the other hand,

³⁸ Kendall and Wickham use the terms “general” and “total history” to highlight the distinction Foucault has made between his and a more traditional approach to history. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* -Foucault argues that traditional history divides past events into long periods of time and, by seeking -continuities, tries to reveal stable structures and unity beneath the shifts and ruptures. His approach, on the other hand, by seeking discontinuities reveals complex and changeable relationships between -the studied objects. For further information, see: Michel Foucault 2010, 3-6.

the requirement of the latter principle to focus on statements, not authors, is not only a choice, but a necessity in the process of researching Wikipedia. Even though Wikipedia enables its users to create their profiles, the quality of data they provide is uneven, while some of the profiles are left completely blank. Therefore, these profiles cannot provide quantitative data on the geographic distribution, gender balance, age, attained education level and cultural background of people that edited the entry, which would enable us to make any generalisations. The same stands for users' Internet Protocol (IP) addresses. Even when not faked, IP addresses are usually not static but dynamic, meaning that a single Internet user might get a different one every time he or she connects to the Internet, and this kind of approach is even further complicated by the fact that Wikipedia keeps records of IP addresses of its users only for a period of one month in order to protect their privacy.³⁹

In addition to abovementioned analytical principles, Kendall and Wickham were able to define seven goals that an archaeological inquiry should attempt to accomplish:

- to chart the relation between the sayable and the visible;
- to analyse the relation between one statement and other statements;
- to formulate rules for the repeatability of statements (or, if you like, the use of statements);
- to analyse the positions which are established between subjects (...) in regard to statements;
- to describe 'surfaces of emergence' - places within which objects are designated and acted upon;
- to describe 'institutions', which acquire authority and provide limits within which discursive objects may act or exist;
- to describe 'forms of specification', which refer to the ways in which discursive objects are targeted. A 'form of specification' is a system for understanding a particular phenomenon with the aim of relating it to other phenomena. (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 26)

The second and the third goal are quite clear. They require examination of relationships between the statements and their functions in the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia. The seventh goal, on the other

³⁹ Miloš Rančić's e-mail to the author, 26 September 2011.

hand, merits some further explanation. Kendall and Wickham use the term “forms of specification” to assert that scholarship provides a series of terms and concepts which determine the ways in which a specific phenomenon can be understood (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 28). For instance, in the discourse on Europe, such concepts are continents, civilization, culture, and others. They are very important since they have the principal role in determining in which terms Europe can be thought of in English Wikipedia and, therefore, such concepts cannot be neglected in this research.

However, since this inquiry is limited to only one of the domains, or one ‘surface of emergence’, of the discourse on Europe – that in Wikipedia – it will not focus on the goals that heavily depend on the power of discourse to produce subjects, as these are not products of just this particular domain of the discourse, but of the general discourse on Europe in its totality. Thus, this research will not try to accomplish the first goal, charting of the relationship between what has been said about Europe in English Wikipedia and how it affects the reality of Europe. Because of the same reason the fourth goal, which requires examination of the way in which subjects and the statements that produce them interact, is irrelevant in the context of this study as well. Similarly, the sixth goal cannot be taken into consideration since it is also heavily dependent on the power of discourse to produce subjects. Kendall and Wickham argue that subjects are also shaped by the institutional setting in which they are allowed to exist, and which determine the mode of their existence – for instance, in the discourse on schooling, arrangements of architectural features of schools largely determine the ways in which different subjects (such as pupils, teacher or principals) can interact and what positions they may take in relation to each other (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 27-28). Likewise, to name one example, visa regimes limit the ways in which Europeans can interact with each other and non-Europeans, but since Wikipedia hardly has any power over them, this issue is not relevant for this inquiry.

Genealogy is, according to Foucault, a successor of archaeology and it, correspondingly, contains many of its essential elements, including the analysis of corpuses of statements in the archive (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 28). Hence, it should be rather regarded as a “strategic development of archaeological research” because it is a technique that enables researchers to link archaeology to our present concerns (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 29). This development has made Foucauldian discourse analysis

more critical since, it is argued, once we reveal the details of the discourse that defines what we can be and what we can think at this specific point of time, it will become easier to think and exist in other ways (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 31).

This new dose of criticism was enabled by the shift of focus of Foucault's later 'genealogical' work towards the embeddedness of discourses in material practices, and the comprehension of them as a form of power/knowledge that forms and transforms subjects (Caldwell 2007, 772-773). Nevertheless, as the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia is just one of the domains of the general discourse on Europe, its power to affect materiality of the phenomena it analyses is extremely limited, and it therefore cannot be understood as a form of power/knowledge. It is just knowledge that is hardly in a position to exercise any power and, hence, Foucault's understanding of the connectedness of knowledge and power is not useful in the context of this research, and it will not be examined here.⁴⁰

On the other hand, another difference between archaeology and genealogy this research could benefit from lies in the way they approach discourse and in what they put in the focus of their inquiry. While archaeology reveals a relatively static snapshot of the relationships and functions of statements in a discourse, genealogy is more geared towards examining its processual character, towards analysing the way in which these relationships and functions of statements change as the discourse progresses and new statements become part of it (Pentzold and Seidenglanz 2006, 64). This is a very important modification of focus this study will need to utilise in order to exploit the fact that Wikipedia's entries are never considered finished. Instead, they are constantly expanded and rewritten, so it is important to pay attention to the processual character of the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia and highlight the most important changes it has gone through.

⁴⁰ Foucault has developed such an elaborate understanding of the relationship between power and -knowledge that its full explication could not be given within the limited space of this study. Besides, -it is not of high relevance to this research. For further information on Foucault's understanding of -knowledge/power see: McHoul and Grace 2002, 55-90; Kendall and Wickham 2003, 47-56.

Kendall's and Wickham's five steps to doing Foucauldian discourse analysis

In their book on using Foucault's methods Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham proposed five steps that one should undertake in doing Foucauldian discourse analysis, while Christian Pentzold and Sebastian Seidenglanz showed that it is possible to apply them in the context of Wikipedia (Pentzold and Seidenglanz 2006, 64). However, it must be noted that these five steps are guidelines rather than thoroughly defined methodological steps. In fact, Kendall's and Wickham's steps are not even designed to be performed successively one after the other, but are rather principles that should be kept in mind throughout the entire process of doing discourse analysis. This is because of the poststructuralist belief that any analysis is unavoidably interpretative, and that, when examining a certain problem, different elements can be always combined in a number of ways to highlight different aspects of it (Graham 2005, 3-4). Therefore, Foucauldian discourse analysis needs to be flexible in order to accomplish its particular goal. Additionally, I would argue, flexibility is also necessary because of the very nature of discourses themselves. As new statements are being incorporated, the discourse keeps evolving, so the rules governing formation and transformation of statements change as well, to the extent that over a period of time the discourse might end up being drastically different from its earlier versions of itself. Hence, such developments should be anticipated, and research methodology needs to remain flexible in order to properly accommodate the relatively unstable nature of discourses.

Nevertheless, a study should not go to the other extreme and become an unsystematic speculation either. In this regard, Kendall's and Wickham's five methodological steps offer an adequate dose of scientific rigour, which, at the same time, accommodates the flexibility demands of Foucauldian discourse analysis. Therefore, those five steps will be used as the basis for defining the methodology of this research, and they are as follows:

- recognition of a discourse as a corpus of 'statements' whose organisation is regular and systematic. (...);
- identification of rules of the production of statements;
- identification of rules that delimit the sayable (which of course are never rules of closure);
- identification of rules that create the spaces in which new statements can be made;

- identification of rules that ensure that a practice is material and discursive at the same time (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 42).

As it has already been shown in the analysis of Wikipedia's collaborative culture in the previous chapter that production of statements in this free encyclopedia is regular and systematic, the completion of the first step would only require a selection of a feasible corpus of data from Wikipedia that can be examined in a single research (Pentzold and Seidenglanz 2006, 64). English version of his free encyclopaedia hosts such an astonishing number of entries on Europe-related topics that could, perhaps, be sufficient for an entire academic career. Therefore, the task of examining all that is or can be said about Europe on Wikipedia cannot be dealt with within a single research. Having in mind the nature of encyclopaedic effort that, more or less, aims to bring forward what is essential, or at least important about a certain topic, it would be natural to select the main article on Europe on Wikipedia for the research. Apart from the entry itself,⁴¹ it also contains the history of its revisions,⁴² and a discussion page about the entry.⁴³

However, once again we should remind ourselves that, unlike an entry in a traditional encyclopedia, Wikipedia's entry is written in a form of 'post-Gutenbergish' hypertext, so it is important to note that it is not designed to be read lineally. Quite contrary, it encourages non-linear narration and branching of content by enabling users to continue their reading elsewhere by activating a hyperlink (Stakić 2009, 62a). Still, this does not mean that all articles hyperlinked in the main entry on Europe should be examined since it cannot be said that all of these hyperlinks lead to pages that deal with topics highly relevant to the overall notion of Europe. For instance, just to list a few, the main entry on Europe provides links to articles on other continents, historical figures, abstract ideas, to pages that define geological terms, and so on. Besides, encyclopaedic discourse requires us to stay focused on what Wikipedia finds to be important about Europe.

⁴¹ "Europe" (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe>, accessed 15 December 2011).

⁴² "Revision history of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&action=history>, accessed 15 December 2011).

⁴³ "Talk: Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe>, accessed 6 January 2012).

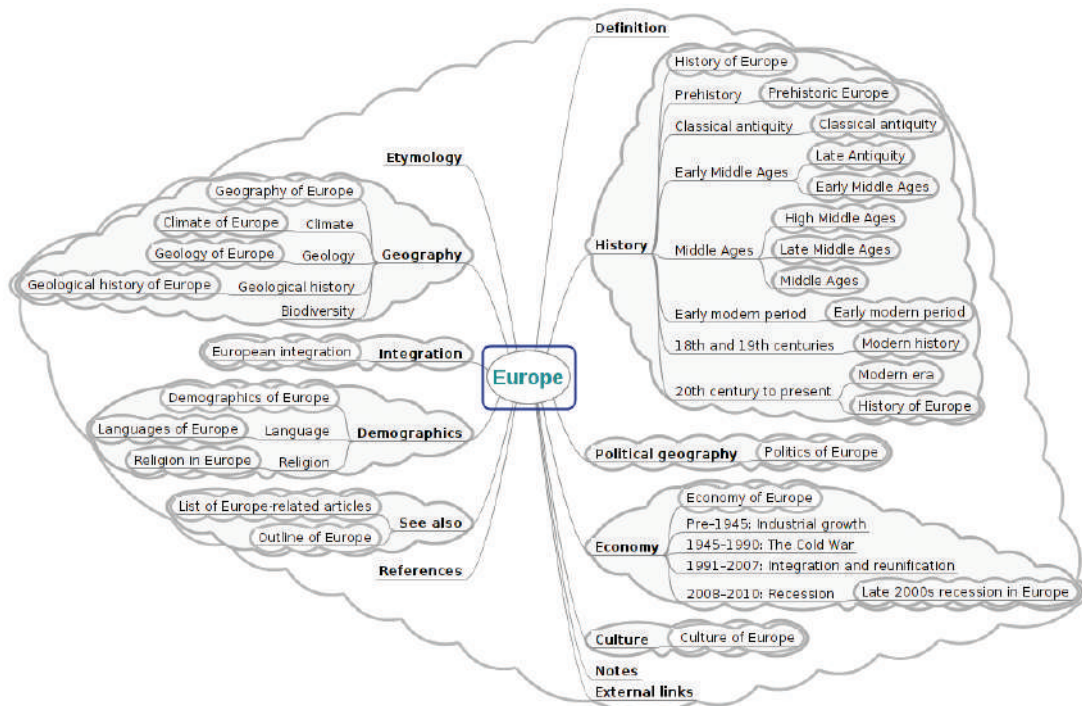


Chart 1: Text written in bold letters represents different sections of the entry. Grey clouds signify that a section has developed one or more child entries. White clouds within grey clouds highlight direct derivatives of the main entry on Europe that will be taken into account in this research. Grey clouds within grey clouds designate indirect derivatives that fall outside of the scope of this study.

Source: Image by author.

Hence, this research will concentrate on pages that are *themselves* a part of the main entry on Europe. It is common in Wikipedia for accounts on certain sections of entries to develop considerably enough, so that they become disproportionate to the other sections. In such cases, those sections are usually granted their own entries where they continue to be developed, while the entry they originated from retains just a summary of now ‘independent’ entry, while pointing to it. Preliminary research for this study has shown that entries can be linked in such a way even if they have separate origins. Nevertheless, the result is the same – when an entry becomes recognised as a sub-entry of the more general article, summary of the specialised entry gets

added as a section to the more general one, and their further development becomes closely connected. Hyperlinks to pages that should be treated as an integral part of the main entry on Europe can be easily recognised as each of the entry segments that evolved into ‘separate’ articles is designated by the mark “main entry” accompanied by a hyperlink at its beginning. Still, development of some of the sections-turned-entries has progressed even further, enough to bring about a new set of entries. For instance, in the case of the entry of Europe in English Wikipedia, a segment on history of Europe, besides its ‘independent article’, engendered the following entries as well: Prehistoric Europe, Classical Antiquity, Late Antiquity, Middle Ages, Early Middle Ages, High Middle Ages, Late Middle Ages, Early Modern Period, and so on.⁴⁴ However, including these articles in the study would lead this research astray from its goal. Therefore, indirect derivatives of the main entry on Europe will have to be excluded from the inquiry which will, instead, focus on the following direct derivatives: History of Europe,⁴⁵ Geography of Europe,⁴⁶ Politics of Europe,⁴⁷ European Integration,⁴⁸ Economy of Europe,⁴⁹ Demographics of Europe,⁵⁰ and Culture of Europe.⁵¹ (For detailed structure of the entry see Chart 1).

The second of Wickham’s and Kendall’s steps is fairly simple and it requires, as the names suggest, the identification of rules governing the production of statements (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 31). In their research, Pentzold and Seidenglanz have discovered that organization of the discourse they have studied in Wikipedia’s collaborative culture follows the regularities named by Foucault – succession, coexistence, and procedures of intervention

⁴⁴ See: “History of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Europe, accessed 15 December 2011).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ “Geography of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Europe, accessed 15 December 2011).

⁴⁷ “Politics of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Europe, accessed 15 December 2011).

⁴⁸ “European integration.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_integration, accessed 15 December 2011).

⁴⁹ “Economy of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Europe, accessed 15 December 2011).

⁵⁰ “Demographics of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Europe, accessed 15 December 2011).

⁵¹ “Culture of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Europe, accessed 15 December 2011).

(Pentzold and Seidenglanz 2006, 64-65). In this research, these regularities will be sought for by examining what was added, removed or transformed in the beforehand selected entries. From the changes that occurred over the time and comments explaining them, it will be possible to discern the rules for the production of statements. Preliminary research has shown that a vast number of these rules are fairly technical – for instance, spelling of the words should be correct, a table should be properly formatted, while added image needs be published under a compatible copyright license. Such technical rules do not heavily affect the meaning of the entry, so they will be disregarded. On the other hand, Wikipedia's policy of neutrality or the rule that prohibits original research is far more consequential for the content of the entry, and this inquiry will focus on such rules instead.

The third step, the identification of rules that delimit the sayable, is the natural continuation of the second step since the identification of rules that delimit the sayable already, to some extent, identifies rules that restrict what can be said in a certain discourse (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 43-44). As Pentzold and Seidenglanz argue, every discursive practice has its own internal rules that delimit the sayable, and the aim of investigation, in this regard, should be to examine the levels and functions of conflict in a discourse (Pentzold and Seidenglanz 2006, 65). Foucault himself points out that different levels of dissention may serve several functions in a discourse, among which he emphasises the additional development of the enunciative field, the reorganization of the discursive field and the critical role of contradictions to evoke self-reflection of the discourse or, in Foucault's words: "put into operation the 'acceptability' of the discursive practice" (Foucault 2010, 154-155). Therefore, by examining discussion pages, comments accompanying edits, and especially edit wars in the selected Wikipedia's articles, this study will aim to identify points of disagreement about Europe in English Wikipedia, and investigate how the resolution of conflicts has affected the understanding of the term "Europe" – whether it has made it more complex or concrete, inclusive or exclusive, and so on – and what the impact of changes across different sections of the entry was. Arguably, this is the most important methodological guideline in this research since it is better positioned to reveal the nature of discourse than any of the other methodological steps. For instance, while uncovering the rules that govern production of statements might, in some cases, only reveal that those rules, in fact, exist; conflicts in the discourse quite often lead to examination and re-evaluation and, ultimately, to confirmation or substitution of those rules. Therefore, in

the process of disputation that arises in such situations, *raison d'être* of particular rules in the discourse is much more clearly revealed.

The fourth step, the identification of rules that create the spaces in which new statements can be made, is closely related to the second one as well. As Kendall and Wickham put it: "In discussing the rules by which the statements which make up each of these discourses were and are produced, we are also, almost tautologically, discussing the rules by which new statements are made" (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 44). Still, it differs from the second step since its investigation has a different focus. The fourth step requires a researcher to focus on the novelty of newly produced statements, while the second one has the rules of production of new statements in its focus. (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 44). As a result, the aim of this methodological step is to investigate the inventiveness of discourses, "the way they invent new forms of person, like the mentally ill and the criminal, and the way they invent new categories for understanding human nature, like sexuality" (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 44-45). However, Wikipedia, as an encyclopaedia, is a tertiary source of information, and such sources, by definition, do not seek to produce new statements but just to sum up and organise those that have already been produced. Wikipedia's "No original research" policy clearly prohibits introduction of statements that have not already been made elsewhere.⁵² Because of that, I assume, Pentazold and Seidenglanz have not included this step in their proposed methodology for analysing discourses on Wikipedia. Still, the fact that certain rules exist does not mean that they are indiscriminately followed. After all, one of its rules is to ignore all the rules.⁵³ Therefore, we can assume that there is some space for inventiveness of discourses on Wikipedia, albeit extremely limited. It can be easily identified in cases in which a statement has been introduced without a reference to a secondary source to accompany it.

The fifth step, the identification of rules that ensure that a practice is material and discursive at the same time, cannot be utilised in this research because it requires an investigation of the complex web in which the discourse on Europe and material practices related to it, such as European integration, identity building and so on, reinforce each other (Kendall and Wickham 2003, 45). Since discourse on Europe on Wikipedia is only one part of the

⁵² "Wikipedia: No original research." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:No_original_research, accessed 12 November 2011).

⁵³ "Wikipedia: Ignore all rules." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Ignore_all_rules, accessed 22 September 2011).

general discourse on Europe, it is not in a position to form and transform material practices alone.

Method for analysing visual content

Even though Foucault and his followers claim that visual material should be considered one of the components of a discourse, none of them seem to offer concrete strategy for its analysis. It goes without saying that it should be somehow translated to text, but the question of how exactly that should be done remains. In an attempt to answer it, methodology of the History of Art comes as a natural starting point. There, Erwin Panofsky's iconographical method stands out as the most promising solution since it takes into account both the subject matter and formal aspects of visual images.

This method is neatly divided into three successive stages: pre-iconographical, iconographical, and iconological (Pooke and Newall 2008, 68-69). In the first stage, configurations of lines and colours on a canvas or, in the case of this study, differently coloured pixels on a screen, are identified as natural forms such as humans, hats, flowers, or screwdrivers, for instance (Panofsky 2009, 221). During the second phase of analysis, these natural forms are brought into connection with text and recognised as artistic motifs, and specific arrangements of artistic motifs are finally recognised as themes and concepts (Panofsky 2009, 221-222). Therefore, for example, it can be concluded that three male figures fighting with a sea serpents represent Laocoon and his sons. In this examination, the completion of this stage will be fairly easy as well since the texts for unlocking visual materials are given right beside them. At the last, iconological stage, the specific way in which themes and concepts are represented in a work of art is brought into relation with the civilization or/and epoch in which it was created in order to bring forward its intrinsic meaning, or "underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion" (Panofsky 2009, 222). Thus, by examining the way in which, for instance, a Nativity scene is painted, we can determine whether it belongs to Catholic or Orthodox Christian tradition.

Needless to say, the third, iconological step is not compatible with Foucauldian discourse analysis since it aims to discover the actual meaning of an image within its larger social and historical framework (Pooke and Newall 2008, 69). In fact, Panofsky has even explicitly stated that he has chosen the

suffix 'logy' to emphasise that his method is interpretative (Panofsky 2009, 223), as opposed to the older iconography, which is rather descriptive. Yet, this step shows that a researcher can, and should, go beyond iconography since formal characteristics of a work of art, such as composition of motifs, can provide additional information that cannot be discovered by a simple iconographical analysis.

In order not to lose that information, while being compliant with the requirements of Foucauldian discourse analysis, the last step will have to be modified. The inquiry will take into account not only *what* is being represented, but also *how* it is represented. For instance, a map showing geographical distribution of languages in Europe can be drawn in a way that just represents dominant languages by countries, in can highlight different regional dialects of these languages as well, or it can depict the distribution of European languages regardless of state borders on a map that may or may not contain these borders, and so on. Hence, images will be compared with the text they accompany, and if it happens that the images provide some additional information, this will be simply translated into text and treated as an ordinary component of the discourse.

Additional remarks

Over the course of roughly ten years of its existence, only Wikipedia's main entry on Europe itself has been edited more than 8500 times.⁵⁴ While it might appear that investigation of such an enormous amount of data would require sampling, in practice, that is not the case. Wikipedia comes equipped with the "diff" tool that automates the process of comparing two versions of an entry by highlighting the differences between them, i.e. additions, deletions or modifications of content (Lih 2009, 74). This tool makes the analysis of page history much easier and, therefore, eliminates the need for employing some sort of sampling technique. Thanks to this, all the contents created within the boundaries set up by this study will be examined in their entirety.

Additionally, for the sake of better organization of research, a two-step approach will be employed while reading the material. Firstly, revisions will

⁵⁴ "Europe - Article revision statistics." (*X!'s tools*, available at: <http://toolserver.org/~soxred93/articleinfo/index.php?article=Europe&lang=en&wiki=wikipedia>, accessed 18 December 2011).

be read chronologically and significant contingent developments will be noted. While doing so, edits will be divided into different themes corresponding to sections of Wikipedia's entry on Europe that will be studied together. From the moment when a single section engenders its own derivative entry, it will be taken into account as well. This two-step approach will bring more clarity to the research by analysing content according to different categories, but it will not neglect important contingent developments that cut across separate themes.

Lastly, since this research is based on Wikipedia's own administrative records – namely entry's discussion and history pages – it is required to take into consideration the original purpose of collecting this set of data and determine whether it is compatible with the purpose for which it will be used in the study (Hakim 2000, 51-52). Given that these administrative records are meticulously kept, primarily in order to provide a detailed account of the development of Wikipedia's entry on Europe, and that this is exactly what they will be used for in this research, we can conclude that there should be no compatibility issues to overcome in this regard.

DISCOURSE ON EUROPE IN ENGLISH WIKIPEDIA

This segment represents the core of the research as it is the place where Foucauldian discourse analysis will be applied on the entry Europe in English Wikipedia. Since the goal of the study is to determine the specificity of the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia, only the statements that produced changes to knowledge presented in the entry have been taken into consideration⁵⁵ and not more general rules governing production of statements on Wikipedia. For the sake of better organization, results of the inquiry will be presented in themes that, according to Wikipedia, highlight the most important categories for understanding what Europe is. Each of these categories occupies a dedicated section in the main entry on Europe, and majority of them are also further discussed in Wikipedia's specialised articles bearing the same name. In this research, the sections of the main entry and their corresponding specialised articles will be analysed together since each of these pairs deals with a specific issue. Additionally, preliminary research has shown that vandalism and visual materials also play a role in this discourse, so these two themes will be examined as well.

Definition of Europe

Even though it is rather short, the section of the main entry on Europe dealing with its definition is of highest importance in the discourse since changes in it greatly affect the entire article. The debate on whether Europe is a continent or something else and where its borders lie was incredibly intense – to the extent that it has occasionally been conducted in various places simultaneously, and in a few instances some of its participants have

⁵⁵ Even though the number of edits is extremely high, a vast majority of them did not actually change the content of the entry, just the form. For instance, in such edits grammatical and spelling mistakes were corrected, width and height of tables and images adjusted, font size or paragraph indentation changed, and so on.

completely lost their civility and resorted to swearing and name-calling. Additionally, one of the most common types of vandalism was replacing the entire entry with a statement that Europe is not a continent. Moreover, this debate spilled over to the sections on physical and political geography, and therefore some of the statements from these sections need to be analysed together with the section that defines Europe.

All the debates related to this issue stemmed from the fact that contributors were unable to decide whether continents are geophysical, socio-political or cultural entities. The first version of the entry presented Europe as something that is rather unproblematic: "Continent stretching from the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Ural Mountains in the east. From the Mediterranean Sea in to the south to the North Pole. With Asia, Europe forms the super continent Eurasia: Europe is the western fifth of the Eurasian landmass."⁵⁶ Nevertheless, neither a reference nor a rationale were given to accompany this definition, but its consequence was that Cyprus and Transcaucasian countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) were left out from the list of European countries⁵⁷ as they did not fit within the defined borders.⁵⁸ However, this definition did not have a long life in the entry on Europe. Already in mid-2002, the abovementioned countries were added to the list.⁵⁹ Then it was highlighted that Europe does not have clearly defined borders and that, therefore, determining which countries are European depends on how these borders are drawn.

The real debate about what Europe actually is and, consequently, where its borders lie, started in early 2004, when some of the users started questioning whether it is a continent at all.⁶⁰ The side supporting this point of view argued that Europe is not considered as a continent in many non-European cultures⁶¹ and the English entry started being compared to entries in

⁵⁶ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&olddid=248756>, last modified 1 October 2001).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Since the south eastern border of Europe was not defined, because of the exclusion of Transcaucasian -countries, we can assume that it ended before, not behind Caucasus. It should also be noted that other-transcontinental countries, Russia and Turkey, were present in the list.

⁵⁹ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&olddid=130845>, last modified 30 July 2002).

⁶⁰ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&olddid=2282472>, last modified 2 February 2004).

⁶¹ "Talk: Europe/Archive 2." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_2, accessed 5 January 2005).

other languages, many of which considered it to be just one part of Eurasian continent.⁶² Geological definitions of continents also came into play since, as it was argued, in geology the status of Europe is not a point of disagreement – it is simply a peninsula.⁶³ Meanwhile, the other side claimed that concept of continents pre-dates their definition; hence stating that it is the definition that is wrong.⁶⁴ Soon, participants started comparing secondary sources, as they should have done in the first place according to Wikipedia's policies, but that did not help much either.⁶⁵ Eventually, it became clear that consensus is not likely to be found. At one point, it was even suggested that the name of the entry should change to "Europes".⁶⁶ Over the course of time, Europe was defined as an ambiguous term, and its historical development and common contemporary usage was gradually charted. The version of the entry at the end of 2011 conveniently displays some images to highlight this ambiguity: the reconstruction of Herodotus' original division of world into continents, a mediaeval T and O map, and the 1570 map *Europa Regina* which excludes the British Isles and Scandinavia from Europe.⁶⁷

During the debate, as one or the other side gained prominence, the list of European countries changed accordingly. When the geographical definition gained prominence, Armenia and Cyprus were excluded, but Kazakhstan⁶⁸ was listed. If tectonic plates were brought into play, the status of Iceland as a European country was questioned.⁶⁹ On the other hand, when cultural factors were brought to fore, it was debated whether countries with a dominant

⁶² "Talk: Europe/Archive 3." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_3, accessed 5 January 2005).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ "Talk: Europe/Archive 2." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_2, accessed 5 January 2005).

⁶⁵ "Talk: Europe/Archive 6." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_6, accessed 5 January 2005).

⁶⁶ "Talk: Europe/Archive 5." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_5, accessed 5 January 2005).

⁶⁷ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

⁶⁸ Not a member of the Council of Europe. See: "The Council of Europe in Brief." (The Council of Europe, <http://www.coe.int/aboutcoe/index.asp?page=47pays1europe&1=en>, accessed 5 January 2005).

⁶⁹ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=130845>, last modified 30 July 2002).

Muslim population⁷⁰ or the United Kingdom⁷¹ should be excluded, though, it should be noted, such views were far from the mainstream in the discussion. The debate went in the other direction as well. Some users argued that the Middle East is culturally and historically much closer to Europe than to Oriental Asia, and that therefore Europe should adopt the Arabian tectonic plate the same way as Asia encompasses Indian subcontinent.⁷² Cultural considerations also played an important role in arguments that opposed the separation of Europe and Asia into two distinct continents. As one user argued, Europe and Asia have been in contact since antiquity, and it would be possible to reconceptualise them as a single entity united by the trade routes, such as the ancient Silk Road.⁷³ However, this kind of arguments could not have been accepted because of Eurasian reality, or “materiality,” to put it in Foucauldian terms. If we disregard the very recent developments regarding construction of the Eurasian Union (BBC News Europe, 18 November 2012),⁷⁴ there are simply no ambitious political and cultural projects with significant backing aiming to bring Europe and Asia closer together.

Even though the meaning of geophysical borders of Europe as a peninsula was heavily relativised, its presence in the debate remained strong and it continued to play an important role in the entry. For instance, names of transcontinental countries in the table are accompanied by footnotes stating that some of their territories lie outside Europe. Additionally, it might be interesting to point out that the same treatment was applied not only to Russia, Turkey and Transcaucasian states, but also to former colonial powers such as France or the Netherlands.⁷⁵ A map introduced in late 2004 clearly emphasises these borders, since Asian territories of transcontinental

⁷⁰ “Talk: Europe/Archive 2.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_2, accessed 5 January 2005).

⁷¹ “Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=37210200>, last modified 29 January 2006).

⁷² “Talk: Europe/Archive 5.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_5, accessed 5 January 2005).

⁷³ “Talk: Europe/Archive 3.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_3, accessed 5 January 2005).

⁷⁴ “Russia sees union with Belarus and Kazakhstan by 2015,” accessed 5 Jan 2012, BBC News Europe, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-15790452>.

⁷⁵ “Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

countries are painted in a lighter colour.⁷⁶ However, this map also shows that other definitions of the borders of Europe are highly relevant as well. Political borders are signified by the use of a different colour for Asian territories of transcontinental states, while yet another colour was used to highlight Cyprus and Armenia as countries thought to be culturally belonging to Europe (see Image 2).

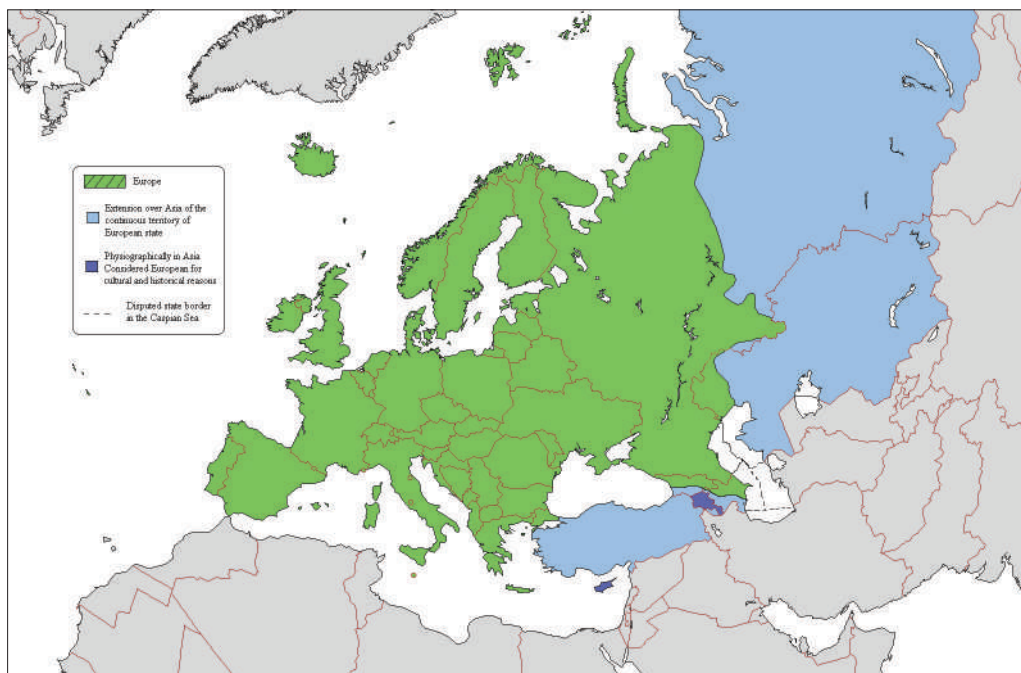


Image 2: Map showing Wikipedia's definitions of Europe

Source: Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Europe_political_map.png.

Still, it is possible to determine some sort of hierarchy between them. Judging from the debate, any amount of territory within Europe's geographical borders is a sufficient reason to consider a country European, therefore, geographical notion of Europe takes precedence. For instance, Kazakhstan was more readily included than Armenia, even though this country does not

⁷⁶ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=8554693>, last modified 18 December 2004).

seem to see itself as a part of Europe, if its reluctance to join the Council of Europe is any indicator of this. Additionally, the status of Turkey was less debated than the status of Cyprus, while in the case of predominantly Christian Russia there were hardly any arguments. This signals that culture also had a role to play since, for instance, there was less resistance to append Georgia with dominant Christian population than Azerbaijan, with a Muslim majority.⁷⁷ Lastly, political factors were also considered. For example, footnotes of the entry state as an anomaly that Belarus and Vatican are not the members of the Council of Europe,⁷⁸ but their statuses as European countries have never been questioned. On the other hand, inclusion of Israel, which was proposed for cultural reasons,⁷⁹ might have been more acceptable in the discourse if the country was a member of some European political organizations, like Armenia.

Still, a discourse is needed to differentiate Europe from one more entity. Already in the first version of the entry it was claimed that: "Increasingly, the word 'Europe' is being used as a synonym for the EU; thus we have such seemingly paradoxical statements as the following 'A European Space Policy will also provide solid grounds for a closer relationship between Europe and Russia.' ('Towards a Space Agency for the European Union', p. 6)."⁸⁰ The lengths to which Wikipedians went to distinguish Europe from the EU are perhaps best illustrated with the controversy revolving around the flag of Europe. It was introduced in the article in March 2004 in the opening paragraph of the entry,⁸¹ and soon an edit war erupted because of it. Many participants were shocked to learn that it is actually the flag of the Council of Europe as well, and therefore completely legitimate symbol for the entire Europe. However, it was pointed out that it had become synonymous with the much more exclusive EU, and that even the Council of Europe, which

⁷⁷ Religious composition of Azerbaijani population was explicitly stated as an obstacle. See: "Talk: Europe/Archive 1." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_1, accessed 5 January 2005).

⁷⁸ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

⁷⁹ "Europe (Difference between revisions)." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&action=historysubmit&diff=10428384&oldid=10420351>, last modified 19 February 2005).

⁸⁰ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=248756>, last modified 1 October 2001).

⁸¹ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=2925354>, last modified 26 March 2004).

had originally created the flag, understood that, and adopted a new logo.⁸² Three years later, a poll was organised to finally solve the issue, and the majority of participants voted for the flag to be removed since its presence was somewhat confusing and thought to be misleading.⁸³ Still, we cannot say that the function of this group of statements is to render the EU as the other, in the fashion of statements separating Europe from Asia. Rather, they are simply saying that the EU is just one part, which is not completely identical with Europe. Indeed, the flag soon found its place in the entry, though in the history section, where European integrations are described as the seminal development in the continent of the later part of the twentieth century.⁸⁴

Etymology of the word “Europe”

The statements grouped around this theme provide a classic example of Wikipedia’s policy of neutrality at work. While the first version of the entry stated, completely unproblematically, that the name of this continent derives from the Greek myth about Phoenician princess Europa,⁸⁵ in which she was abducted and ravaged by Zeus disguised as a white bull on the shores of the continent that later came to carry her name. However, it did not take long for this theory to be challenged. In as early as August 2003, the section was supplemented by a theory which claims that the term “Europe” stems from a Semitic word for sunset - “ereb”⁸⁶. Later on, possible meanings of the term from Greek⁸⁷ and Latin⁸⁸ languages were added to the section. Additionally, in the

⁸² “Talk: Europe/Archive 3.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_3, accessed 5 January 2005).

⁸³ Archive 5 provides results of the poll and a link to the pool, however, it is now defunct. See: “Talk: Europe/Archive 5.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_5, accessed 5 January 2005).

⁸⁴ “Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=157397737>, last modified 12 September 2007).

⁸⁵ “Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=248756>, last modified 1 October 2001).

⁸⁶ “Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&diff=prev&oldid=136689>, last modified 3 August 2002).

⁸⁷ “Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=3029150>, last modified 2 April 2004).

⁸⁸ “Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=1495308>, last modified 25 September 2003).

discussion pages there were debates on whether the word might have its origins in Western Sami languages, Latvian, or that it might be connected with the term “Evri” that refers to Israelites.⁸⁹ Later on, some users even claimed that it comes from either Lithuanian or Romanian language.⁹⁰ Still, as none of them was able to provide reputable references to support those theories, they have never entered the entry itself. Therefore, in the case of this section, Wikipedia’s policy of neutrality was fully utilised. It was acknowledged that the term “Europe” does not have definite origins, and all the major relevant theories about it were presented.⁹¹

On the other hand, it is hard to determine what kind of function this group of statements performs in the discourse on Europe in Wikipedia. Changes in this section do not seem to cause changes in other sections of the entry, and vice-versa. These statements stay isolated from the rest of the discourse, and one could easily imagine the article without them. A possible explanation would be that examination of etymology represents a form of academic folklore. Michel Foucault argues that during the Renaissance language was considered as analogous to the world, not just as its signification. Therefore, language and etymology were studied by the scholars of the time because it was believed that they could reveal the hidden truth about the world, not just original meanings of words.⁹² Eventually, this line of thinking was abandoned but, nevertheless, accounts on etymology continued to be written in some academic texts, as a sort of academic tradition now, since they have lost their original purpose. Even today, to a much lesser extent, etymological explorations can be found in some works. Hence, it can be argued that Wikipedia includes them in a vast number of its entries in order to align itself with old academic traditions, and consequently appear more academic and, perhaps, create the impression of greater reliability in the eyes of its readers.

⁸⁹ “Talk: Europe/Archive 5” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_5, accessed 5 January 2005).

⁹⁰ “Talk: Europe/Archive 9” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_9, accessed 4 January 2012).

⁹¹ “Europe (Difference between revisions)” (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&action=historysubmit&diff=266000020&oldid=265678102>, last modified 23 January 2009).

⁹² For further information, see: Michel Foucault 1994, 34-42.

History of Europe

It is interesting to note that the section in the main entry and the specialised article on European history initially adopted two different approaches to organizing their account of past events that took place on European soil. While the main entry's section was describing the history of Europe as a whole from its inception,⁹³ the specialised entry was created as a list of hyperlinks to articles on national histories of European countries, supplemented by the links to pages on histories of important European political entities of the past, and a couple of significant events and historical periods.⁹⁴ However, even though significant differences existed in the early stages of their development, soon, the specialised entry started changing the direction towards writing a history of Europe as a whole,⁹⁵ and after roughly five years, even the section containing links to histories of European nation states were removed from the article.⁹⁶ It was argued that writing a history of Europe as a whole makes more sense than writing national histories, since nation states are relatively recent phenomena, while common European culture has existed for centuries.⁹⁷

In writing the history of Europe, once again, the definition of Europe turned out to be a major issue. Some European countries had been in close contact with the Middle East, Africa and Asia since early antiquity, while others later managed to colonise large portions of Earth. Hence, it turned out quite difficult to keep the entire European history within the somewhat arbitrary borders of the present-day Europe. Therefore, a somewhat odd solution has been found. While it was impossible not to mention colonialism, for instance, it is indeed only mentioned in just one sentence of the section of the main entry,⁹⁸ the specialised article boasts an entire section

⁹³ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=248756>, last modified 1 October 2001).

⁹⁴ "History of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=History_of_Europe&oldid=256130, last modified 13 Nov 2001).

⁹⁵ "History of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=History_of_Europe&oldid=49884, last modified 19 March 2002).

⁹⁶ "History of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=History_of_Europe&oldid=86585043, last modified 8 November 2006).

⁹⁷ "Talk: History of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:History_of_Europe, accessed 3 Jan 2012).

⁹⁸ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

on mercantilism and colonial expansion, albeit describing the phenomenon from an extremely Eurocentric perspective. The section simply states which European countries colonised which areas of the world and what the effects of colonization on Europe were – namely, it states how much profits those colonies yielded, and that those profits were largely used for financing wars in Europe⁹⁹ – as if colonialism had no effect on the colonised.

The definition of Europe as a primarily cultural phenomenon in the account of its history had profound consequences. Whether an event is to be included in this history of Europe heavily depends on whether the country of its origin is considered European or not. Even though a proper debate on what European culture is and what it includes did not arise yet, we can notice that its understanding has shifted over time. While early versions of the specialised entry (starting from 19 March 2002) excluded not only Muslim countries, but Byzantium as well as the “other,”¹⁰⁰ the situation completely changed roughly seven years later. When it was proposed to merge the entry on history of Europe with the one on history of Western civilization because they largely overlap, it was argued that the article on European history should exist on its own since Russia and Turkey are excluded from the entry on the history of Western civilization.

Surprisingly, there was not much debate over different interpretations of past events. The only notable edit war ignited between 19th and 22nd of November 2005 over the role of the Soviet Union (USSR) in the outbreak of World War II.¹⁰¹ While one user argued that Nazi Germany and the USSR started the war by invading Poland, others claimed that the move of the USSR was somewhat defensive, and that by following the same logic it can be argued that Nazi Germany and Poland began the war by annexing parts of Czechoslovakia.¹⁰² Otherwise, development of the entry progressed quite smoothly, without much debate. Inaccuracies and factual mistakes were occasionally introduced in the text, but those were eventually corrected with-

⁹⁹ “History of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=History_of_Europe&oldid=468232276, last modified 29 December 2011).

¹⁰⁰ “History of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=History_of_Europe&oldid=49884, last modified 19 March 2002).

¹⁰¹ See: “Revision history of History of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=History_of_Europe&action=history, accessed 3 January 2012).

¹⁰² “Talk: History of Europe/Archive 1 (2005-06).” (*Wikipedia*, available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:History_of_Europe/Archive_1_\(2005-06\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:History_of_Europe/Archive_1_(2005-06)), accessed 3 January 2012).

out much or any altercation, as was the case with the wrong identification of the first European hominid,¹⁰³ or with the wrong map of the World War I.¹⁰⁴

On the other hand, contributors did debate a lot about what is worthy of mention in the entry and the section. Given that the space is limited,¹⁰⁵ and the number of historical events that could be included almost limitless, a rough selection had to be made. There was much debate about this issue on the discussion pages of both the main entry and of the specialised article, but those have not yielded any firm conclusions. As one of the participants argued, to decide what is important implies having a point of view.¹⁰⁶ Editors have rather approached such issues on case-by-case basis, but by examining revision histories and looking at what was included, and what was rejected, some regularity can be found. It appears that in order to be worthy of inclusion, an event must have significant consequences for a large portion of Europe, or constitute a shared experience between significant numbers of Europeans. Therefore, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution and the Bubonic plague were included in the discourse, while the English Civil War and the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s were deemed as rather local affairs and were, therefore, only briefly mentioned in the specialised entry,¹⁰⁷ while being completely left out from the section in the main entry,¹⁰⁸ even though there were attempts to introduce them. In fact, the account on the English Civil War used to occupy an entire seven paragraphs long section in a specialised article at one point of time.¹⁰⁹

The considerably limited amount of space available for discussion on this topic had two more important consequences. Firstly, Wikipedia's policy

¹⁰³ "Talk: Europe/Archive 9." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_9, accessed 4 January 2012).

¹⁰⁴ "Talk: Europe/Archive 6." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_6, accessed 5 January 2012)

¹⁰⁵ Wikipedia recommends that an article should not exceed 50 KB, which translates roughly to 10000 -words. See: "Wikipedia: Article size." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:SIZE>, accessed 3 January 2012).

¹⁰⁶ "Talk: History of Europe/Archive 1 (2005-06)." (*Wikipedia*, available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:History_of_Europe/Archive_1_\(2005-06\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:History_of_Europe/Archive_1_(2005-06)), accessed 3 January 2012).

¹⁰⁷ "History of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=History_of_Europe&oldid=468232276, last modified 29 December 2011).

¹⁰⁸ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

¹⁰⁹ History of Europe (Difference between revisions)." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=History_of_Europe&action=historysubmit&diff=6610565&oldid=6541361, last modified 13 October 2004).

of neutrality (NPOV) had to be abandoned, as there simply was not enough space to include all the different, but relevant opinions on a certain topic¹¹⁰. Luckily, there were not many divergences of points of view between the editors of these texts. Additionally, this problem seems to be counter-balanced by expulsion of practically everything that might be regarded as a point of view. Because of that, the history of Europe that Wikipedia provides is a rather flat account of events that successively happened without any underlying meta-narrative. For example, in the early version of the section in the main entry, fight for democracy and individualism were the rationale behind the history of Europe.¹¹¹ However, this and other points of view were later dropped in favour of a more neutral account that hardly even tries to interpret European history. Secondly, the lack of space was a catalyst for the creation of a number of new entries. Already in May 2004 it became obvious that, as one of the Wikipedians noted, “a short paragraph to cover hundreds of years isn’t enough,”¹¹² and therefore a series of new, more specialised articles was created. Not only did each of the periods get its own entry, but also the original article was expanded even further. This is perhaps best illustrated by the following case. Once a user complained that the section on prehistory in the main entry makes no reference to some important scientific developments, such as the String Revolution theory and the division of Europe into pre-literate cultural periods. She was advised (and she accepted) to concentrate her effort on improving and writing entries more relevant to the topics,¹¹³ as the section on history in the main entry on Europe is meant to be only the most basic summary of past events.¹¹⁴

Combined with the advantages of hypertext, the lack of space and a high number of specialised entries that it engendered were turned into an advantage. This has enabled contributors to create specialised entries in which they could develop lengthy, detailed accounts of even quite obscure historical events which would have never made it into traditional paper

¹¹⁰ “Talk: History of Europe/Archive 1 (2005-06).” (*Wikipedia*, available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:History_of_Europe/Archive_1_\(2005-06\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:History_of_Europe/Archive_1_(2005-06)), accessed 3 January 2012).

¹¹¹ “History of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=7651742>, last modified 19 November 2004).

¹¹² “Talk: History of Europe/Archive 1 (2005-06).” (*Wikipedia*, available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:History_of_Europe/Archive_1_\(2005-06\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:History_of_Europe/Archive_1_(2005-06)), accessed 3 January 2012).

¹¹³ Since Wikipedia had no article on the String Revolution theory at the time.

¹¹⁴ “Talk: Europe/Archive 8.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_8, accessed 3 January 2012).

encyclopaedias. On the other hand, the issue of insufficient space has also modified aims of more general entries. Rather than being the final, insulated destination for a reader, these are now (especially very general entries like the one on the history of Europe) also imagined as reference points to easily navigate more specialised entries.¹¹⁵ Users of Wikipedia are no longer expected to see a relatively general entry as their final destination, but just as a starting point. This is why each of the sub-sections in the account on European history and the specialised entry provide links to the main entry on a specific period of time and to a number of pages dealing with related phenomena and events.

Physical geography of Europe

The section on physical geography considers Europe as if it was uninhabited by people. The function of statements grouped around this subject is to show that Europe is primarily a natural entity that had existed long before humans appeared, and that could exist without them. Therefore, it charts Europe's geological history, physical characteristics, climate and biodiversity.¹¹⁶

Since these features are far less dependent on political and cultural points of view, once the question of the definition of Europe was transferred to a separate section, this account on physical geography developed quite unproblematically, and it has virtually remained free of edit wars. The specialised entry was, on the other hand, created before the section on geography in the main entry was split into two. Therefore, it still contains some bits about Europe's political geography, and its rather short discussion page repeats some of the debate from the section on the definition of Europe, such as whether Turkey is a European country or not.¹¹⁷ Still, the main debate in this regard revolves around the main entry, and therefore, such comments and interventions in the specialised article should be considered as placed in the wrong context.

¹¹⁵ "Talk: History of Europe/Archive 1 (2005-06)." (*Wikipedia*, available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:History_of_Europe/Archive_1_\(2005-06\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:History_of_Europe/Archive_1_(2005-06)), accessed 3 January 2012).

¹¹⁶ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

¹¹⁷ "Talk: Geography of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:-Geography_of_Europe, accessed 6 January 2012).

When the separation of physical and political geography happened, it became possible to use strictly geographical terms in the section on physical geography since it was free from political and cultural considerations. Therefore, Europe could here be defined just as the western fifth of the Eurasian landmass, and nothing more,¹¹⁸ while, for instance, it became possible to turn to using purely geographical groupings – Scandinavia, Iberian peninsula, Balkans peninsula, Italian peninsula, and the main landmass of Europe – which was proposed earlier, but could not have been put to practice in the context in which political and physical geography were not separated.¹¹⁹

The only somewhat surprising fact about the section is that it uses maps that chart natural phenomena that cut across national borders, but still contain those borders¹²⁰. Since Wikipedia is aimed at general audience which is much more familiar with them than with natural reference points such as rivers or mountains, it might be argued that state borders were kept simply as orienteers that help Wikipedia's end users to read the maps more easily.

Political geography of Europe

Even when Europe and its border were defined, arguments in the section on political geography still did not stop, since questions of internal subdivision of Europe into regions, and about the definition of an independent country, turned out to be quite problematic as well.

In the beginning, starting from late October 2003, names of various regional groupings in Europe started being introduced. At first, these were the Balkans, Baltic States, Benelux, British Isles, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Iberian Peninsula, Nordic countries, Scandinavia, and the Visegrád group.¹²¹ Since some of these groups overlapped, it is clear that the intention was not to subdivide Europe in a systematic way.

¹¹⁸ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

¹¹⁹ "Talk: Europe/Archive 3." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_3, accessed 5 January 2005).

¹²⁰ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

¹²¹ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=1650077>, last modified 30 October 2003).

Serious problems appeared in May 2004 when a map was added and a separate section on political geography was created.¹²² From then onwards, no overlapping regions could exist, and consensus on a single subdivision on Europe proved difficult to achieve. Only two days later, the map was replaced with a new one,¹²³ and other revisions followed, while the debate on discussion pages erupted.¹²⁴ Each and every map proposed was deemed as arbitrary by many, and soon the text of the section was changed to reflect the lack of consensus. For instance, the paragraph on Eastern Europe stated that:

*Similarly to Western Europe, the term Eastern Europe may be used in a strict or broad sense. It usually includes the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the European CIS States (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Russia). It often includes the Caucasus or Transcaucasus countries (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia), though these are also regards as part of Northern Eurasia. In a broader economic/political context, it may also encompass the Visegrad Group (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary) and the Balkan Peninsula (Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia & Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria).*¹²⁵

In late February 2006, countries were grouped as per the United Nations (UN) scheme,¹²⁶ and this solution has been much more successful than others. Not in the way that it extinguished all conflicts, as the subdivision continuously remained under attack, but relatively broad consensus among participants was achieved. It was argued that, since this map was created purely for statistical purposes, it does not bear any deeper meaning and, hence, it is free from political points of view.¹²⁷ One more factor might have contributed

¹²² "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=3477878>, last modified 6 May 2004).

¹²³ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=3499333>, last modified 8 May 2004).

¹²⁴ "Talk: Europe/Archive 2." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_2, accessed 5 January 2005).

¹²⁵ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=4801149>, last modified 23 July 2004).

¹²⁶ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=40466548>, last modified 20 February 2006).

¹²⁷ "Talk: Europe/Archive 6." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_6, accessed 5 January 2005).

to its relatively wide adoption. Since it was created by the UN, which is the largest international organization, it was bound to be more appealing than solutions put forward by other organizations since Wikipedians also come from all parts of the world.

Still, the solution was not perfect in this context. The entry and the UN classification scheme had defined borders of Europe differently, which created a paradoxical situation in which European countries, in the entry on Europe, were listed in the regions of Central (Kazakhstan) and Western Asia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Georgia and Turkey).¹²⁸ Additionally, non-existence of the region of Central Europe in the used classification scheme proved to be particularly problematic, and this aspect of it was by far the most disputed since, as one user pointed out, labelling some post-communist countries that joined the EU in 2004 as Eastern European might be even considered offensive.¹²⁹

Nevertheless, it was not this kind of criticism, but Kosovo's declaration of independence that has lead Wikipedians to re-examine their heavy reliance on the UN. Kosovo is not the first European country to unilaterally declare independence and achieve de facto control over its territory. A list of such territories (Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Northern Cyprus) had already been added to the article in mid 2005,¹³⁰ well before Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. However, it was removed because participants agreed that only internationally recognised countries deserve to be mentioned in the entry.¹³¹ After a similar edit in 2006, it was agreed that independent countries are those that are represented in the UN.¹³² In this regard, the case of Kosovo was different as it has secured much higher degree of international recognition than any of the abovementioned countries, but still not high enough to be accepted in the UN. This has created a relatively novel situation and triggered a long debate on this issue because Wikipedia had no policy dealing with the issue of

¹²⁸ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=40466548>, last modified 20 February 2006).

¹²⁹ "Talk: Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe>).

¹³⁰ "Europe," *Wikipedia*, last modified 29 July 2005, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=19880807>, accessed 6 January 2012).

¹³¹ "Talk: Europe/Archive 3." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_3, accessed 5 January 2005).

¹³² "Talk: Europe/Archive 4." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_4, accessed 7 January 2012).

what counts as an independent country. Since Taiwan was recognised at the time by a similar number of countries and was included in the list of Asian countries, it was taken as a precedent and Kosovo was added to the table.¹³³ However, since it was not universally recognised, a disclaimer was added to the section saying that neutrality of the table was disputed.¹³⁴

Situation got even further complicated later in the same year when, after a short war, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were recognised by some UN members. It was argued that, if Kosovo is included, they should be as well.¹³⁵ The solution was finally found in March 2009, when it was agreed that states that have achieved de facto independence should be mentioned in the section, but not in the table of universally recognised countries,¹³⁶ and therefore, a new table was created to accommodate them.¹³⁷

The main point of this argument is that after the inclusion of Kosovo in the table of independent countries, the UN could not be considered as a place of international consensus any longer. Its authority was shaken in the eyes of the people gathered around Wikipedia, and soon they gave up on insisting on using exclusively the UN scheme for subdivision of Europe.¹³⁸ In June 2008, the table of countries was rearranged alphabetically, whereas political maps according to the CIA, the EU, and the Council of Europe were added¹³⁹ next to it, alongside the UN map.

Additionally, the section on political geography contains a list of British crown dependencies and territories with broad autonomy,¹⁴⁰ but the debate revolving around them is of minor importance since it is self-contained, and does not have a significant impact on the rest of the entry.

¹³³ "Talk: Europe/Archive 6." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_6, accessed 5 January 2005).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ "Talk: Europe/Archive 8." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_8, accessed 3 January 2012).

¹³⁷ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=278380328>, last modified 19 March 2009).

¹³⁸ The United Nations classification scheme caused the other mentioned problems in the entry, and they -have certainly contributed to the relativisation of its significance. However, the independence of Kosovo -was a drop that spilled the glass.

¹³⁹ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=219303616>, last modified 14 June 2008).

¹⁴⁰ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

Contrary to other sections, this one does not link to a specialised entry on political geography of Europe since there is not any. Instead, it points to the article on politics of Europe, which is rather complementary to the section than a more exhaustive version of it. The specialised article was began in 2004 with a quite promising opening which stated that: "It is a topic far more detailed than other continents due to a number of factors including the long history of nation states in the region as well as the modern day trend towards increased political unity amongst the European states."¹⁴¹ (sic.) However, it has yet to achieve the level of development comparable to other specialised entries on Europe.

Later in 2004 it was added that the EU became the dominant power in European politics after the collapse of the Soviet Union,¹⁴² and in March 2005 it was expanded to include sections on contemporary political climate, international alliances¹⁴³ and independence movements in Europe.¹⁴⁴ The section on contemporary political climate listed as the most important issues the deterioration of relations between the West and Russia because of the spread of Western organizations into former Soviet countries, the enlargement of the EU, and stated that a few conflicts still remained in the Balkans and the Caucasus, in otherwise conflict-free continent.¹⁴⁵

The section has already reached its current structure at that time. Onwards, the development has concentrated on charting secessionist and devolutionary pressures; Northern Ireland and Basque country were added alongside the Balkans and the Caucasus as relatively unstable regions,¹⁴⁶ while Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Kosovo and Russia were designate as not being liberal electoral democracies.¹⁴⁷ That is actually all that has happened in the entry. The discussion

¹⁴¹ "Politics of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Politics_of_Europe&oldid=8497653, last modified 16 December 2004).

¹⁴² "Politics of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Politics_of_Europe&oldid=8626903, last modified 20 December 2004).

¹⁴³ Which will be analysed later in the research together with the section on European integrations

¹⁴⁴ "Politics of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Politics_of_Europe&oldid=10754276, last modified 1 March 2005).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ "of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Politics_of_Europe&oldid=234107267, last modified 25 August 2008).

¹⁴⁷ "Politics of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Politics_of_Europe&oldid=234107267, last modified 8 May 2007).

page contains only six posts, only two of which are connected to each other. Therefore, we could not say that there is actually any debate at all.¹⁴⁸ Most of the posts there are questioning whether some devolutionary or secessionist movement deserves a mention, but there was no attempt to determine criteria for inclusion. Currently, the bar is set quite low and, by the end of 2011, even extremely weak movements from the total of 17 countries were listed.

European Integration

The section on European integration, added at the end of January 2011,¹⁴⁹ is by far the youngest section of the main entry on Europe. This section, which has not been altered since its introduction until the end of 2011, states that:

*European integration is the process of political, legal, economic (and in some cases social and cultural) integration of states wholly or partially in Europe. In the present day, European integration has primarily come about through the Council of Europe and European Union in Western and Central Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States in Eastern Europe and most of former Soviet countries.*¹⁵⁰

Clearly, it shows that Western European organizations do not have a monopoly on integration, but this statement is a result of a lengthy debate, which took place, and is still taking place, in the specialised article about European integration. When it was created in 2004, it virtually identified European integration with the EU.¹⁵¹ However, later that year, the Council of Europe was referred to as another integrative power.¹⁵² Later on, the

¹⁴⁸ "Talk: Politics of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk: Politics_of_Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Politics_of_Europe), accessed 7 January 2012).

¹⁴⁹ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=410954736>, last modified 30 January 2011).

¹⁵⁰ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

¹⁵¹ "European integration." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=European_integration&oldid=4425814, last modified 28 May 2004). -

¹⁵² "European integration." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=European_integration&oldid=7053007, last modified 2 November 2004).

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE),¹⁵³ and various regional integrative efforts, such as the Nordic Council, were added to the mix,¹⁵⁴ and other initiatives soon flooded the entry. By the end of 2011, the entry had offered a comprehensive survey of various types of integrative efforts in different sectors of human activity, of the organizations through which these are brought about, and of their past and future prospects.¹⁵⁵

Still, even in 2010, there were no mentions of post-Soviet integrations in the entry, and when these were proposed in mid-2010 they were objected and deemed as irrelevant.¹⁵⁶ At the time, this article had not entered the main discourse on Europe, so we can assume that the same set of rules did not apply. While one of the major concerns of the main entry on Europe was to include the EU, but prevent it from hijacking the entry, this did not seem to be the case here. At its inception, this entry was centred on the EU. Indeed, the EU has reached the depth of integration not comparable to any other international organization in Europe, and one could hardly argue that it does not deserve to be described in much more detail than, for instance, the OSCE. However, this strong presence of the EU had interesting consequences.

In one of the self-reflective pages on Wikipedia, contributors themselves argue that articles tend to be “whatever centric,” meaning that they tend to favour the subject which they are discussing.¹⁵⁷ It is not outrageous to assume that people editing an article are passionate about the subject at hand, and that they might be biased towards it. This especially seems to be the case with the specialised entry on European integration. For instance, in early 2006, the entry was edited to reflect that not only conservative nationalists can be against the EU.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, that statement was removed in a little

¹⁵³ “European integration.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=European_integration&oldid=188800572, last modified 3 February 2008).

¹⁵⁴ “European integration.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=European_integration&oldid=189049417, last modified 4 February 2008).

¹⁵⁵ “European integration.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=European_integration&oldid=468133304, last modified 28 December 2011).

¹⁵⁶ “Talk: European integration.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:European_integration, accessed 9 January 2012).

¹⁵⁷ “Wikipedia: Why Wikipedia is not so great.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Why_Wikipedia_is_not_so_great, accessed 9 January 2012).

¹⁵⁸ “European integration.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=European_integration&oldid=41547999, last modified 28 February 2006).

less than a year,¹⁵⁹ and even at the end of 2011 this Wikipedia's entry still led its readers to believe that liberal, cosmopolitan individuals cannot be averse to European integration.¹⁶⁰

At the point when adding information about the CIS was rejected, the specialised article was centred on the EU, while listing other organizations, such as the Council of Europe, NATO, the Baltic Assembly and others, which are essentially compatible with the EU. On the other hand, the CIS was perceived as something that rather goes against the EU at that point of time, but one small intervention in the entry opened up the space for its inclusion. In the section on the future of European integration, a short subsection titled "Common space from Lisbon to Vladivostok" was added in which Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was quoted agitating for the establishment of common economic area, saying that it would also be possible for Russia to adopt the euro at some point in the future.¹⁶¹ A few days later, French president Nicolas Sarkozy was also quoted saying that he as well believes than in 10 or 15 years there will be a common economic area, a visa-free regime and a general concept of security between the EU and Russia.¹⁶² The statements in this subsection have made the CIS compatible with the EU so, this time, the introduction of the section on the CIS passed without any objection.¹⁶³ Its position was further strengthened when the specialised article entered the main discourse on Europe in Wikipedia whose rules not only favour, but require its inclusion. In fact, in the main entry the EU and the CIS are presented on equal footing.

¹⁵⁹ "European integration." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=European_integration&oldid=10198908, last modified 20 January 2007).

¹⁶⁰ "European integration." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=European_integration&oldid=468133304, last modified 28 December 2011).

¹⁶¹ "European integration." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=European_integration&oldid=10198908, last modified 13 December 2010).

¹⁶² "European integration." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=European_integration&oldid=402853347, last modified 17 December 2010).

¹⁶³ "European integration." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=European_integration&oldid=403026734, last modified 18 December 2010).

Economy of Europe

The section on economy is one of the sections that developed without many problems and, created in mid 2007,¹⁶⁴ it is the second youngest section of the entry. The specialised entry on European economy was created in 2004,¹⁶⁵ and it still serves as the basis for the section in the main entry. Therefore, the specialised article is the main place where the debate on European economy is taking place.

However, there does not seem to be anything problematic about European economy. It is divided in three blocks – The EU plus EFTA and Turkey, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and CEFTA – and analysed accordingly.¹⁶⁶ High number of edits of the specialised entry, 869 in total by the end of 2011,¹⁶⁷ is not a result of harsh debate, but of the fact that the entry contains a lot of information that changes frequently, such as exchange rates of European currencies.¹⁶⁸ The structure of the specialised article has, more or less, been established by the end of 2004,¹⁶⁹ and afterwards the overall focus of development, apart from correcting factual misstates, was to add more detail and keep the article and section up to date. For instance, when Estonia joined the Eurozone in 2011, it was shortly reflected in the specialised entry.¹⁷⁰

It is important to mention that the account on European economy is very current indeed, as it is expected from Wikipedia's entries. The section on economy in the main entry already gained a sub-section on the late 2000s

¹⁶⁴ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=136163189>, last modified 5 June 2007).

¹⁶⁵ "Economy of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Economy_of_Europe&oldid=6586101, last modified 15 October 2004).

¹⁶⁶ "Economy of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Economy_of_Europe&oldid=468809978, last modified 31 December 2011).

¹⁶⁷ "Economy of Europe - Article revision statistics." (*XI's tools*, available at: http://toolserver.org/~soxred93/articleinfo/index.php?article=Economy_of_Europe&lang=en&wiki=wikipedia, accessed 9 January 2012).

¹⁶⁸ "Economy of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Economy_of_Europe&oldid=468809978, last modified 31 December 2011).

¹⁶⁹ "Economy of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Economy_of_Europe&oldid=410650033, last modified 28 January 2011).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

economic recession in Europe in 2009,¹⁷¹ which, by the end of 2011, had already contained some information about the Greek bailout.¹⁷² However, it did not come from the specialised entry on European economy, which still has no information about this issue, but from the dedicated article on the late 2000s recession in Europe.¹⁷³ This shows that Wikipedia's entries are very interconnected and that its participants put a lot of effort in keeping the entire encyclopaedia consistent. Still, the lasting absence of this information in the specialised article on European economy clearly signals that the situation in this regard is still far from perfect, and that further effort is needed to increase the consistency level across individual articles.

Demography of Europe

The section on demography was created in September 2005, when it basically only stated that humans settled in Europe approximately 10,000 years ago, and that their number had reached 600 million by the end of the twentieth century.¹⁷⁴ However, more important parts of the section were initially created in the section on political geography, and they stemmed from a desire to subdivide Europe into more meaningful cultural clusters than those established by the subdivision as per the UN scheme which, according to Wikipedians, was devoid of almost any meaning at all.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, underneath this scheme, a subsection aiming to present linguistic-cultural regions of Europe was added.¹⁷⁶ As the three main European linguistic groups more than less correspond to three main branches of Christianity found on the continent, it did not take long before linguistic division was reinforced

¹⁷¹ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=305481958>, last modified 1 August 2009).

¹⁷² "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

¹⁷³ "Late-2000s recession in Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late_2000s_recession_in_Europe, accessed 9 January 2012).

¹⁷⁴ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=22729116>, last modified 6 September 2005).

¹⁷⁵ "Talk: Europe/Archive 3." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_3, accessed 5 January 2005).

¹⁷⁶ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=25270886>, last modified 11 October 2005).

by religious affiliations.¹⁷⁷ However, since those categories are not perfect matches, this subdivision turned out to be controversial as well,¹⁷⁸ so separate sections on languages and religions in Europe were created,¹⁷⁹ before they were finally transferred to a newly created section on demographics.

The most interesting thing about this section is that it shows, or more correctly, used to show a relatively high degree of inventiveness. According to Wikipedia's "No Original Research" policy, there was not supposed to be any. However, large amount of statistical data seems to have inspired many to make original synthesis of it. The attempt to redraw the map of Europe by merging linguistic and religious factors was one example. On another occasion, a common belief that there are three major language families in Europe was slowly transformed over time to state that there are seven main language families. These were Romance, Germanic, Slavic, Uralic, Altaic, Baltic and Celtic language families.¹⁸⁰ Quite adventurous claims that, as a result of this practice, regularly appeared in this section began to irritate Wikipedia's users. In fact, this was the first section to which a disclaimer stating that its accuracy is disputed was added.¹⁸¹ Slowly, participants started adding references and following "No Original Research" policy, not only in this section, but in the entire entry as well, so inventiveness of this discourse has dramatically decreased.

While the section on demography focused on language and religion, the specialised entry covered other demographic factors such as population density, age and others, and the debate on its discussion pages mostly focused on the accuracy of data and solving incompatibility problems that arise from using multiple sources of statistics.¹⁸² Additionally, it might appear that the EU is featured too much in this specialised entry but, even though participants could not resist using Eurostat's large collection of data

¹⁷⁷ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=40168550>, last modified 18 February 2006).

¹⁷⁸ "Talk: Europe/Archive 9." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_9, accessed 4 January 2012

¹⁷⁹ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=42172259>, last modified 4 March 2006).

¹⁸⁰ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=22729116>, last modified 6 September 2005).

¹⁸¹ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=42101791>, last modified 3 March 2006).

¹⁸² "Talk: Demographics of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Demographics_of_Europe, accessed 8 January 2012).

which is freely available online in a convenient form, they have managed to follow entry's insistence on avoiding substitution of Europe for the EU by occasionally softening its presence with notes saying that there are also¹⁸³ other countries in Europe outside of his organization.

Still, there is one more important development that needs to be discussed before moving on to other groups of statements. In mid 2005 a section about race and physical appearance was added to the entry,¹⁸⁴ and has immediately evoked a debate. After a lengthy discussion, it was concluded that, unlike in some other parts of the World, race is not a meaningful category in discussions about Europe where other factors, namely culture, language and nationality, are far more important.¹⁸⁵ However, over a couple of years, the situation has completely changed. Not only does the specialised article have a similar section with the similar content under the label "Genetic origins," but the section of the main entry also lists racial relations among current European demographic issues, while finding it important to highlight that European Muslim women have a higher fertility rate than their Christian counterparts.¹⁸⁶ Apparently, with the entry of ultra-nationalist ant-immigration parties into parliaments of some European countries, racial issues have become a part of European reality, and therefore a meaningful concept when discussing Europe.

Culture of Europe

Culture is often stated as a seminal factor in many contexts of the entry, but this section's level of development does not live up to those claims. Surprisingly, the main entry did not have a section on culture during most of its existence, even though some users demanded it on the discussion pages already in 2005.¹⁸⁷ On the other hand, the specialised entry on European

¹⁸³ "Demographics of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Demographics_of_Europe&oldid=468329941, last modified 29 December 2011).

¹⁸⁴ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=15182957>, last modified 14 June 2005).

¹⁸⁵ "Talk: Europe/Archive 3." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_3, accessed 5 January 2005).

¹⁸⁶ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

¹⁸⁷ "Talk: Europe/Archive 3." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_3, accessed 5 January 2005).

culture was created in late 2004, and its opening paragraph was finally copied in the main entry in June 2008.¹⁸⁸ Still, the specialised entry has remained the only place in which the discourse on the culture of Europe is taking place. The only other intervention in the section of the main entry was copying another passage from the specialised article.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, other relevant comments on the discussion pages of the main entry only lament the poor stage of development of this section;¹⁹⁰ therefore, the inquiry will focus only on the specialised entry on culture. Unfortunately, its discussion page does not offer much material for analysis¹⁹¹ but, at least, the entry was edited 848 times until the end of 2011.¹⁹² Hence, unlike in the case of the entries on the politics and economy of Europe, it will be possible to draw at least some conclusions.

Still, a relatively high number of revisions did not ensure expansive debate on European culture. The section on sport was the first to appear in somewhat developed form, but it had more qualities of a list than of a reflection,¹⁹³ and unfortunately it seems to have set the standards for the rest of the entry. The other sections merely followed its form, and this is why all the sections contain only a handful of vague sentences which mostly serve to introduce or connect exhaustive lists of European artists, scientists, athletes, cuisines, religions and others.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, a vast majority of edits in which actual content was introduced only consisted of adding another item to the list. In this respect, most of the elements of European culture seem to be already in the entry; however, it has yet to synthesise them into something more meaningful.

¹⁸⁸ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=218065646>).

¹⁸⁹ "Europe," *Wikipedia*, available at: last modified 18 October 2010, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=391511356>, last modified 9 June 2008).

¹⁹⁰ "Talk: Europe/Archive 9." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_9, accessed 4 January 2012).

¹⁹¹ "Talk: Culture of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Culture_of_Europe, accessed 8 January 2012).

¹⁹² "Culture of Europe - Article revision statistics." (*XI's tools*, available at: http://toolserver.org/~soxred93/articleinfo/index.php?article=Culture_of_Europe&lang=en&wiki=wikipedia, accessed 8 January 2012).

¹⁹³ "Culture of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Culture_of_Europe&oldid=42947154, last modified 9 March 2006).

¹⁹⁴ "Culture of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Culture_of_Europe&oldid=466673679, last modified 19 December 2011).

The opening section of the entry describes European culture as a series of overlapping cultures that are sometimes relatively at odds with each other, but its perceived main common denominators were also brought to fore: “The foundation of European culture was laid by the Greeks, strengthened by the Romans, stabilised by Christianity, reformed and modernized by the fifteenth-century Renaissance and Reformation and globalised by successive European empires between the sixteenth and twentieth century.”¹⁹⁵ This formulation has already come under attack, albeit on discussion pages of the main Entry of Europe where it is copy-pasted,¹⁹⁶ but the real debate which could determine whether it will be kept, rejected or modified still has not erupted.

Additionally, is important to point out that the specialised entry uses a broad anthropological definition of culture, according to which, all human traits that are passed mentally and socially, rather than biologically, should be considered as parts of culture which, therefore, consists of customs, habits, values, religious and specific beliefs (AnthroBase). Correspondingly, Wikipedia’s specialised entry on European culture includes the following sections: art, science, philosophy, religion, cuisine, clothing, sport, the European Capital of Culture project, and symbols.¹⁹⁷

It is obvious from this list that one important element of culture is missing – values. In fact, a section on European values existed before, and it was introduced in the entry near the end of 2004,¹⁹⁸ but it was removed two years later.¹⁹⁹ No explanation for this move was given but, given that it was too closely tied to the efforts of the EU to invent common European values,²⁰⁰ the removal was hardly surprising at all. In Wikipedia’s entry on Europe the EU is identified just as one part of Europe, therefore, generalizations about the EU are not compatible with the text that seeks to present culture of Europe as a whole and they are habitually taken down for the sake of entry’s

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ “Talk: Europe/Archive 9.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_9, accessed 4 January 2012).

¹⁹⁷ “Culture of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Culture_of_Europe&oldid=466673679, last modified 19 December 2011).

¹⁹⁸ “Culture of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Culture_of_Europe&oldid=8992686, last modified 29 December 2004).

¹⁹⁹ “Culture of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Culture_of_Europe&oldid=98449962, last modified 4 January 2007).

²⁰⁰ “Culture of Europe.” (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Culture_of_Europe&oldid=8992686, last modified 29 December 2004).

consistency. Since then nobody has proposed an alternate section on European values that would cover Europe in its entirety.

Similarly, the section on global influence of European culture, added in late 2005,²⁰¹ was removed in November 2006²⁰² since it associated Europe too closely with the West. The addition of map dividing the World according to Samuel Huntington's book "The Clash of Civilizations" had the same fate. It was quickly removed²⁰³ since the fault lines of his civilizations divided rather than united Europe. While the introductory section of the main entry on Europe states that it is the birthplace of Western culture,²⁰⁴ it does not say that Europe is synonymous with it. Apart from this section, the above-mentioned specialised entry on history distinguishes them from each other. Also, throughout the article, many micro-efforts have been taken to avoid any confusion and subsequent exclusion of Eastern Europe. For instance, the sentence: "Both World Wars were ignited in Europe greatly contributing to a decline in European dominance in world affairs by the mid-20th century as the United States and Soviet Union took prominence," was changed to emphasise that it was the Western European dominance that has declined,²⁰⁵ as the sentence would otherwise imply that there was nothing European about the Soviet Union.²⁰⁶ Indeed, the entire Eastern Europe, as defined by the Cold War borders, was not considered to be a part of the concept of West.

Entry's links with related texts

The purpose of this section is to direct users that are more interested in the topic towards related articles. There are two kinds of related texts the

²⁰¹ "Culture of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Culture_of_Europe&oldid=30393462, last modified 6 December 2005).

²⁰² "Culture of Europe (Difference between revisions)." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Culture_of_Europe&action=historysubmit&diff=169588517&oldid=167612050).

²⁰³ "Culture of Europe," (*Wikipedia*, last modified 3 October 2009, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Culture_of_Europe&oldid=317573565, last modified 6 November 2006).

²⁰⁴ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

²⁰⁵ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=336356591>).

²⁰⁶ "Talk: Europe/Archive 9." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_9, accessed 4 January 2012).

main entry links- external websites and other Wikipedia's articles. Furthermore, one more entry labelled as the "Outline of Europe" offers a dazzling number of links to other Europe-related pages on Wikipedia.²⁰⁷ In fact, their number is so huge that they had to be grouped in different categories ranging from a list of cities and villages in Europe, over education and transportation system, to slavery and prostitution, and a tendency is that each of the section offers links to pan-European overviews, as well as to the pages about the same topics in individual European countries. Additionally, there are links to lists of entries related to individual countries. Therefore, this page is extremely inclusive, and as long as the linked page is somehow related to Europe, it will be kept. This page's revision history shows that during its entire existence, not a single link has been removed.²⁰⁸ So, as the number of articles can be only expected to grow, this page will as well.

On the other hand, space in the main entry was much more limited, so a selection had to be made. However, this section was far from a priority in the discourse on Europe on Wikipedia. Despite almost a limitless number of possible choices, a debate on what constitutes a relevant link has never been conducted. Therefore, what was added or removed largely depended on individual users. Both links to external websites and relevant pages on Wikipedia were mostly added individually. For instance, one user added a link to Wikipedia's entry on the chemical element europium,²⁰⁹ the other on an external website containing historical maps of Europe,²¹⁰ and so on. On the other hand, when this section grew too large, some user would take upon him or herself to clean the section up according to his or her own personal criteria.²¹¹

Additionally, special attention was paid to removing commercial spam. Since Wikipedia's entry on Europe receives a high number of visits, many commercial businesses (most commonly those that provide vacation planning

²⁰⁷ "Outline of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Outline_of_Europe&oldid=466084497, last modified 16 December 2011).

²⁰⁸ "Revision history of Outline of Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Outline_of_Europe&action=history, accessed 9 January 2011).

²⁰⁹ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=11423727>, last modified 22 March 2005).

²¹⁰ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=99358436>, last modified 8 January 2007).

²¹¹ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=165705481>, last modified 18 October 2007).

information and related services) have tried to include hyperlinks to their websites in the external links section in order to get financial gains.²¹² However, although frequent, such edits are usually quickly spotted and reverted.

Entry's references

References are not commonly found in encyclopaedias, at least not in the amount that is comparable to Wikipedia. Here, they are necessary because Wikipedia cannot rely on the scientific authority of its writers. Therefore, it tries not to introduce statements that have not been already made elsewhere and, by providing references to secondary sources, it uses them as the basis for its authority. This would suggest that this section should almost exclusively comprise highly reputable academic sources, but that is largely not the case.

While highly reputable academic sources are indeed featured in this section, they hardly constitute a majority.²¹³ In this regard, the problem seems to be their inaccessibility to general audience. Clearly, with the access prices set so high, traditional scholarly sources can hardly be considered relevant to the general audience at which Wikipedia is aimed, and by which it is largely written. More importantly, Wikipedians also do not seem to trust each other that something is actually stated in the provided source. For example, one user removed references to two sources after consulting them and finding out that they do not contain the information they were said to provide.²¹⁴

This practice has set the preference towards open access journals but, given that their number is limited, some compromises had to be made. For instance, on the discussion pages, it has been argued that the National Geographic magazine is not the best source of information,²¹⁵ but given that a

²¹² "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=4367812>, last modified 30 June 2004).

²¹³ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

²¹⁴ "Europe (Difference between revisions)." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&diff=prev&oldid=205639141>, last modified 14 April 2008; "Europe (Difference between revisions)." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&diff=prev&oldid=205640157>, last modified 14 April 2008).

²¹⁵ "Talk: Europe/Archive 8." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_8, accessed 3 January 2012).

scientific society stands behind it, it was deemed as good enough.²¹⁶ Additionally, even though the neutrality of the CIA Factbook has often been disputed,²¹⁷ it is still used as a source of some factual information as it is freely available online.²¹⁸

Visual representation of Europe

Images present in Wikipedia's entry on Europe mostly serve to illustrate what has been said in the text. There are various maps illustrating, for instance, Europe's division into floristic regions or spread of the EU and the CIS, or important historical events that have been discussed in the text. Occasionally, they provide some further information that would take up too much space if presented in texts, such as the number of unemployed people per country in the subsection on the late 2000s economic crisis, or various ways in which European countries can be grouped in the section on political geography.²¹⁹

On the other hand, when it comes to photographs aiming to provide a visual feel of Europe, a shift is noticeable over time. In the first period, the discourse seemed to favour photographs that show extraordinary or the most extreme of Europe. For instance, at one point the entry included: Portugal's Cape Roca, the westernmost point of mainland Europe; Iceland's Dettifoss, the most powerful waterfall in Europe; Montenegro's Tara River Canyon, the deepest canyon in Europe, and similar extremes.²²⁰ Needless to say, such approach has made the entry wildly unrepresentative of Europe, and it was only a matter of time until someone complained about it.

In May 2009 a user argued that Malta's Hagar Qim and Tarxien constructions might better represent prehistoric Europe than rather exceptional

²¹⁶ "Talk: Europe/Archive 3." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_3, accessed 5 January 2005).

²¹⁷ Talk:Europe/Archive 5." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_5, accessed 5 January 2005).

²¹⁸ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

²¹⁹ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

²²⁰ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=188384653>, last modified 1 February 2008).

Stonehenge,²²¹ and a picture of the temple Ġgantija was added to the entry during the same day.²²² Still, a picture of Stonehenge remained, and some other iconic images, such as Raphael's *The School of Athens*, to name one example, are still to be found in the main entry,²²³ but pictures of ordinary features also started finding their place in the entry. For example, at the end of 2011, in the subsection on religion, a picture of a small village church in Germany was presented²²⁴ at the place where older rules would favour a photograph of St. Paul's cathedral in Rome.

Vandalism

Given how frequent it is in Wikipedia's entry on Europe, vandalism deserves a separate short mention. Wikipedia defines vandalism as "any addition, removal, or change of content in a *deliberate* attempt to compromise the integrity of Wikipedia. Examples of typical vandalism are adding irrelevant obscenities and crude humour to a page, illegitimately blanking pages, and inserting obvious nonsense into a page."²²⁵ (original emphasis). Indeed, Wikipedia's main entry on Europe has been completely blanked dozens of times, while many have tried to modify it in order to entertain themselves. For example, one user wrote in late November 2005 that Europe is the password for a torrent file.²²⁶ However, rather than just compromising the integrity of Wikipedia, some acts of vandalism often perform additional functions that are highly relevant to the discourse.

Most importantly, vandalism is frequently used for expressing disagreement with what is written in the entry, and sometimes with the entire concept of collaborative knowledge production. On a number of occasions, for instance, the entire entry was replaced with the text saying that Europe does

²²¹ "Talk: Europe/Archive 8." (*Wikipedia*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Europe/Archive_8, accessed 3 January 2012).

²²² "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=292187777>, last modified 25 May 2009).

²²³ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=468281043>, last modified 29 December 2011).

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ "Wikipedia: Vandalism." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Vandalism>, accessed 1 Jan 2012).

²²⁶ "Europe." (*Wikipedia*, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=29183705>, last modified 25 November 2005).

not actually exist, or changed to highlight certain political points of view, as in the example in image 3. Still, we must note that Wikipedia makes a distinction between edit warring and vandalism:

*Even if misguided, wilfully against consensus, or disruptive, any good-faith effort to improve the encyclopaedia is not vandalism. Edit warring over content is not vandalism. Careful consideration may be required to differentiate between edits that are beneficial, detrimental but well-intentioned, and vandalizing. Mislabelling good faith edits, as vandalism can be considered harmful.*²²⁷

Obviously, users that engage in this specific kind of vandalism have the other path to follow if they want to make their voices heard, but they choose not to. I would argue that this kind of behaviour is an online equivalent to traditional street protests since, we may assume, a high number of people does not think that it is up to them to write Wikipedia's entries, the same way as most city dwellers do not think that it is personally up to them to clean river banks. Therefore, such acts of vandalism are rather a way for them to demand some action, than straightforward attempts to compromise Wikipedia.

²²⁷Ibid.



Image 3: An example of politically motivated vandalism on Wikipedia

Source: Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Europe&oldid=169132318>.

Results

This research shows that the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia has, in most parts, reached a satisfactory level of maturity, meaning that various ideas and points of view have been tested, kept, rejected or modified, depending on how much they conformed to the overall rules of the discourse. However, some groups of statements, namely those dealing with the economy and politics of Europe did not incite much debate since they are not considered to be cardinal elements of the discourse on Europe. Hence, changes in these sections did not have significant consequences on the rest of the entry.

The discourse on geography of Europe clearly shows that amount of debate concerning specific issues is, in most cases, quite proportional to their significance in defining Europe. While statements from the sections on physical and political geography, whose function is to define what Europe

is, where its borders lie, and what countries are European underwent much scrutiny, the rest of these sections developed quite unproblematically as they were not crucial to the abovementioned concerns.

One of the maps used to illustrate this entry presents Europe as a geographical, cultural, and political entity. Since geographical borders of Europe are clearly highlighted by using different colours for European and Asian parts of transcontinental states, we can conclude that this notion takes the precedence over the other two. Indeed, because of this reason, the discourse was more sceptical towards the inclusion of Cyprus than towards the inclusion of Turkey in the list of European countries. However, since the third colour was used to depict Cyprus and Armenia, countries that have no territory on European soil, as part of Europe, it is obvious that culture also plays a very important role in this discourse. Furthermore, the status of predominantly Christian Russia as a European country was far less debated than the status of Turkey, which has a Muslim majority.

European culture is currently defined alongside the Classical Antiquity – Christianity – Enlightenment axis, but it cannot be said that this statement has a secure place in the discourse. It has already been challenged, but proper debate still has not been conducted on this issue. Currently, the specialised entry on European culture contains the list of its elements but, as it is a very complex notion, Wikipedians still do not have confidence to use it to draw more general conclusions and make a synthesis of it. Once this happens, because of the role culture plays in the overall discourse of Europe, we can expect that significant reorganization of the discourse will happen.

Politics, on the other hand, was certainly an important factor in the debate. However, it cannot be said that it was a determining one. For instance, neither Belarus nor Kazakhstan were excluded because of not being members of the Council of Europe, though such “anomaly” has been noted in the entry. Rather, the role of politics was far more pronounced in the attempts to subdivide Europe internally. Nonetheless, even here the role of politics has been somewhat relativised since multiple subdivisions of Europe are given.

Additionally, it was not sufficient to define what Europe is, it also had to be said what it is not. In this regard, the discourse went to separate Europe from the West, and from the EU. In this case, two distant approaches had been used. Europe was defined as the birthplace of Western culture, but the discourse concluded that it is no longer a part of it as Turkey and the post-communist European countries never really belonged there.

The EU, on the other hand, is defined as one significant portion of the continent which, however, cannot be used as the substitute for the entire Europe. From the very creation of the entry, it was noted that many, especially the media, often use the term “Europe” to refer to the EU, and it was concluded that such oversimplification should be avoided in Wikipedia. Therefore, many efforts have been made to pursue this end, out of which the most drastic example was the exclusion of the European flag, which, as the flag had originally been created by the Council of Europe, could serve as a legitimate symbol for the entire Europe. It has been removed from the entry just for the sake of avoiding any possible confusion. On the other hand, the presence of the EU is still predominant in the specialised article on European integration, but that can be explained by the fact that statements grouped around this specialised entry have only recently entered the main discourse on Europe. In the corresponding section of the main entry, the EU and the CIS are already represented on equal footing. As the rules of the main discourse on Europe take firmer grip on the specialised article, it is to be expected that it will be reorganised accordingly as well.

Also, it is important to note that more general rules of Wikipedia as a whole play an important role in the discourse as well. The most important is Wikipedia’s policy of neutrality, which requires an entry to represent all the relevant points of view on the subject. Hence, for example, Europe is defined as a geographic, cultural and political concept, while the section on etymology provides several explanations about the origins and the meaning of the term “Europe”. On the other hand, limited space and the abundance of possible content for the section and the specialised article on history of Europe have prevented participants from following that policy. Therefore, they have decided to do the closest thing possible – to provide as flat account of past events that took place on European soil as possible, which tries to avoid adding any underlying principle that would connect them in a meaningful narrative. These are to be found in a number of more specialised entries to which the section and the dedicated entry link to.

Since Wikipedia cannot stand behind the authority of its writers, which are largely either anonymous or pseudonymous, it has to rely on a number of references to secondary sources to assert its trustworthiness. Still, as users do not even trust each other on the issue whether a source really contains the information which it claims to contain, it is occasionally checked whether the information is really present in the source. This has set the preference towards widely available sources, and explains the relative underrepresenta-

tion of highly reputable academic sources, which are kept away from the general audience behind the highly priced pay walls of academic publishers. Because of the same reasons, sources deemed by the participants themselves as not academic enough (the National Geographic magazine), or not neutral enough (the CIA Factbook) are still used merely because they are freely available online. Additionally, Wikipedia tries to appear more trustworthy by mimicking some academic traditions, most notably by providing the account on etymology, which itself does not seem to serve any other purpose in the discourse.

Given that people who engage in editing Wikipedia entries come from all over the World, its reliance on large international organizations, such as the United Nations, where some important compromises have already been achieved is not surprising at all. Still, it can be hardly said that Wikipedians blindly follow their viewpoints. The case of Kosovo's independence clearly shows that when the reality becomes significantly different from their views, their importance will be relativised.

Internal coherence of Wikipedia is also another important factor in the discourse. Various articles of this free encyclopaedia are interconnected by a number of hyperlinks and, as editors of Wikipedia occasionally refer to them while debating certain issues, it is obvious that a lot of effort is put into keeping them coherent. Still, as the absence of the section on the late 2000s economic recession in the dedicated entry on European economy, and its presence in the main entry on Europe indicates, Wikipedia still has to find a proper solution to address the issue of internal coherency. To put it simply, changes in one entry do not always affect other connected entries in a timely fashion.

CONCLUSION

This research was an attempt to examine the nature of the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia. By analysing its development, introduced changes, and their effect on the entire entry, it has sought to provide better understanding of the discourse on Europe in this controversial, but undoubtedly influential encyclopaedia.

This study finds that, even though Wikipedia is made by a general audience for a general audience, it can hardly be said that it represents the aggregation of public opinion. That is not the nature of this discourse. Participants did not simply vote on all the points of divergence, but a set of rules that guide the development of the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia was gradually established and, as soon as it was in place, it became the primary factor that determines whether a statement is kept, rejected or transformed. Individual participants were a far less significant factor in this regard. Therefore, it can be concluded that the development of the entry on Europe in English Wikipedia unfolded in accordance with discursive rules suggested by Michel Foucault, and that his approach to doing discourse analysis was a valuable instrument for examining the collaborative process of knowledge production in Wikipedia, since it made it possible to discover functions of statements, rules that govern their formation and transformation and, ultimately, boundaries of thought about Europe in English Wikipedia.

Indeed, as Foucauldian discourse analysis usually does, closer investigation of the process in which this discourse unfolds did yield some surprising results that can by no means be attributed to the impact of public opinion. Hardly anyone could have expected that, for instance, the status of Cyprus, a predominantly Christian EU member state, would be more questioned than the status of Turkey as a European country. However, if the rules of the discourse are taken into consideration, this development is not surprising at all. As the primacy of the geographical concept of Europe was established in this specific discourse, it is to be expected that a country with at least some territory in Europe was better positioned to be regarded as European than a country that has none, even though it has much stronger

cultural and political ties with the continent. Similarly, the EU could not get a more prominent place in the discourse since it is only one part of the geographical concept of Europe, even though the term “Europe” is quite often used to refer to this supranational organization in the general public discourse.

A surprisingly low amount of the debate on European history can also be explained by limitations set out by the discourse itself. As the number of possible developments that could be included in it was much higher than the limited space of the entry could accommodate, the debate on possible interpretations of specific events in European history was transferred to more specialised entries where Wikipedia’s policy of neutrality could be fully applied. All that could fit in the entry was a relatively flat account that tries to avoid any interpretation wherever possible.

This account of European history also shows another important characteristic of discourses as conceptualised by Foucault – that different versions of the same discourse can be drastically different from one another. While early versions of the account on European history excluded not only European Muslim countries but the Byzantine Empire as well, its later versions used specifically the account on historical events involving Turkey and Russia, a part of Byzantine commonwealth, as one of the main reasons for challenging a proposed merger with the entry on the history of West.

Overall, this research shows that behind the relatively stable-looking façade of the entry on Europe in English Wikipedia, one can discover a number of transformations through which it has passed over time. The entry on Europe in English Wikipedia is rather a process than a final product. Changes are introduced on daily basis, and the account on Europe continuously keeps evolving. Throughout its existence, it has gone through many significant alternations, and it can be expected that many important changes have yet to come. As Foucauldian discourse analysis expects, developments in one section did tend to affect other parts of the entry as well, though it cannot be said that all of the changes were of equal importance. On the contrary, changes to the statements defining what Europe is, which have the cardinal role in the discourse, had much more significance than others. Because of that, as geography of Europe is unlikely to change, the statements dealing with European culture hold a privileged position as any alternations in this account could trigger a number of transformations in other parts of the entry as well. Interestingly, the discourse on the nature

of European culture still has not been a subject of exhaustive debate, and it therefore still remains a relatively unstable element in the discourse.

While the intention of knowledge production behind the entry on Europe in English Wikipedia certainly was not to provide cultural legitimization for the political project of European integration, it deserves to be examined against the background of this problem. If we take into account Wikipedia's widespread use, it can be argued that it is an influential source of information, in a position to influence opinions of an enormous number of individuals on many issues, including their views and attitudes towards political integration in Europe.

In this regard, it can be concluded that the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia is quite compatible with the narratives behind the integrative processes in Europe, despite the fact that a lot of effort has been put in distinguishing the notion of Europe from that of the EU. In this specific discourse, Europe has been presented as a single geographic concept that has common history. In fact, it was even argued that writing a history of Europe as a whole makes much more sense than writing national histories of European countries because these are seen as relatively recent inventions, while Europeans have been connected, in one way or another, for centuries, through a relatively dense web of shared cultural and social experiences.

Additionally, despite the fact that the culture of Europe has been described as a series of overlapping cultures, common denominators have been already brought to fore in the following passage. What is more, the specialised entry on European culture is not divided along the national lines, but according to various sectors such as philosophy, art, cuisine, sport, and others, where individuals and cultural products from different countries are grouped together, side by side.

Therefore, since Europe is systematically rendered as a single unit according to geographic and cultural assumptions, this Wikipedia entry can serve as a means for cultural legitimization of European processes of integration. In fact, the entry even features a section on European integration as an important aspect of European reality.

However, all this might seem at odds with persistent preoccupation with keeping the EU from hijacking the entire notion of Europe. This can be also explained precisely with the fact the overall intention of the discourse to present Europe as a single unit. As the entry notes, there are two integrative processes unfolding in Europe – that of the EU and that of the CIS. Even

though they bring some of the European countries closer together, they essentially divide the continent in two parts. Admittedly, this explanation is not sufficient since the CIS has only recently entered the discourse on Europe in English Wikipedia, while the EU has been kept from overtaking the entire discourse since the first version of the entry was created.

Given that the EU itself can be also viewed as a divisional force which segregates people belonging to it from those that do not, it can be assumed that it is what makes it somewhat incompatible with discourse's notion of Europe as single geographic and cultural entity. It is not *the* process, but just *a* process of European integration. Therefore, while the EU can find cultural legitimization for its political project in Wikipedia's entry on Europe, this discourse clearly signals that, according to its criteria, in addition to deepening, further widening of the EU is needed if culture is going to be used as the basis for forging common identity of its citizens. Borders of European culture are still not identical with those of the EU and, therefore, the current grouping of countries within the umbrella of EU seems relatively arbitrary from this entry's perspective.

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LIST OF ACRONZMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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CEFTA – The Central European Free Trade Agreement

CIS – The Commonwealth of Independent States

EFTA – The European Free Trade Association

EU – The European Union

NATO – The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

FOSS – Free and open-source software

IP – Internet Protocol

OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

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Dušan Miletić

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