Wikimedia and Democracy –

The impact of Wikimedia UK's information literacy work on citizen engagement

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WIKIMEDIA
UK

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Executive Summary

Democracies rely on informed citizens to function effectively. Over recent years, new digital technologies have fundamentally altered the creation and consumption of media content, and introduced new challenges (as well as opportunities) to democratic participation. The increased volume of news, the politicisation of social media, misinformation, disinformation, and the distracting of the public through fake news, along with the rise of polarised and radicalised groups whose own ideology is reinforced by "filter bubbles", all combine to create untrustworthiness, bias and misrepresentation. These issues undermine democracy and its reliance on well-informed citizens.

At its heart, information literacy empowers citizens to access, create, consume and critically evaluate information. It builds understanding of the ethical and political issues associated with the use of information, including privacy, data protection, freedom of information, open access/open data and intellectual property. Information literacy is empowering, contributing to democratic, inclusive, participatory societies (UNESCO, 2016). Further, as interpreted by UNESCO, it is also a universal human right. Access to unbiased, reliable and verified information is a fundamental requirement for creating trust and ensuring that citizens can meaningfully engage with content. It is a core element of facilitating engagement (although not the only one).

Wikipedia is one of the biggest sources of accurate, factual and independent information in the world. According to Eurostat, the percentage of individuals using Wikipedia to learn about any subject is growing steadily in the UK, rising from 41% in 2011 to 54% in 2015[1], showing the increasingly central role Wikipedia plays in today's information environment. As one of the world's largest open knowledge platforms, Wikipedia provides anyone who has internet access with the ability to consume as well as create and add to the sum of all knowledge, thereby making the production and distribution of information more democratic. Representation on Wikipedia matters, as Wikipedia's content gets reflected elsewhere on the internet, and in media. Wikipedia offers a platform where communities can capture and share information that is important to them, without commercial influences – something that's increasingly rare.

Wikimedia UK is the national charity for the global Wikimedia movement. We believe that open access to knowledge is a fundamental right, and a driver for social and economic development. A registered charity, we work with Wikimedia projects such as Wikipedia to enable people and organisations to contribute to a shared understanding of the world through the democratic creation, distribution and consumption of knowledge. Wikimedia UK, through its programme delivery, helps strengthen civil society and democratic processes in the UK by:

1. **Providing open and free access to accurate information** – Wikimedia UK facilitates the recording and provision of factual and accurate historical and cultural memory (redressing the imbalance of representation for marginalised groups), thereby challenging media manipulation.

2. **Improving information literacy skills** – Wikimedia UK's programmes promote information literacy by providing access to open knowledge, and facilitating its consumption and creation. Its content development programmes help fight mis- and disinformation, misrepresentation, systemic bias and inequality, thus building more tolerance and cultural understanding.

3. **Encouraging volunteering** – Working with Wikimedia UK provides opportunities for marginalised groups to self-organise, self-represent, learn useful skills and become active members of a democratic society.

4. **Providing accessible collaborative infrastructure** – Wikimedia UK's programmes are delivered within the Wikimedia projects ecosystem, using its collaborative tools and drawing on its consensus-based community decision-making processes. Programme participants thereby gain direct experience of navigating community decision processes, self-representation and participation, achieving skills for civic engagement in public life outside of Wikimedia.

Every year, Wikimedia UK holds events which educate about 8,500 people in the UK about referencing and verifying information sources and the importance of open knowledge. It also reaches about 50,000 people a year on social media. The Wikipedia articles edited within our programmes are seen over 120 million times a year. The provision by Wikimedia projects of open access to factual knowledge can increase information literacy levels and promote critical thinking in individuals.

Wikipedia also encourages people to actively contribute to knowledge by becoming wiki editors, which teaches them how to assess content, reference and credit sources. This process transforms passive consumers into active creators of knowledge, giving them the opportunity to contribute something very important to society.

Wikimedia UK works with about 800 new volunteer editors and 500 community leaders a year, who contribute to Wikimedia UK's programmes by organising events, "editathons", "hackathons" and content uploads, supporting external partnerships, and advocating for open knowledge. Wikimedia UK focuses on supporting underrepresented communities in these activities.

Our experience shows that groups organised around a shared interest, value or cause, and equipped with digital, information and collaboration skills, are more likely to engage in civic participation in public matters relevant for them. Moreover, learning about the culture of democratic participation and processes of engagement empowers individuals, equipping them with transferable skills.

Wikimedia UK's programmes help provide citizens with skills and competencies that are needed for the critical evaluation of information in the following ways:

— Understanding content (e.g., ideas, opinions, concepts, relationships between facts) and where it comes from (evaluating the trustworthiness of information before making a decision on an issue), applying strategies for verifying information (finding the original content source, verifying the source, checking other information, reading fact-checking articles, and turning to trusted places), and reflecting on the impact of false and misleading information in political, social and public arenas

— Applying critical thinking skills (e.g., analysing, detecting bias, evaluating, inferring, interpreting, revising, refining, reviewing, reflecting, forming conclusions, synthesising)

— Using collaborative and group learning skills (e.g., communication skills, questioning, active listening, problem solving, teamwork)

— Encouraging civic disposition (e.g., disposition to respect diversity of opinion; assume the personal responsibilities of a citizen, including reflecting on online responsibility).

Freedom of expression and access to reliable information through Wikimedia projects increase intercultural dialogue and decrease the social isolation of minority groups. Wikipedia serves as a platform that can assist displaced or minoritised communities to maintain cultural identity[2]. Wikimedia UK delivers over 300 editathons, workshops and residency programmes in collaboration with communities or organisations in the UK, with 50% of these programmes dedicated to documenting and sharing the cultural and historical memory of marginalised groups. In essence, Wikimedia UK contributes to building a more tolerant, informed and democratic society by increasing the information literacy level of individuals and communities, and facilitating their accurate self-representation and civic engagement in public life and policymaking.

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FAKE ECONOMY!

Recommendations

Wikimedia UK's programmes can significantly increase citizen engagement in democratic processes through our work in information literacy. To ensure the highest possible impact of this work, we recommend that:

1. Working definitions of information literacy at national and institutional levels promote the importance of information literacy for democratic participation. Wikimedia UK acknowledges the important relationships between individuals' information literacy and civic and political engagement. In particular, Wikimedia UK emphasises the importance of having the skills to locate reliable information online in the fight against fake news, misrepresentation and prejudice.

2. The culture of democratic participation is better embedded in formal education curricula, as well as in informal and adult education, potentially using Wikimedia projects as a way of demonstrating the process of civic engagement.

3. Information literacy resources from Wikimedia are harnessed in formal, informal and adult education programmes. Wikipedia, aside from being one of the biggest sources of accurate, factual and independent information in the world, has also accumulated extensive resources on information literacy itself – e.g., on referencing, citations, types of sources, reliability, and verifiability of information.

Wikimedia UK delivers its information literacy programmes in partnership with external organisations and community groups. We recommend that any organisations wanting to partner with us on literacy programmes:

1. Organise programmes to volunteer with Wikimedia UK as a way to promote civic engagement, activism and community involvement. Wikimedia UK believes that even online programmes facilitate civic engagement offline.

2. Support marginalised groups to harness the skills gained through contributing to Wikimedia projects. Through participating in Wikimedia activities, communities can learn to share their cultural heritage, self-organise, self-represent, and develop other life and work skills that help them become active members of a democratic society.

3. Support citizens to tackle systemic biases on Wikipedia, thus facilitating access to reliable and balanced information for all. Engaging with and representing marginalised people and subjects can effect change by increasing the amount of available information that more accurately reflects our society.

FAKE NEWS?

Introduction

Wikipedia is the world's leading website through which people learn about history and culture. It is the number one informational site on the web. Each day, there are 260 million views on English Wikipedia from about 70 million users. The English Wikipedia is just one of nearly three hundred language versions, maintained by volunteer communities of differing sizes.

Wikipedia is part of the Wikimedia movement, which includes online platforms, volunteer communities and charitable organisations, sharing the goals of open knowledge for all. In its current strategy – "Wikimedia Movement 2017 Strategy/Direction" (2021) – the Wikimedia movement has explicitly committed to the goal of knowledge equity as one of two core principles: "As a social movement, we will focus our efforts on the knowledge and communities that have been left out by structures of power and privilege."

Wikimedia UK is the UK charity for the global Wikimedia movement. Our vision is of a more tolerant, informed and democratic society through open knowledge. We are passionate and committed to open knowledge and free access, not just in the UK but on a global scale. Our staff, trustees, community leaders, contributors and volunteers are all committed to the vision of a world where everyone shares in the sum of all knowledge. Wikimedia UK works with Wikimedia projects and enables people and organisations in the UK to contribute to a shared understanding of the world through the democratic creation, distribution and consumption of knowledge[3]. We are working towards the following long term outcomes:

— Wikimedia reflects our diverse society and works to overcome systemic bias

— Our work will have increased free, ethical access to knowledge and information

— Our work will have supported the development of high levels of information literacy

— Wikimedia users are able to understand the climate crisis and their role within it

— Wikimedia UK is recognised as a leading organisation for open knowledge

Wikimedia UK believes that engaging with Wikipedia and the other Wikimedia projects – particularly through becoming a contributor – enables learners to understand, navigate and critically evaluate knowledge and information. In partnership with the education sector, we put that belief into practice through a range of interventions that support the development of digital and information literacy skills for primary school pupils through to Masters Degree students. We work in partnership with the education sector to improve the digital literacy skills of both staff and students, and help to prepare students for the challenges of dealing with information online. Through our projects and programmes, students – across age groups and education settings – can develop their writing, research, evaluation and critical thinking skills whilst contributing to open knowledge that reaches millions of people.

Through this research project we wanted to critically investigate how engaging with Wikimedia projects contributes to the strengthening of civil society and democratic processes in the UK, and how improving information literacy skills contributes to Wikimedia UK's vision of a more tolerant, informed and democratic society. Does our work in education increase participants' information literacy, and does this in turn lead to a more engaged civil society?

To answer this question, we will examine current understanding and frameworks of literacies, civic engagement and democratic participation, to see how information literacy can be shown to support civic engagement. We will then show how Wikimedia UK's work fits into these frameworks.

Overview of literacies, civic engagement and democratic participation

Introduction – "Informed societies"

Democracies rely on informed citizens. Engaging citizens in democratic processes can identify and resolve collective problems, diagnose distribution of power inequalities within a society and allow for broadened dialogue, which includes the views and perspectives of traditionally marginalised groups (Wampler, 2012). New technologies and the online digital convergence of media (traditional media migrating online and becoming integrated) have altered the creation and consumption of media content, and introduced new challenges, such as the increased volume of news, politicisation of social media, purposeful misinformation and distracting of the public with fake news, and the rise of polarised and radicalised groups whose own ideology is reinforced by algorithms, thereby creating "filter bubbles" and echo chambers in the online sphere. It has also given rise to "astroturfers"; manufactured groups with political, commercial or religious purposes who pretend to be supporters of grassroot groups (Mason et al., 2020). These combined phenomena are creating untrustworthiness, bias and misrepresentation; issues that undermine democracy and its reliance on well-informed citizens (Goldstein, 2019).

Traditional citizenship includes voting in elections, reading/writing/debating about issues and leaders, working in the community in support of a particular cause, lobbying, campaigning, protesting for or against government action, or forming/joining/leading political parties or communities.

Navigating the 21st century's digital age and information landscape requires citizens to have new skills for democratic participation, such as critical media literacy, including digital, data, information, and political literacy (Polizzi, 2020). Today's citizens not only need to be knowledgeable about media ownership to understand manipulation, but also about how news are created in the online environment to purposefully generate audience reach for profit/sales with viral stories and sensationalism, and about how to determine trustworthiness of information on digital platforms. Media literacy has been identified as being key to empowering citizens to adequately consume and create media themselves, in order to be active participants in a democratic society (Kellner and Share, 2005). However, media literacy, traditionally emphasising the critical understanding and creation of media texts, has come to be used as an umbrella term referring to a variety of literacies, including information, media, and digital literacies (Livingstone et al., 2013)[4].

Information literacy remains a critically important subset of media literacy, as whichever format media is presented in, citizens need to be able to locate/access, verify, critically evaluate and analyse, manage, create, communicate, store and share information with an understanding of ethical and political issues associated with using that information, including privacy, data protection, freedom of information, open access/open data, and intellectual property. Information literacy is also empowering – it is a contributor to democratic, inclusive, participatory societies; as interpreted by UNESCO, it is a universal human right (CILIP, 2018).

Types of literacies, and civic engagement

Quantitative studies in the context of media education (particularly on children and university students), have demonstrated a positive correlation between critical thinking, knowledge of how the media operates, and civic engagement both on- and offline (Martens and Hobbs, 2015; Hobbs et al., 2013). There is also evidence of a link between the ability to evaluate the trustworthiness of websites with online political engagement, and higher levels of online exposure to diverse perspectives (Kahne, Lee and Feezell, 2012). In the context of critical pedagogy, students' critical reflections of dominant representation increased their ability to rewrite content subject to bias, misrepresentation and prejudice connected to political action (Kellner and Share, 2007). Citizens' drive to participate stems from psychological factors, such as a sense of civic duty and belonging, which requires an exploration of social and behavioural sciences on the cross-section with these literacy skills, a subject which has not yet been sufficiently explored. But research has shown that networked engagement within online communities can facilitate the development and sharing of critical debate (McGinnis et al., 2007) and the participation of marginalised groups in the public sphere (Goldstein, 2019). Moreover, it was proven that psychological empowerment can be enhanced by one's degree of content generation online and by both one's attitude and behaviour in civic engagement offline (Leung, 2009). Information scientists draw on critical pedagogy and link

critical information literacy (the ability to question power and authority) with citizenship, and the ways in which it facilitates social justice. Although it overlaps with information literacy and critical literacy, the question of whether political literacy – people's knowledge of history, political systems, groups, government, civic and political affairs – is backed by people's ability to evaluate information in relation to bias, trustworthiness, or prejudice has not been addressed (Goldstein, 2019). This is particularly relevant for youth, since, according to a study by Ofcom (2018) on news consumption in the UK, although three-quarters of 12–15-year olds say they are aware of fake news, only a shocking 2% of children have the critical literacy skills to determine whether an online news story is real or fake. An empirical study in the USA investigated whether individuals with greater literacy (including media, information, news, and digital literacies) were better at recognising fake news, and concluded that accurate identification of fake news was significantly associated with information literacy, but not with other types of literacy scales used in the study. Information literacy (people's abilities to navigate and find verified and reliable information online) was the most useful in identifying fake news (Jones-Jang et al., 2019). Information-seeking motives were also found to strongly contribute to adolescents' intent toward civic engagement (Martens and Hobbs, 2015).

The role of a civil society in facilitating the development of media and information literacy skills has been recognised at the international level by UNESCO (Paris Declaration on Media and Information Literacy in the Digital Era[5]): "Civil society associations and NGOs (…) support media and information literacy focus on citizenship and civic agency and can foster a vibrant public sphere engagement and empowerment outcomes in the digital context." In a report by the European Audiovisual Observatory (2016), civil society in this context was categorised as "foundations, not-for-profit organisations, arts and cultural bodies, charities, think-tanks, communities of interest and community networks." Research into the role of civil societies in Europe in improving media and information literacy skills showed that they mostly focused on providing programmes on critical thinking, media use, participation and interaction, creativity and intercultural dialogue (Kanižaj, 2017). This is why we have decided to focus on information literacy as a key information framework to use while reflecting on civic engagement.

Information literacy frameworks in the UK

CILIP (the Chartered Institute for Librarians and Information Professionals in the UK) developed a comprehensive definition of information literacy (CILIP, 2018), which is reflective of information literacy's role in citizen engagement:

"Information literacy allows individuals to acquire and develop their understanding of the world around them; to reach informed views; where appropriate, to challenge, credibly and in an informed way assumptions or orthodoxies (including one's own), and even authority; to recognise bias and misinformation; and thereby to be engaged citizens, able to play a full part in democratic life and society. Information literacy helps to address social exclusion, by providing disadvantaged or marginalised groups with the means of making sense of the world around them and participating in society. In a global environment where "fake news" has become a recognised term, an ability to display critical judgement about multiple information sources, particularly online, is crucial. Whether in relation to conventional news outlets, social media, internet searches or simply information communicated orally, information literacy helps to reach views about the reliability and authority of information sources. In these ways too, information literacy reinforces democracy and civic engagement."

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In the UK, the latest Online Media Literacy Strategy (DCMS, 2021) focuses on five key areas needed by users to navigate the increasingly complex digital landscape (Figure 1). The strategy covers online safety, personal data, information bubbles and echo chambers, misinformation and disinformation, ads and sponsored content, fact and source checking, dealing with harmful content, safe online behaviour when creating and collaborating, and engaging in online conversations (including democratic debates). Although democratic participation in debates was mentioned, the strategy does not address key issues, such as how to empower people to reach and express informed views and to engage fully with society.

Figure 1. DMCS's five identified key areas of online media literacy

	Principle	Scope
	Principle 1 Users should understand the risks of sharing personal data online, how that data can be used by others, and are able to take action to protect their privacy online.	Data and Privacy
	Principle 2 Users should understand how the online environment operates and use this to inform decisions online.	Online Environment
	Principle 3 Users should understand how online content is generated, and be able to critically analyse the content they consume.	Information Consumption
	Principle 4 Users should understand that actions online have consequences offline, and use this understanding in their online interactions.	Online Consequences
	Principle 5 Users are able to participate in online engagement and contribute to making the online environment positive, whilst understanding the risks of engaging with others.	Online Engagement

Image credit: © Crown copyright 2021, Principles of UK's 2021 Online Media Literacy Strategy[6]

The National Information Literacy Framework of Scotland[7] (Figure 2) is divided into different education sectors, and then further into skills to be developed at appropriate levels, creating a learning pathway for education or personal development planning process.
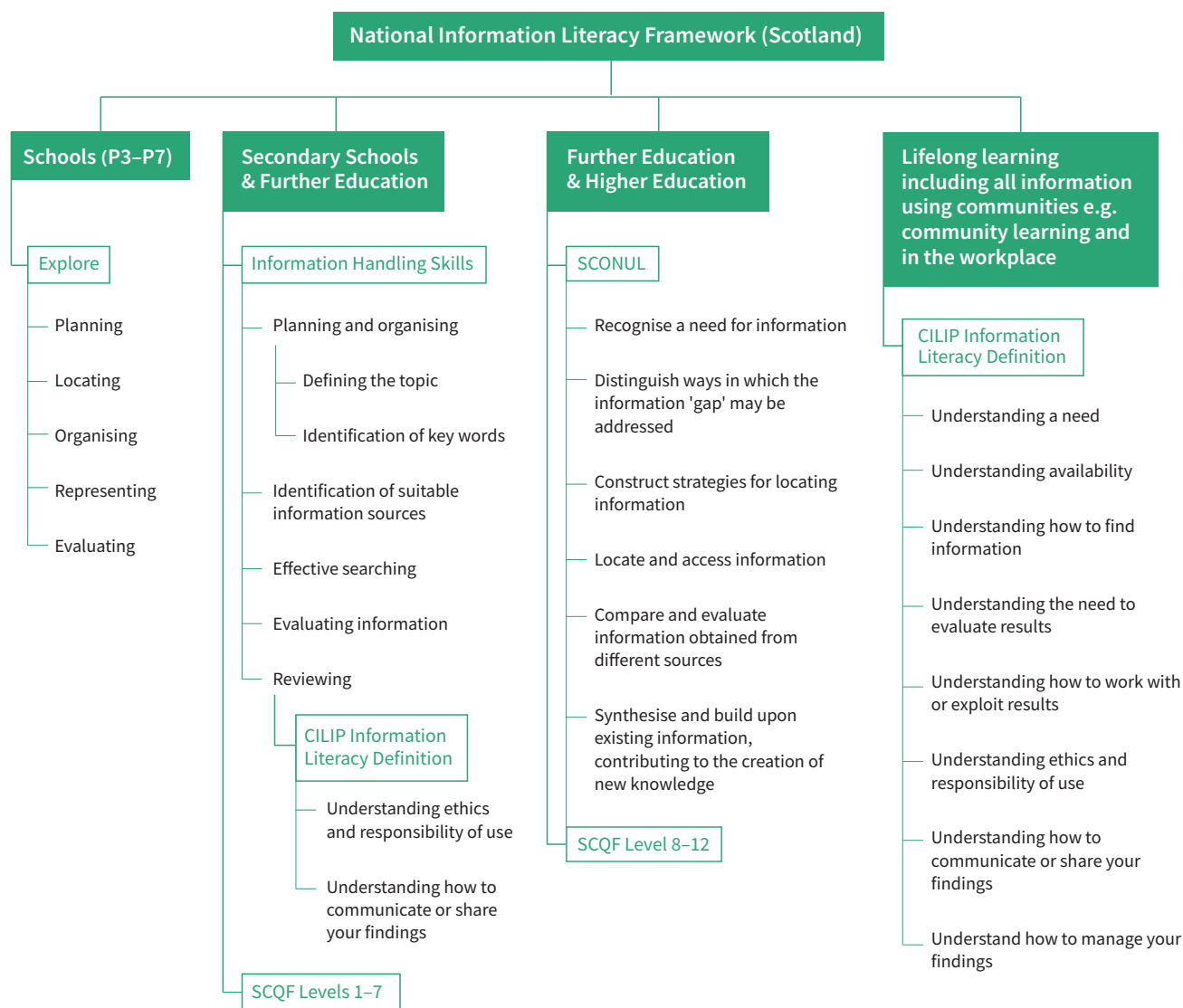
National Information Literacy Framework (Scotland)

Schools (P3–P7)

Explore

— Planning
— Locating
— Organising
— Representing
— Evaluating

Secondary Schools & Further Education

Information Handling Skills

— Planning and organising
  — Defining the topic
  — Identification of key words
— Identification of suitable information sources
— Effective searching
— Evaluating information
— Reviewing
  CILIP Information Literacy Definition
  — Understanding ethics and responsibility of use
  — Understanding how to communicate or share your findings

SCQF Levels 1–7

Further Education & Higher Education

SCONUL

— Recognise a need for information
— Distinguish ways in which the information 'gap' may be addressed
— Construct strategies for locating information
— Locate and access information
— Compare and evaluate information obtained from different sources
— Synthesise and build upon existing information, contributing to the creation of new knowledge

SCQF Level 8–12

Lifelong learning including all information using communities e.g. community learning and in the workplace

CILIP Information Literacy Definition

— Understanding a need
— Understanding availability
— Understanding how to find information
— Understanding the need to evaluate results
— Understanding how to work with or exploit results
— Understanding ethics and responsibility of use
— Understanding how to communicate or share your findings
— Understand how to manage your findings

Figure 2. The National Information Literacy Framework of Scotland
Image credit: Visual diagram of the National Information Literacy Framework of Scotland, Scottish Information Literacy Project (SILP), 2008[8]

The National Information Literacy Framework of Wales is based on the Society of College, National and University Libraries' (SCONUL) seven pillars, and is understood through the eyes of individuals engaged in different types of activities (Figure 3). Based on the seven pillars, Welsh Libraries developed a comprehensive framework to map skills from Entry Level 1 up to Doctoral level, and linked them to the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (Cardiff University, 2011).
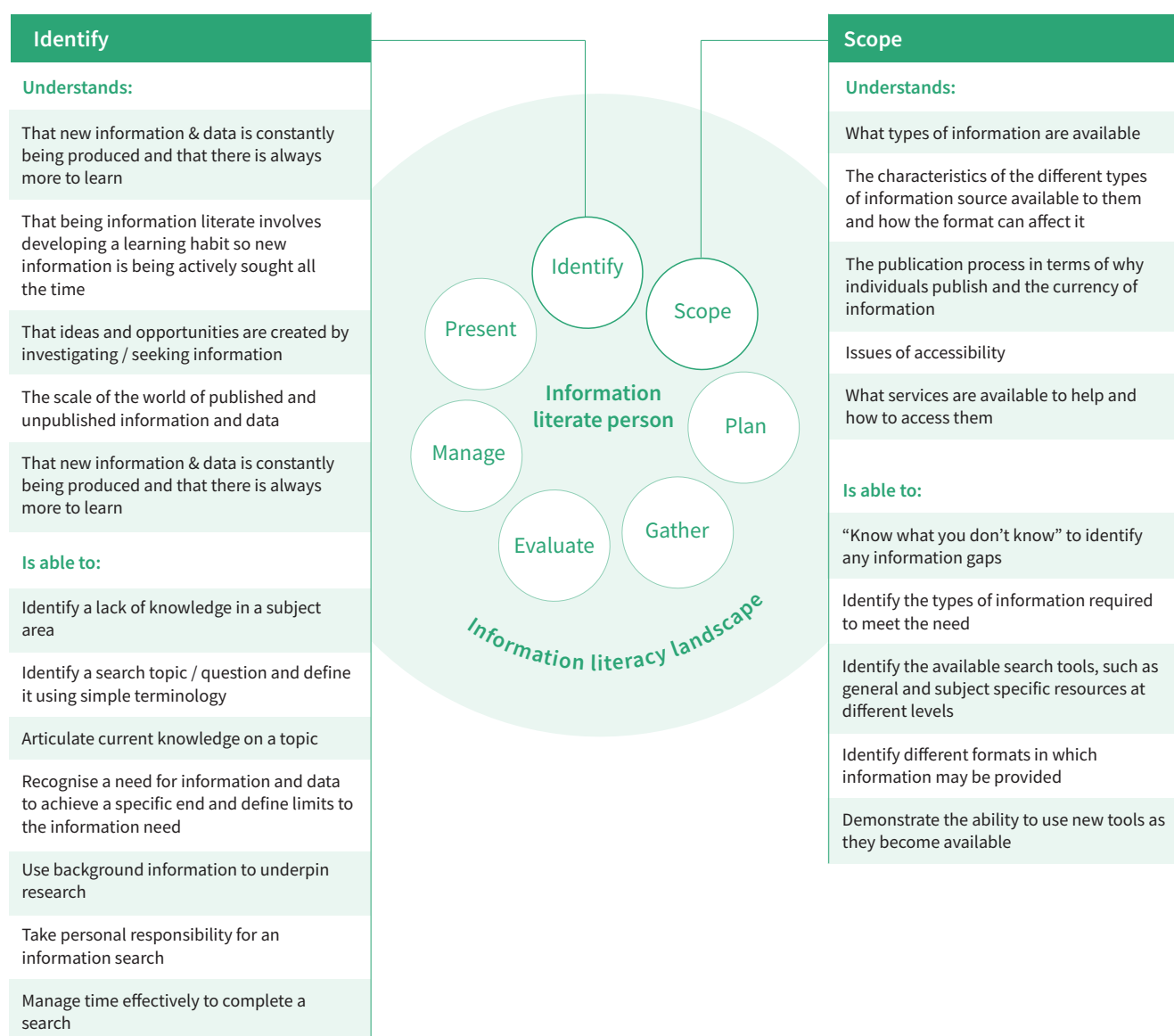

Identify

Understands:

That new information & data is constantly being produced and that there is always more to learn

That being information literate involves developing a learning habit so new information is being actively sought all the time

That ideas and opportunities are created by investigating / seeking information

The scale of the world of published and unpublished information and data

That new information & data is constantly being produced and that there is always more to learn

Is able to:

Identify a lack of knowledge in a subject area

Identify a search topic / question and define it using simple terminology

Articulate current knowledge on a topic

Recognise a need for information and data to achieve a specific end and define limits to the information need

Use background information to underpin research

Take personal responsibility for an information search

Manage time effectively to complete a search

Scope

Understands:

What types of information are available

The characteristics of the different types of information source available to them and how the format can affect it

The publication process in terms of why individuals publish and the currency of information

Issues of accessibility

What services are available to help and how to access them

Is able to:

"Know what you don't know" to identify any information gaps

Identify the types of information required to meet the need

Identify the available search tools, such as general and subject specific resources at different levels

Identify different formats in which information may be provided

Demonstrate the ability to use new tools as they become available

Information literate person

Identify

Scope

Present

Plan

Manage

Gather

Evaluate

Information literacy landscape

Figure 3. SCONUL's seven pillars of information literacy
Image credit: The SCONUL Seven Pillars of Information Literacy, SCONUL Working Group on Information Literacy, April 2011

Both the Scottish and Welsh frameworks put emphasis on finding and comparing different information sources, on critical evaluation of the context in which the content was created, and on ethical use of information. However, as in the DCMS strategy, the link between information literacy and democratic participation is not clearly established.

Citizenship in the UK

Citizenship in formal education

England, Wales, Scotland, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have different systems of citizenship education[9]. In English primary schools, citizenship is a non-statutory subject, but there is a curriculum framework for citizenship which should be used to plan citizenship provision in Key Stages 1 and 2. In secondary schools, it is a statutory National Curriculum foundation subject, and it should address topics listed in the citizenship programmes of study[10] and in the GCSE Citizenship Studies[11]. However, research shows that "less than a third of secondary schools are offering weekly lessons in politics or curricular citizenship education, and a fifth of schools are offering no provision at all." (Weinberg, 2021)

Teachers with Qualified Teacher Status in politics, philosophy, economics, law and other social sciences can become trained citizenship teachers through universities offering specialist training, but also via work-based training providers (SCITT). However, the number of practising specialists is very low, and this subject is taught predominantly by non-specialists (with overlaps between subjects, 31% humanities, 18% Art or Design Technology, 20% English, 22% Modern Foreign Languages, 15% Maths, 17% Science and 22% Physical Education or vocational subjects). The top three "barriers" to providing better democratic education reported by teachers were "competing demands on teachers" time; "teacher expertise"; and "curriculum content" (Weinberg, 2021).

According to the 2021 APPG report, less than a fifth of teachers feel "very" confident when teaching sensitive or controversial issues and only 1% of them feel fully prepared to deliver democratic education in some format or frequency: "This a concerning situation that undermines schools and teachers who should otherwise want to, and be able to, engage young people in important discussions about issues such as race, gender or even extremism." (Weinberg, 2021)

The National Citizen Service

The National Citizen Service Act in 2017 established the National Citizen Service Trust, which runs the NCS for young people who have left secondary education. The NCS comprises a two to four week programme with three parts. The first stage consists of adventure activities, the second consists of learning skills for work and life, and the third is a local social action project.

Citizenship Education support by Civil Organisations

A number of organisations support citizenship education in England:

— Association for Teaching Citizenship (ACT) is the membership association for teachers and others working on citizenship education

— Active Citizens FE is a community interest company and the national network for citizenship post-16

— CitizED is the home of the Citizenship Education Teacher Training Community

— Citizenship Foundation is a leading charity working to promote and support citizenship education

— Democratic Life is a voluntary coalition of organisations and individuals seeking to strengthen and extend young people's entitlement to high-quality citizenship education in England

— Department for Education (DfE) is the ministerial department charged with citizenship education

— Hansard Society has a programme of citizenship education with activities for students and teachers

— National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) has provided some of the latest Citizenship research, and published CELS – the largest and longest-running study on the impact of citizenship education on young people

— Ofsted is the school inspection agency in England and provides regular reports on the quality of citizenship education

— Parliament Education Service works to engage students and teachers in education about parliament, and offers a range of training and teaching materials

Additionally, a number of civil society organisations help to build individuals' political, information and digital literacy skills in the UK to empower them to engage democratically with society, including:

— ShoutOut UK: "ShoutOut UK delivers programmes for people to capture the fundamental British institutions, and how they operate, talking about local councils, local councillors, and the national level, what's the role of the Parliament, government, Prime Minister, members of parliament, and how to get in touch with all of these different representatives. And interwoven into all of these are two key elements. Media literacy is one of the elements, the ability to identify misleading information, misinformation, disinformation, and how to recognise media bias. The second element is public speaking, and discussion based activities, so that people are part of the process on topics interesting to them, getting them to be a part of the whole concrete knowledge creation process." (Interview with Ralitsa Raleva, ShoutOut UK, 22 October 2021)

— Google: in the UK, Google has been working with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and Parent Zone to deliver education programmes in the UK that seek to build digital resilience and citizenship, overlapping with goals of information literacy

— The Be Internet Citizens programme covered 12–15-year olds' critical consumption of information and fake news, recognition of differences between hate speech and free speech, building confidence for self-expression, and promoting tolerance and respect for the opinions and worldviews of others online, as well as evaluation of the negative impacts of echo chambers and filter bubbles and how the internet is shaping attitudes towards other people (ISD, 2020)

A review of Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the UK

A Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, appointed by the House of Lords in June 2017, found that the United Kingdom's approach to citizenship has become synonymous with volunteering, social action or learning facts, rather than learning about and practising democracy in the sense of political engagement and democratic participation (House of Lords, 2018). The Select Committee also argued that "civic engagement is associated with greater levels of tolerance, better knowledge of public affairs, and higher levels of trust and reciprocity across society. In all, the overwhelming weight of evidence points to a series of benefits associated with civic participation which are felt in numerous areas of social and political life."

While the NCS seems to facilitate participation in voting and volunteering, the House of Lords report found that other forms were lacking: "Active citizenship centred on 'social action' is the 'brand' of youth citizenship embodied by NCS … Our research uncovered that citizenship within NCS … is often equated with volunteering." (House of Lords, 2018, Point 179, p48)

The Select Committee consultation report also identified barriers to taking part in civil society, such as: unpredictable short-term work patterns, a lack of facilities in which civil society groups can meet and the government's approach to the voluntary sector as a whole, as well as to mobilising the socially disadvantaged, disabled and marginalised groups of society regarding their integration and assimilation.

This is reflected in formal education, where the APPG report surveying teachers and parents in relation to political and civic education in secondary schools pointed out inequalities in provision, where students in fee-paying schools or maintained secondary schools that serve affluent communities are favoured (Weinberg, 2021): "Independent schools do offer an enhanced programme of provision outside the curriculum – specifically school trips to political institutions, political contact, extra-curricular activities and active citizenship projects. These differences are starkest when compared to maintained schools serving the most deprived communities." The same report concluded that 72% of parents, irrespective of the types of schools attended by their children, "agree" or "strongly agree" that it is important for children to be taught about politics in school.

Conclusions

Several disciplines (media education, critical pedagogy, cognitive and behavioural sciences, political studies and information studies) are exploring the relationships between concepts of literacies, civic engagement and democratic participation. Different civic assessment frameworks[12] agree that many information, digital and media literacy skills overlap with civic skills, but also highlight further essential skills for democratic participation which overlap with political literacy:

— Civic knowledge (e.g., what is civic life and the roles of citizens in a democracy. What are the foundations and building blocks of the political systems, methods and approaches that can be used by governments, organisations, groups and individuals to address citizenship issues in society, including practical citizenship actions, etc.)

— Skills to debate, formulate opinions, viewpoints and hypotheses, create sustained and reasoned arguments and reach substantiated conclusions

— Ability to plan practical citizenship actions aimed at delivering a benefit or change for others in society

Research has been able to confirm positive correlations between individuals' information literacy, media knowledge, critical thinking abilities, and civic and political engagement online and offline. Information literacy has been highlighted in particular for its potential to fight against fake news, misrepresentation and social prejudice. England, Scotland and Wales are all promoting information literacy education through their national frameworks.

Citizenship, citizenry or civic engagement are interpreted in various ways as volunteering, taking part in consultations and voting, political activism/ movements on social media, or enhancing people's skills to tell their story about a specific issue affecting their community. At Wikimedia UK we support a broad understanding of civic engagement, including political empowerment and activism.

Research on youth and civic engagement has found (Raynes-Goldie, K., and Walker, L., 2008) that online interactive sites promoting civic engagement or community involvement are facilitators of civic engagement in the offline world. Even if they are not necessarily the places in which that engagement occurs, they are still providing access to three keys to change: information, people, and organisational tools:

"Online engagement sites (…) enable youth to access information about issues, other relevant organizations, and how to take action effectively. They can connect with their peers to get feedback and support, and organize around issues important to them. Armed with the support of like-minded individuals, tools to organize, and the right information, youth are empowered by these Web sites to step out into the offline world to volunteer, raise awareness, educate others, and start their own organizations." (Raynes-Goldie, K., and Walker, L., 2008)

Civil society also has a role in strengthening and extending formal citizenship education in the UK: "Many people (…) don't know where to start (…), where do I go to volunteer or how do I contribute? And this is where the political literacy element comes in, breaking down those fundamentals of democratic engagement, like how do you go to the local council? What is the function of the local council? How does the local council enable community engagement?" (Interview with Ralitsa Raleva, ShoutOut UK, 22 October 2021)

The work of civil society organisations is particularly important in light of the need for the 21st century citizen to be able to navigate the shifting power balances and environments, and understand context and content around human rights, systemic racism, LBGTI inclusion, social justice, migration and cultural diversity issues. What is especially powerful is the fact that a civil society is affected and shaped by the people who join it, just as they are simultaneously changed by it. As Dr Konstantina Martzoukou highlighted in an interview on information literacy development with Scottish public libraries welcoming new Syrian Scots:

"People are a product of the society they are associated with, and the more they stay, the more they become integrated into the society. (…) We want to help [New Scots] to integrate into the culture of the new environment, but (…) because [New Scots] are also part of the environment, they will change the environment [itself]." (Interview with Dr Konstantina Martzoukou, The Robert Gordon University, 1 September 2021)

Wikimedia and information literacy

Wikimedia is a volunteer-based global movement that strives to bring about a world in which every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge. It does so through collaborative online working on projects such as Wikipedia, Wikidata and Wikimedia Commons.

"[Wikipedia] was built on a volunteering community concept where, most of the time, they have to vote on the directions to take, and even build the confidence in the process itself (…). This definitely leaves an impact in the way that participating editors perceive themselves." (Interview with a Wikimedia Trainer and PhD student at school of Computer Science at the University of St. Andrews, 10 September 2021)

Wikipedia, the free online encyclopaedia, helps average **readers** to[13]:

— Determine the nature and extent of the information needed: Wikipedia helps understand an idea or topic by giving background knowledge of it

— Access needed information effectively and efficiently: Wikipedia facilitates learning by providing further avenues to deepen one's understanding or research (e.g., article sources, external links, keywords as hyperlinks, links to other Wiki projects, such as to media files on Commons or data on Wikidata)

— Critically evaluate information and its sources and incorporate selected information into the readers' knowledge base and value system: as an encyclopaedia that can be edited by anyone, Wikipedia helps readers understand that all sources of information should be critically evaluated on, for example, authority and accuracy

— Wikipedia articles can teach people how information can be structured and presented on a given subject by guiding the readers through sections and headings under which the information is presented

— Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information in an ethical and legal way: Wikipedia facilitates the awareness of the need for citations and copyright considerations

Furthermore, contributing to Wikimedia projects can help editors acquire skills and competencies that are needed for the critical evaluation of information in the following ways:

— Understanding content (e.g., ideas, opinions, concepts, relationships between facts) and where it comes from (evaluating the trustworthiness of information before making a decision on an issue), applying strategies for verifying information (finding the original content source, verifying the source, checking other information, reading fact-checking articles, and turning to trusted places), reflecting on the impact of false and misleading information in political, social and public arenas

— Applying critical thinking skills (e.g., analysing, detecting bias, evaluating, inferring, interpreting, revising, refining, reviewing, reflecting, forming conclusions, synthesising)

— Using collaborative and group learning skills (e.g., communication skills, questioning, active listening, problem solving, teamwork)

— Encouraging civic disposition (e.g., disposition to respect diversity of opinion, and assume the personal responsibilities of a citizen, including reflecting on online responsibility)

Prior research into Wikimedia's role in strengthening individuals' skills and competencies (Bruszik et al., 2018) concluded that Wikimedia projects contribute to at least six areas of skill development (computer and internet skills, content creation skills, collaboration skills, information literacy, data literacy and IT development skills), at basic, intermediate and advanced levels. On information literacy, the study concluded that Wikimedia had undeniable potential in teaching individuals about reliable and verifiable sources, citation rules and referencing, the public domain, and copyright. Moreover, working with Wikimedia projects improves skills in searching, assessing and critically evaluating information. Sometimes this learning is not immediate or conscious:

"You can be doing critical thinking and not realise it whilst working and operating on wiki, and then, it clicks for you what it actually is, like, conceptualising critical thinking, and then you can carry these skills somewhere else." (Interview with a Wikimedia Trainer and PhD student at school of Computer Science at the University of St. Andrews, 10 September 2021)

An Australian case study on Wikipedia editing and information literacy found that Wikipedia editing was a useful authentic learning task for students on "how to plan, research, write and publish an article on a small scale, and become critical producers, rather than mere consumers, of information." (Dawe and Robinson, 2017) A study by the Wikimedia Foundation on students' skill development from Wikipedia assignments (McDowell et al., 2016) revealed that students learned, for instance, that authority is constructed and contextual, that information creation is a process, and that information has value.

According to Eurostat, the percentage of individuals using the internet for consulting Wikipedia to obtain knowledge on any subject is growing steadily in the UK, rising from 41% in 2011 to 54% in 2015[14], showing the increasingly central role Wikipedia plays in today's information environment (having almost two billion visitors/month[15]). As one of the world's largest open knowledge platforms, Wikipedia aims to allow everyone who has internet access to consume and add to the sum of all knowledge. And while information on Wikipedia needs to include references that verify information presented, it is not (yet) a non-biased site. It has been criticised for geographical, gender and racial biases leading to under-representation of groups of societies and regions on its platforms. Representation on Wikipedia matters, as information presented on Wikipedia will become more visible via search engines and the press, and eventually to the public.

"I actually had a positive surprise when I came to know more about Wikimedia and Wikipedia, about how they work and about their policies and guidelines. Unfortunately, we tend to think that it's not a really reliable platform. But when I was reading more about policies and guidelines and how it's working, I was really surprised in a good way, and it made me more interested in Wikipedia as a very important source of knowledge. And people need to be aware that it's reliable, and we can count on it. And we should use it as a way to make our voices heard." (Interview with an MSc student at Education, Gender and International Development Studies at UCL, 10 September 2021)

Public opinion on key issues has been always manipulated by the media – but by the 21st century, the emergence of digital media had also heightened the impact of media manipulation for commercial applications or to serve political agendas (Mason et al., 2020). On the other hand, social media also allows marginalised groups to raise issues (e.g., #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo) or to organise civic engagement and activities. Yet, social media platforms pose significant challenges as our spaces for public discourse are increasingly controlled by private corporations who prioritise markets over democracy. Wikipedia, sometimes called "the last good place on the internet", offers a platform where communities can capture and share information that is important to them, without commercial influences.

"The assumption that everyone is on the same level of understanding of their rights and what democracy is and what freedom of speech is is false. We were surprised by people who had their own interpretation of what democracy and freedom are, and they acted accordingly. Giving these people a tool to assess what is reliable is crucial because of fake news. Building an informed society where people understand how they make a decision on why they vote on someone or why they support a certain group is very crucial." (Interview with a Wikimedia Trainer and PhD student at school of Computer Science at the University of St. Andrews, 10 September 2021)

Moreover, wiki sites are suitable for open democratic participation – e.g., large-scale consultations and gathering contributions in the public sphere. For example, Melbourne city used a wiki site for a collaborative update of its city plan[16], with people being able to edit it directly (Mandarano et al., 2010). A study exploring nine case studies of public participation via wiki sites revealed that their use range from environmental monitoring to providing collaborative spaces for specialists to share knowledge or for working closely with citizens to allow them to submit their own ideas, comment on submissions, and help formulate final policy documents (Mergel, 2011).

12

13

Ignore Media Propoganda

14

Wikimedia and civic engagement

Building on these results, a mapping exercise was carried out to explore how Wikimedia contributes to the strengthening of civil society and democratic processes in the UK, and how improving information literacy skills contributes to Wikimedia UK's vision of a more tolerant, informed and democratic society (Figure 4)[17].
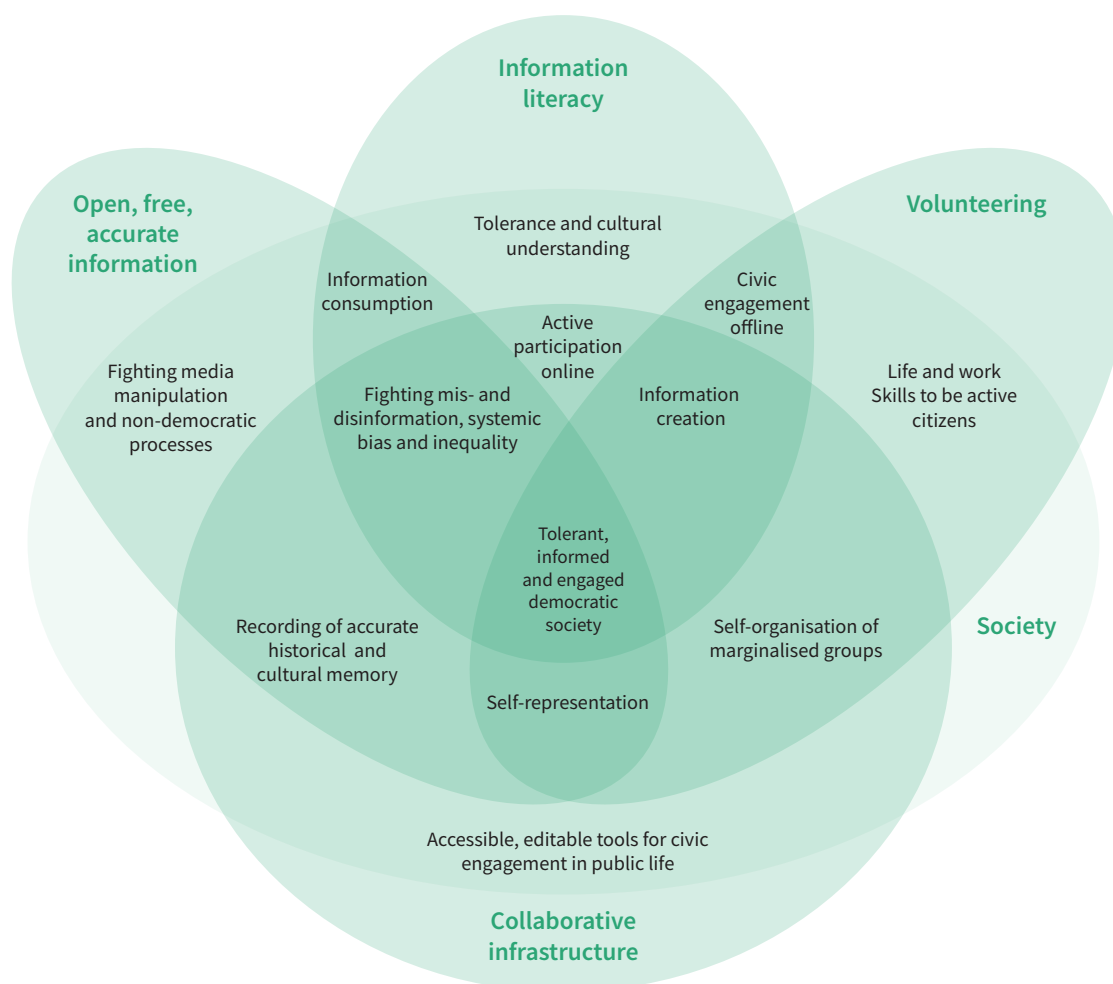

Figure 4. Mapping the role of Wikimedia UK in Civic Participation
Image credit: Wikimedia UK, 2021

Based on our research, Wikimedia contributes to civic engagement and democratic participation in four interrelated ways:

1. Providing open and free access to accurate information

Wikimedia UK facilitates the recording and provision of factual and accurate historical and cultural memory (redressing the imbalance of representation for marginalised groups), thereby challenging media manipulation.

Freedom of expression and access to reliable information through Wikimedia projects increase intercultural dialogue and decrease the social isolation of minority groups:

"The people in the UK take it for granted that they are able to express their opinions, using internet, posting what they feel like. But [minority groups] don't feel confident saying certain things. To empower people in these communities to be able to express, and be part of the UK community would help them integrate, instead of having bubbles where they're isolated from whatever the UK is doing." (Interview with a Wikimedia Trainer and PhD student at school of Computer Science at the University of St. Andrews, 10 September 2021)

Wikimedia UK's work focuses on the knowledge and communities that have been left out by structures of power and privilege; breaking down the barriers that prevent people and organisations from accessing and contributing to open knowledge, and supporting the development of people-centred and technical solutions to help eradicate inequality and bias. This is guided by the concepts of knowledge equity, knowledge justice and the power of self-representation.

Accurate historical and cultural memory

Every year, Wikimedia UK delivers over 300 editathons, workshops and residency programmes in collaboration with cultural institutions in the UK, with 50% of these programmes dedicated to archiving cultural and historical memory, in particular of marginalised groups. Wikimedia UK also regularly dedicates effort to Black history, organising events around the topics of slavery and race. Racial issues have become more prominent research themes in individual disciplines; for instance within the histories of archaeology[18], where historical construction of inequality and race are highlighted. Wikimedia UK can be a partner in addressing such misrepresentation on Wikimedia projects.

A contemporary example of capturing factually accurate information is the real-time improvement of Wikipedia's coverage of UK politics on general election nights, adding new MPs to Wikipedia and updating pages related to UK politics and associated subjects[19].

"How important is the collaboration and identifying reliable sources, where people could rely on in upcoming elections or wherever there are community elections or whatever they are going through. So it's crucial, in our age, to facilitate that." (Interview with a Wikimedia Trainer and PhD student at school of Computer Science at the University of St. Andrews, 10 September 2021)

Fighting media manipulation

One of the aspects that makes Wikipedia a reliable and factual information source is the way in which articles are added and checked on the platform. An extensive guide[20] helps editors identify what constitutes a verifiable source they can cite, what comprises primary, secondary and tertiary sources, what defines reliability in different contexts, and what makes a source questionable. It also explains how to deal with information created by news agencies and news organisations, and information based on personal opinions or biased views of individuals. Wikimedia UK's video[21] about fake news has been widely disseminated to further raise awareness on the dangers of consuming information without critically evaluating its sources.

An example from 2020–21 is a global wiki Covid-19 platform that aims to provide the most accurate information on the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the global pandemic[22] in the face of misinformation and disinformation campaigns on social media. Volunteer editors across the globe have been collaborating to collate accurate information about the pandemic, while the multilingual nature of Wikipedia meant that the information can be distributed to communities within minoritised languages.

Fighting non-democratic processes

"I think that it's a matter of promoting the culture of freedom of self expression, and being able to really have a democratic view or practice [via Wikimedia], even if it's a small community. And then [this experience] also helps you to understand and realise what's going on, for example, I've never heard before about lobbying, about parties coming together, about how [an election] works. And when you understand [democratic practices], you start to understand it on a broader picture, of what's happening in political parties and bigger countries, who's winning, who's losing. So first, these activities give you a way to practice and understand how [the democratic process] goes, then it helps you to understand what's really happening in the world." (Interview with a Wikimedia Trainer and PhD student at school of Computer Science at the University of St. Andrews, 10 September 2021)

Authoritarian regimes can target free, accessible outlets of information and decide to ban them from use. For example, Turkey blocked access to Wikipedia by law from 29th April 2017, in response to a Wikepedia article in which the country was accused of state sponsorship of terrorism. Wikimedia UK supported the Turkish Wikimedia community during this ban by organising a Wikipedia workshop for Turkish speakers to improve content on the Turkish Wikipedia about cultural subjects, by uploading images on cultural sites in Turkey and by improving datasets on these sites on Wikidata. The Constitutional Court of Turkey ruled that the Wikipedia block violated human rights, and on 15th January 2020, the block of Wikipedia in Turkey was lifted[23].

2. Improving information literacy skills

Wikimedia UK's programmes promote information literacy by providing access to open knowledge, and facilitating its consumption and creation. Its content development programmes help fight mis- and disinformation, misrepresentation, systemic bias and inequality, thus building more tolerance and cultural understanding.

Wikimedia projects provide open access to factual knowledge, and increase information literacy levels and critical thinking of individuals. Research has underscored that Wikipedia "plays an important role in the disinformation ecosystems, both as a battlefield where attackers try to introduce disinformation but also as a reliable source for machines and humans to combat disinformation."[24] Editing Wikipedia leads people to re-evaluate the internet and the reliability of sources; it elevates people from passive consumers to active creators of knowledge. This is a critically useful skill for education. It is also empowering for citizens to contribute to a society [that is] increasingly reliant on online information.

"One of the fascinating things about Wikipedia and why I think it would be very beneficial for anyone to get involved in writing it is the fact that before I had a very distorted image of how referencing works, what is referencing and cross-referencing. After I came to Wikipedia (...) I realised that I would love my community to learn the same skills, to give them the ability of critically assessing a resource." (Interview with a Wikimedia Trainer and PhD student at school of Computer Science at the University of St. Andrews, 10 September 2021)

Every year Wikimedia UK holds events which educate about 8,500 people in the UK about referencing and verifying information sources and the importance of open knowledge: in classroom courses, conferences, workshops, training, editathons and community meetups. A further 50,000 people are reached through social media with similar messaging about open knowledge.

Specifically within the education sector, since 2016, Wikimedia UK has supported 37 separate regular and one-off classroom courses at 18 universities across the UK, which use Wikimedia projects as digital content tools (e.g., Wikipedia, Wikidata and Wikibooks). In this "Wikimedia in the Classroom" model students write wiki articles for course credits. Since 2016, nearly 10,000 students have contributed over 47,000 hours to Wikimedia projects, while improving their information, digital and data literacy skills. Skills improvements are measured through surveys run by the course leaders, and include the following aspects:

— Finding information online

— Creating online content

— Collaborating online

— Identifying reliable information

— Understanding and using data

— Understanding how open knowledge is created

— Understanding open data

— Understanding copyright and public domain

On average, 80% of participants notice an improvement in their skills in these areas.

Students work on a wide range of subjects, dictated by the course we are partnering on, and their interest. In recent years however we have been steering the focus of "Wikimedia in the Classroom" towards underrepresented knowledge. For example, since 2020 we have collaborated with staff and students of the London College of Communications to decolonise Wikipedia; building on their own work to decolonise the curriculum. As we develop our understanding of what decolonisation means within the context of Wikimedia UK and our partners, it has become clear that decolonising university curricula and collections is not just a matter of including more diverse authors on reading lists, but of diversifying knowledge production itself. It's about recognising different knowledge, and ensuring that different ways of knowing are visible and valued. At London College of Communications, our partnership project is developing the skills and confidence of students to play an active role in decolonising knowledge production, with one of the outcomes being to increase the visibility and credibility of underrepresented figures connected to their key subject disciplines.

Tolerance and cultural understanding

Individuals with higher levels of information literacy are less prone to mis- and disinformation and misrepresentation, can identify more systemic bias and inequality, and build more tolerance and cultural understanding.

According to the Memorandum of Understanding between UNESCO and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, urgent attention and action is needed "in order to guarantee peaceful coexistence, harmony and interaction between people with different cultural backgrounds by proposing cultural and linguistic diversity and intercultural dialogue." In this context, media and other information providers are thought to be in a strategic position when it comes to promoting broad international dialogue, provided they are given the freedom and

independence to do so. They play a vital role in shaping perceptions of other cultures, and therefore have a unique responsibility with regard to promoting and endorsing tolerance throughout the world. Promoting media and information literacy doubtless constitutes an opportunity to advance all of these ideals (UNESCO, 2013, Correia, 2002).

Wikipedia could be a powerful tool for fostering cultural understanding. However, it's important to stress that as an information source, Wikipedia itself is still biased. A variety of factors including cultural bias, accessibility and the culture of the existing contributor community have led to a disproportionate representation of dominant knowledge across all Wikipedia platforms.

For example, Wikipedia has a large gender gap in its contributors and content. In a 2011 survey, the Wikimedia Foundation found that fewer than 10% of its contributors identify as female. Further, data analysis tools and computational linguistics studies have concluded that Wikipedia has fewer and less extensive articles on women; those same tools have shown gender biases in biographical articles.

These imbalances can be used as an initial impetus for running programmes to increase representation. Wikimedia UK has run several multi-year programmes to tackle systemic biases by increasing engagement with, and representation of, marginalised people and subjects. These include projects like gender gap work, in which editors collate information and edit thousands of biographies of inspiring women; collaborations between Wikimedia UK and Amnesty International to create biographies of female human rights defenders and increasing the visibility of notable women by uploading their portrait pictures to Wikipedia and Wiki Commons (#VisibleWikiWomen). These kinds of projects can effect change through Wikipedia by increasing the amount of freely accessible information that more accurately reflects our society.

3. Encouraging volunteering

Working with Wikimedia UK provides opportunities for marginalised groups to self-organise, self-represent, learn useful skills and become active members of a democratic society.

Wikimedia UK works with about 800 new volunteer editors and 500 community leaders a year, who contribute to the implementation of its programmes by organising events, editathons, hackathons and content uploads, supporting external partnerships, and advocating for open knowledge. All of these activities are opportunities to develop additional skills. Leading volunteers are additionally provided with focused "Train the Trainer" courses to further polish specific teaching or collaboration skills. Wikimedia UK also provides grants to support volunteer-led activities. Based on annual volunteer surveys, between 86% and 90% of Wikimedia UK's volunteers reported having developed new transferable skills through volunteering activities.

Group editing events serve to improve a specific topic or type of content on Wikipedia or on other Wikimedia projects. Contributing to the project does not need to be a solitary activity. Wikimedia UK works in collaboration with community groups to help them run wiki events, which typically include basic editing training for new editors (by Wikimedia UK staff or leading volunteers), and may be combined with a more general social meetuphelping to build a sense of community. These editing events were usually run in-person before the Covid-19 pandemic but generally moved online in 2020, with hybrid events becoming increasingly common at the time of writing.

McMillan and Chavis (1986, p.9) define a sense of community as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members" needs will be met through their commitment to be together." Rafaeli and Ariel (2008)

found that on Wikipedia, contributors can have an immediate influence on article content and can take part in many editorial and community life decisions. During group editing events or "editathons", participants look for reliable sources, establish a to-do list, get trained in editing and contribute together. Moreover, they have the freedom to contribute with content that is important to them and increase the visibility of content about common interests or cultural, natural and historical heritage. The freedom to self-initiate and self-organise such events is a great added value for community groups.

Wikimedia has a particularly relevant role in enabling displaced or minority communities to maintain cultural identity and increase their representation, as, for instance, experienced in a programme on Syrian refugees' social integration, supported by CILIP:

"(…) They worked with libraries and created a video, for example, where they presented the country and all the cultural heritage they've lost. And they wanted to show the world that they were not just some people with no background, or people who didn't have something to contribute. They had a very rich history, background, civilization and things that they would give to society." (Interview with Dr Konstantina Martzoukou, The Robert Gordon University, 1 September 2021)

Groups that are organised along shared interests, values or causes, and are then also equipped with digital, information and collaboration skills, are more likely to engage in civic participation in public matters relevant for them. Moreover, learning about the culture of democratic participation and processes of engagement through volunteering equips individuals with transferable skills:

"(…) when you're having a community who is promoting those values, and teaching you how to put them in practice, later, when you go on in real life, you will also be able to do them." (Interview with an MSc student at Education, Gender and International Development Studies at UCL, 10 September 2021)

Empowering communities through wiki participation

The UK is one of the most culturally diverse countries in Europe, with over 300 languages spoken. In addition to organising programmes for indigenous minority languages in the UK (Scottish, Gaelic, Welsh, Cornish, etc), Wikimedia UK regularly engages other marginalised communities in volunteering. Through workshops with their peers, volunteers can contribute to cultural diversity, polish skills, translate impactful content of their choice and improve their professional portfolio. These activities can also lead to improved job prospects and inspire communities towards further self-organisation.

Since 2017, Wikimedia UK has been working with Turkish, Ahmadi or Kurdish communities in the UK. Kurds are unusual among diaspora communities in that they do not have a secure state of their own, and face threats to their culture as a people. They are proud of their nationality, and preserving their heritage is important to them. Kurds speak a range of languages, including Kurmanji, Sorani, Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, Armenian and Azeri. Kurdish Kurmanji is spoken by 15 million people, but it is threatened by hostile government policy in countries with large Kurdish populations, such as Turkey. Wikimedia UK has provided teaching methods, skill development and the possibility to collaborate with institutions that act as venues, networks, and advocates. In 2020, the Kurdish community on Wikimedia grew into a recognised User Group affiliate of the Wikimedia Movement.

Another example of empowering communities through Wikipedia editing is the Women's Classical Committee. Their #WCCwiki editing initiative is a successful model of a pre-existing community extending their activity to include Wikipedia editing. The group have been editing Wikipedia for a number of years, and welcome new contributors who want to join. The transition to online only events in 2020 went smoothly as they had already mixed in-person events with online meetups; the main change was from using text based platforms such as IRC to video conferencing such as Zoom which allowed greater interaction and meant that live training and mentoring became possible. The group's efforts have been transformative in improving the English Wikipedia's coverage of classics, and they are responsible for improving or creating hundreds of articles over the course of their project. Importantly, they also advocate for the use of Wikimedia by researchers to share work and foreground the efforts of their academic foremothers. In doing so they have helped inspire other initiatives such as #MedievalWiki which seeks to improve Wikipedia through feminist, anti-racist editing.

4. Providing accessible collaborative infrastructure

Wikimedia UK's programmes are delivered within the Wikimedia projects ecosystem, using its collaborative tools and drawing on its consensus-based community decision-making processes. Programme participants thereby gain direct experience of navigating community decision processes, self-representation and participation, achieving skills for civic engagement in public life outside of Wikimedia.

All Wikimedia projects are collaboratively developed by users around the world using the MediaWiki software. All contributions are released under a free Creative Commons licence, which means that the content may be freely used, edited, copied and redistributed, subject to the terms of the licence[25]. Wikimedia projects can be edited collaboratively, and anyone can edit all of them, once an anonymous user account has been created for the editor.

Additionally, independent collaborative open-access websites can be built based on the free MediaWiki software (wiki sites), which can be used for collaborative knowledge management of any content, and it could include gathering evidence and opinions on public issues, or running participatory-led consultations.

The open and editable character of Wikimedia projects, and the MediaWiki software, means that the opportunities for collaboration are endless. The following examples illustrate the use of wiki functionalities for civic engagement.

Participatory democracy – Digital Democracy UK consultation

In 2014, a page titled "Connecting knowledge to power: the future of digital democracy in the UK' was established on "Meta-Wiki" to collect responses to a call by the House of Commons' Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy UK, under the digital scrutiny theme. People were invited to provide input on three key questions to collaboratively feed the consultation response[26]. The way the consultation process was modelled at the same time showcased ideas in digital democracy itself.

Citizen empowerment – Wikidata and Code the City in Scotland

Wikimedia UK has been collaborating with Code the City[27], a civic hacking initiative, bringing local communities to improve the representation of information about Aberdeen on Wikidata, Wiki Commons or Wikipedia. A hackathon in 2021 focused on environmental issues – people worked together to map and standardise the information from Local Council websites on household waste recycling centres. Some participants had technical and wiki knowledge which was then shared with others. They released the information worked on into the open for communities to keep up to date. They also created an easily updatable list of hustings (debates or speeches during an election campaign where one or more of the representative candidates are present) for parliamentary candidates[28]. These hustings help people's understanding of candidates' and parties' positions on climate, transport and environmental issues.

Open knowledge, including openly accessible data, isn't of much use to citizens if they are not skilled to use it – Wikimedia activities give people an opportunity to develop their information and data literacy skills, while also providing a space for publishing the information they generate. When that information pertains to the work of their local council, the skills developed become powerful tools of civic empowerment.

Civic participation skills in own language – Welsh Wikipedia

Harnessing technology is an important part of the Welsh government's goal to have one million Welsh speakers by 2050. The National Library of Wales appointed a National Wikimedian in 2017, following the recognition that Wicipedia had become the most popular Welsh website. Since this appointment, several collaborations and partnerships have been built with libraries, information and content providers, and educators to help advance the representation of Wales and the Welsh language on Wikimedia projects, including the incorporation of Wikimedia in the national educational curricula, connected to language and digital and information literacy skills. Over the years, volunteers (including teachers and learners of all ages) have written and edited Welsh Wikipedia articles about historical, geographical and literary subjects, creating social and cultural capital through this community work. The community was also recognised as a User Group affiliate of the Wikimedia movement, translating volunteer activity into a democratic governance structure.

Thanks to volunteer editors building more than 100,000 articles on the Welsh version of Wikipedia, both the Welsh Government[29] promoting the Welsh language and big tech companies realised the value of openly available content. Welsh Wikipedia is the biggest Welsh-language resource online.

Based on this capital, Google Translate and other technologies can also facilitate civic engagement. They use artificial neural networks to learn from examples, training themselves with language data from rich internet sources like the Welsh Wikipedia. "AI can (…) enable computers to analyse Welsh language questions and to respond in a sensible and useful way. Conversational bots and other technologies depend on this infrastructure. Such bots can be used, by citizens, for example, to make enquiries of their local council, or to book a course at night school (amongst a myriad of other possibilities)." (Welsh Language Technology Action Plan, 2017).

Welsh Wikipedia is a distinct online project with a need for their own wiki policies and rules, often inspired by but essentially created separately from English Wikipedia. Being smaller in size, Welsh Wikipedia offers participants a significant chance to take part in project governance discussions, influence policies, and self-organise in ways that are responsive to their context, distinct from English Wikipedia. The value of civic participation in your own language is significant, and Wikimedia, with its 300 language versions, offers a rich collaborative infrastructure for people representing various language communities.

Conclusions

"The rise of populism has been linked to a decline in interest in public affairs and we thought that, being less politically and socially active, people may be less capable of interpreting political phenomena and understanding the complexity of the management of public affairs."[30]

We are faced with a global trend towards a shrinking civil society space. There are fewer spaces where citizens can develop and practise key civic skills such as collaboration, self-representation, and working within a context of diversity and difference of opinion. This is much needed in any country, including the UK. Civic skills are broad in character and can be developed in a variety of settings – they don't have to start off in person and can take advantage of opportunities online. Wikipedia has the benefit of being a well known online space, meaning it has the recognition within a big audience that could then be engaged in civic activities. We can engage with people where they already are rather than needing to bring them to a new, unknown space.

In a recent survey of our community leaders, we asked if individuals' participation in Wikimedia UK activities, such as running wiki events, encouraged them to take part in other non-wiki activities? (e.g. community organising, campaigning, other kinds of volunteering, etc.) It is clear from a recent survey of our community leaders that people's participation in Wikimedia UK activities – such as running wiki events – encourages participation in non-wiki activities such as community organising, campaigning or other kinds of volunteering. As one volunteer reports:

"Yes. In speaking to a volunteer for our charity, I became aware of the [community heritage project centring on a particular 19th century industrial action]. I created the Wikipedia page for[...], a leading figure in the strike whose mentions elsewhere assured her notability, and through this spoke to the originators of [community heritage project]. I am now actively involved with the group, including as part of their education and community engagement sub-group. It's likely that Wikipedia work will feature in this at some stage, as they were overjoyed with the [...] page and very much convinced of the usefulness of more (and more accurate) Wikipedia representation." (Community leader response in a 2021–22 Wikimedia UK volunteer survey)[31]

Working on Wikimedia UK projects can facilitate this spirit of working towards a common good (free knowledge for all), cooperation with others, activism, which in the long run encourages an empowered civil society. This we believe can go a long way towards realising Wikimedia UK's vision of a more informed, democratic and equitable society.

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Endnotes

1   *https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tin00128/ default/table?lang=en*

2   *As an example – https://icom.museum/en/news/wiki-icom- protect-afghanistan-cultural-heritage/*

3   *You can learn more about Wikimedia UK's work at https:// wikimedia.org.uk/home/what-we-do/*

4   *An overview of different literacy frameworks was presented in previous research on Wikimedia's role in the development of digital skills (Bruszik et al., 2018).*

5   *http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/ pdf/In_Focus/paris_mil_declaration_final.pdf*

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7   *http://www.therightinformation.org/*

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13 *Based on Jennings, 2008*

14 *https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tin00128/ default/table?lang=en*

15 *https://stats.wikimedia.org/#/all-wikipedia-projects/reading/ unique-devices/normal|line|2-year|(access-site)~mobile- site*desktop-site|monthly*

16 *Future Melbourne*

17 *https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mapping_the_role_of_ Wikimedia_UK_in_Civic_Participation.jpg*

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26 *https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/speaker/ digital-democracy/wikisourcedsubmission.pdf*

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30 *https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/ S0047272721002140?via%3Dihub*

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