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## **CULTURES OF PUBLICS ON THE WEB: “UNITED IN DIVERSITY“ on the Wikipedia?**

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### **Introduction**

By looking back to the eighteenth century the emergence of global as well as national public spaces has been described as coevolutive structural transformations of modernity (Stichweh 2002: 57). In this vein also the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, published in 1751, can serve as an example illustrating that the nation state and ,world society’ have not emerged as competing socio-political spaces. The *Encyclopédie* addressed the French nation as well as the world as such. Since this project of knowledge production and distribution was written in French and not in the Latin language, the editors strived to popularize (subjective) scientific reflections within the French society (d’Alembert 1955 [1751]: 171). At the same time, it addressed the world inasmuch as knowledge was said to be a universal good which is not only made by people but also made for people (Diderot 1969 [1750/1]: 79). The editors of the *Encyclopédie* thus gathered dispersed knowledge in the scientific community and hoped to contribute in terms of a ,sapere aude’ to the ,enlightenment’ of the individual reader. Supported by François Marie Arouet Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Charles-Louis Montesquieu, Denis Diderot and Jean-Baptiste le Rond d’Alembert published thirty-five volumes between 1751 und 1780. These volumes were thought to be and have indeed been perceived as a critique towards church and society in general. Already in the systematical order which puts the alphabetical order in the background (Mittelstrass 1967: 99), the moment of critique can be traced within the *Encyclopédie*. Etymological the word *critique* derives from the ancient greek word *kritein* (to differentiate, to distinguish, to decide, to judge).

Being aware of this historical context, the project of the free encyclopedia Wikipedia can said to be rooted in the European history of organizing knowledge. Taking these reflections as a starting point, the paper discusses primarily the idea of Wikipedia as translingual/national and in particular European public space. Dealing with the question of a Europeanization as well as transnationalization of the public sphere, the concept of ‘cultures of publics’ is derived from public sphere theory. In doing so, it draws

from political science tradition as well as from theoretical approaches that have been developed in the field of cultural studies. This concept strives to adhere both to the normative dimension of public sphere theory and to the accessibility for empirical analysis. In a second step the paper approaches tentatively peer-to-peer-production and appropriation of political public space in and across different language versions. Can one detect the EU's motto "United in Diversity" in the cyberspace? Do platforms like Wikipedia leave the idea of transnational and/or European public spheres behind by shifting attention to a multilingual as well as to a translingual approach of 'doing public'?

### **Differentiating between Transnational and Translingual**

Political public sphere is a concept central to democracy theory which encounters difficulties to meet the conceptual challenges a globalized, digitalized world provides in terms of thinking beyond Westphalian notions of the nation state as well as in terms of visibility and accountability in cyberspace. Currently, similar lines of thoughts can be observed within political science and communication studies. Starting with the diagnosis that media cultures as well as the sphere of politics are entangled in complex ways both with national states and with processes of globalization, the question of (de-)territorialization is brought up. Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp have lately claimed that comparative media research should take the 'container critique' seriously in consideration by focusing primarily on media cultures instead of media markets or media systems that take mostly the state as reference point:

"More helpful than [...] territorial bordering is to suggest that cultures – as the sum of the classificatory systems and discursive formations on which the production of meaning draws (see Hall, 1997: 222) – transgress the local without being necessarily focused on territoriality as a reference point of their meaning articulation. In this sense, cultures are a kind of 'thickening' (Löfgren, 2001) of translocal processes of the articulation of meaning. Such a theorization opens the possibility of understanding territorialization, and deterritorialization, as contested practices through which specific cultures are articulated in their particularity – by the media and beyond (García Canclini, 1995, 2001)."

(Hepp/Couldry forthcoming: 38)

While this approach suggests a notion of 'cultural thickening', also public sphere scholars have put the idea of connectivity in different ways in the center of their thoughts since intra- and interpublic relations have said to be the *conditio-sine-qua-non* for public spaces to identify themselves and to become visible for the people and political centers such as the EU (e.g. Bohman 2007; Habermas 2008; Wessler 2004; for an overview see Niesyto 2008b). On the *operational level* these thickenings have been spelled out in different proposals of the quality of interconnectivity between different publics. For instance Jürgen Habermas – by drawing from Bernhard Peters – sticks to a national framework of public space while

proposing a European political post-national constellation. He identifies amongst other things the mutual observation of *national mass media* with regard to European issues as well the discursive exchange of arguments and opinions between these national publics as the central empirical accessible levels of European public space (Habermas 2008: 107, 191). Similarly, Klaus Eder and Kathleen Kantner put the idea of national defined territories a priori when argue that the interconnectivity in the context of European public space is given if the same issues are discussed at the same time and with the same criteria of relevance (Eder/Kantner 2000: 315).

With particular regard to the internet as public space with a flexible, distributed, potentially global structure and interactive features and by not denying the central place of nation states a reference points of public space that serve hinge-joint functions in political architectures (e.g. Eriksen 2007), I have drawn from the idea of translocal communities (Hepp) and I have suggested elsewhere to conceptualize European political public spaces as 'cultures of publics' in terms of specific thickenings of communicative connectivities between different localities and between different publics which display an explicit outbound and public orientation within and beyond the public spaces of the nation states (Niesyto 2008a : 31). While the normative concept of political public sphere needs territoriality in order to link back communicative space to sovereign entities, the analytical dimension of public space should not be restricted by the geopolitical unit of political entities (e.g. nation states) because political public spaces contain practices of both territorialization and deterritorialization. At this point (visual, spoken, written) language – understood as system of symbols – comes in, since language as reference frame of 'cultures of publics' allows to capture both – territorialization and deterritorialization – as well as to take particularities in articulation processes into account. In terms of the latter translingualization inherently leads to an understanding of translation as a process of intermediation between different contexts of knowledge and thus to an understanding of translation as a process of 'meaning opening' (Schaffer 2008: 154-7). Hence, in order to approach the question of a *transnational* public sphere, it is analytically required to move one step back and investigate techniques and practices of *translingual* networking produced within 'cultures of publics'.

Based on these considerations the paper outlines first how the concept of 'cultures of public' serves as central node between the analytical and normative dimensions. This said and building upon the distinction of the normative and the analytical, in the following the notion of public sphere is connoted normatively, whereas I use the notion public space in a descriptive and analytical way. On empirical

grounds different language 'versions' of the Wikipedia lemmata and their talk pages around the conflict of genetically modified food are taken as an example to illustrate and further nurture this concept.

### **Grasping (Counter) 'Cultures of Publics'**

The introductory comments have outlined in particular that the concept 'cultures of publics' is a useful concept for grasping the often blurred thickenings of communicative connectivities beyond and in overlapping with the national-territorial formations. In this vein of an broaden understanding of public space in terms of the mutual entanglement between (doing) public and culture, the notion of "public cultures" (Peters 2007; Org. 1997]), of "cultures of citizenship" (Couldry 2006) as well as lately the notion of "discourse cultures" (Hepp/Wessler forthcoming) have entered the academic discussion. Similar to these concepts, also the notion of 'cultures of publics' is not restricted to the concept of political culture in terms of Gabriel A. Almond and Sydney Verba as this is seen as too narrow by linking culture to specific constellations of the political order in the context of a Westphalian framework (Peters 2007: 109).

With respect to the object of research – the Wikipedia – the concept of 'cultures of public' allows to consider two aspects especially. Firstly it opens for empirical access by drawing from the model of „Encoding/Decoding“ (Hall). In doing so, a polysemic character of public communication (media content) is assumed as well as an approach of 'doing public' is taken. 'Doing public' means that the appropriation and use of public media space in terms of interpretation, motives, and convictions is focused. This allows to get individualized collective forms of participation in public communication into the picture. Further it takes presentative (e.g. non-verbal communication, poetic language) as well as discursive language (e.g. literal meaning of spoken or written language) into account (Peters 2007: 118). Secondly, 'cultures of publics' understand the public space to be embedded into culture. Thus the concept provides a bridge between the above mentioned plural of use, appropriation, interpretations and communicative forms and an hegemonic understanding of culture develop in the field of cultural studies. This notion of culture understands the thickening (Löfgren) of processes of the articulation of meaning and sees culture as part of the political (Dörner 1999: 222; Street 1997).

Drawing from Antonio Gramsci's thinking, cultural studies – in the tradition of Stuart Hall – have defined hegemony as political-ideological process of articulation, as process of (re-)articulation of cultural patterns of interpretation (Vorstellungsmuster) aiming at maintaining or reorganizing existing consensus (Dörner 1999: 223). By considering 'cultures of public' not only as an approach paving the way for

empirical analysis but also as a normative connotated concept in the realm of the political the question arises how these processes of hegemonic (re-)articulations are connected to democracy theory. The idea of challenging existing consensus forms an integral part in the works of both Jürgen Habermas and his critique Chantal Mouffe. Arguing that a rational, consensus-based notion of public sphere has to be overcome and the concept of hegemony as an ongoing struggle has to be put in the centre of democratic imaginary, Chantal Mouffe sees consensus solely formed as a “temporary result of a provisional hegemony” (Mouffe 2000: 104). Consequently, she constitutes public sphere as an agonistic space in which democratic struggles over hegemony are constantly taking place. Nevertheless a set of principles of mutual respect for beliefs and the right to defend them is introduced since discursive public contestation is constructed as *democratic communication* (Mouffe 2000: 102-3).<sup>1</sup> On the ontic level this conception of agonistic public sphere stands not completely in contradiction to the deliberative framework put forward by Jürgen Habermas.<sup>2</sup> He also distances himself from a notion of consensus as a fixed agreement. Within his ‘two-track model’ of public sphere, public opinion formation is seen as an ongoing process. Consequently, existing consensus can always be questioned and revised. Besides, he takes into account that public opinion as achieved consensus has to be partial as during the processes of synthesizing and filtering are taking place. In doing so, so called partial publics (Teilöffentlichkeiten) are built through mechanisms of exclusion while at the same time they remain flexible and permeable through so called ‘hermeneutic bridges’ (Habermas 1998b: 436; 2008: 169-172). The very basis of the public sphere to emerge forms the sketched set of minimal ethico-political principles. This set is also reconcilable with the deliberative framework on the ontic level: Respecting and accepting the ‘other’ as a legitimate actor in the same discourse is to be understood as a so called ‘background consensus’ or what Klaus Eder and Cathleen Kantner by drawing from Max Miller have termed ‘coordinated dissent’

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<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that Chantal Mouffe’s later works do not share the above outlined understanding of culture as inherently political: „I find myself in wholehearted agreement but concerned about Chantal Mouffe’s conservative understanding as to what counts as politics. As her writing has progressed, what has become increasingly apparent is her neglect of the everyday forms of cultural politics about which Young writes so convincingly. Chantal Mouffe’s view of the essentially contested nature of culture and politics needs to be expanded to include spheres such as popular culture and education as well as other spheres which fall outside of ‘official’ definitions of politics. That complex societies are made up of a number of diverse and competing public realms is almost entirely absent from her argument. This is a serious omission, as any attempt to construct an alternative hegemonic project would need to be able to mobilize on a number of fronts all at once. This notable absence may be the consequence of Chantal Mouffe’s current preference for the work of the conservative Carl Schmitt over that of her previous intellectual hero, Antonio Gramsci.“ (Stevenson 2006: 395). However, it should be mentioned that in Chantal Mouffe’s works that have been inspired by Antonio explicit references to the cultural can be found (see e.g. Mouffe 1999).

<sup>2</sup> For a similar line of arguments see Dahlberg 2007b.

meaning that through mutual recognition the involved actors construct a shared symbolic space and are aware about the common structure of dissent (Eder/Kantner 2000: 308). Nevertheless the

“[...] ontological difference translates into difference [...] in how these exclusions are dealt with. The deliberative democrat focuses upon how to achieve more rational-critique debate within communicative spaces, while their feminist/poststructural critics focus on the power and exclusion involved in the institution of such communication.” (Dahlberg 2007a: 132)

Given the diversity of publics I build upon an understanding of ‘cultures of publics’ that put the hegemonic struggle over meaning being based on coordinated dissent in an radicalized framework of the ‘two track model’ of deliberative democracy. This ‘two track model’ pays attention that public communication transports and resp. translates problems being articulated in the everyday life world to the political system. Concerning the place culture is attached to in this framework, it has been criticized that

„[...] there is also a risk that this prevailing view of civic interaction delimits our understanding of the kinds of cultural practices that should characterize civic agency in the public sphere, pushing to the margins certain kinds of communicative competencies and practices that are important for a robust democracy.“ (Dahlgren 2006: 277)

This criticism is rejected in so far as by following Jürgen Habermas the concept of life world is highlighted: Public sphere retrieves its impulses exclusively from the life world and modes of everyday communication. Consequently, the lines that separate the private from the public are necessarily always open for renegotiation (Habermas 1998a: 441-3). Also he argues that political culture itself has to be sensitive towards differences (Habermas 1999: 173-5). Being aware that there cannot be a prospect of consensus, he contends that deliberative politics are only able to have a empirical reference if the diversity of communicative forms is allowed for. This involves a complex mixture of moral, ethical and pragmatic arguments (Habermas 1999: 284-5). When taking one step back and going beyond the principle of justification, a concept of radical democracy is not only about deliberation but also about the „ability to initiate deliberation“ (Bohman 2007: 93). Radical democracy is then understood firstly as a concept that accounts for diverse kinds of communicative competencies and practices that can be rendered into deliberation and secondly “being advanced through a heterogeneous public sphere of multiple and contesting deliberative publics [...]” (Dahlberg 2007a: 142). In doing so, I reject the question of ‚either/or‘: “Is it a space of open political agonality, a space of the battle for meaning in the sense of a

‘politics of signification’ (Hall), or is it a space of reasoned rational and informal debate, as Habermas would have it [...]?’ (Marchart 2002) In contrast to this, I build upon an idea of an ‘as well as’.<sup>3</sup> Already Bernhard Peters has argued that one should trace changes in “public culture” instead of hunting established consensus within the deliberative framework (Peters 2007: 183). I would like to refer on this idea in the sense that change implies contentious interaction of discourse and counter discourse. To draw an interim conclusion: By drawing from the different strands of cultural studies, deliberative and agonistic democracy theory, I argued that the political and the cultural are inherently interrelated, that radical democracy has to be based on contention in order to pay fully attention to power and exclusion, but that deliberation remains central inasmuch as the deliberation connects communicative power to the democratic, formal political process. So to say, deliberation is seen as a mode of translation from one context into another.

### **Exploring Wikipedia**

Whereas mass media as uni-directional media is often analyzed as public space of staged consensus (Habscheid/Knobloch 2009), the internet characterizations reach from deliberative spaces (Bohman 2007) to contested terrains (Kahn/Kellner 2005; 2007). This paper looks more specifically at Wikipedia as one of many public spaces on the net. Wikipedia is chosen because of numerous obvious reasons: Wikipedia has become an ‘authority’ of global knowledge, its production and reception has become significant and popular over the last few years.<sup>4</sup> It has not only grown up to about 260 language versions<sup>5</sup> ([[[:en:Wikipedia:About]])<sup>6</sup> but builds also a reference point for journalism and broader public debate. For instance, a study which investigated 93 newsrooms of news agencies, daily news papers, radio and TV stations as well 183 online news rooms based in Germany presents the finding that about 80 percentage of the overall sample use the Wikipedia as work of reference for background knowledge. Further the study also asked the online news rooms to what extent Wikipedia is visited in order to cross-check

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<sup>3</sup> In a different context, Jürgen Habermas has pointed himself to the works of Stuart Hall with regard to the different interpretation strategies of addressed participants of publics (Habermas 1990: 30-1).

<sup>4</sup> According to the web traffic rankings provided by the commercial web service alexa.com Wikipedia.org belongs to the top 10 sites on the internet (<http://www.alexa.com/topsites> [23/04/2009]).

<sup>5</sup> According to the latest multilingual statistics from October 2008, the English version is the biggest one with 2,567,509 articles, followed by the German (808,044 articles) and the French (709,312 articles) versions. In contrast, often spoken languages like Arab and Hindi are ranked rather low on rank twenty-seven with 77,444 articles and resp. rank fifty-four with 21,499 articles. ([[[:en:Wikipedia:Multilingual ranking October 2008]])

<sup>6</sup> I refer to the wiki syntax when citing Wikipedia sites. All sites have been accessed on 27 March 2009.

information. 57 percentage of the news rooms enter the online encyclopedia on this purpose. Interestingly, online and offline news rooms refer rather seldom to Wikipedia if it is searched for pro and con arguments in a public conflict (Neuberger et al. 2009: 314).<sup>7</sup> However, the platform itself is a public digitalized space of deliberation *and* contestation which gathers different actors on the purpose of 'open' (political) knowledge production. Thereby, Wikipedia does build interpublic links between actors with different (political) standpoints and orientations. It provides a public space in which micro politics are pursued through ongoing public discursive struggles that are archived (Pentzold 2007).

These struggles – which can be also characterized as 'discourse specific rituals' (Reichert 2008: 214) – are based upon a common self-understanding of the Wikipedians. After users expressed concern of a commercial appropriation of the platform, Wikipedia migrated from the dot-com-domain created in 2001 to the dot-org-com in 2002. Latest since then Wikipedia displays a self-understanding as international movement made up of volunteers that support the idea of free and open knowledge ([[en:Wikipedia:About]]). Based upon this self-understanding Wikipedia has been characterized as a normative knowledge archive that allows for civic participation and engagement (Frost 2006). This inherent normative connotation is attached to the migration of ideas of the free and open source software movement to the grounds of culture which the Wikipedia project stands for.<sup>8</sup> These ideas are spelled out in the GNU Free Documentation License (GFDL) under whose terms Wikipedia content is available.<sup>9</sup> This license is based on the copyleft principle, meaning that

“Wikipedia content can be copied, modified, and redistributed if and only if the copied version is made available on the same terms to others and that acknowledgment of the authors of the Wikipedia article used is included (a link back to the article is generally thought to satisfy the attribution requirement). Copied Wikipedia content will therefore remain free under the GFDL and can continue to be used by anyone subject to certain restrictions, most of which aim to ensure that freedom.” ([[en:Wikipedia:Copyrights]])

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<sup>7</sup> Despite these realities, there are still voices who claim in favor of a 'previous' models of knowledge production and learning. Just to mention one example, the former president of the American Library Association, Michael Gorman expresses his anxiety about Wikipedia: “The aggregation of the opinions of the informed and the uninformed (ranging from the ignorant to the crazy) is decidedly and emphatically not 'what is known about any given topic.' It is a mixture of the known (emanating from the knowledgeable and the expert) and erroneous or partial information (emanating from the uninformed and the inexperienced).” (Gorman 2007)

<sup>8</sup> For a problematization of the migration from open source to open culture see Stalder (without date).

<sup>9</sup> It has to mentioned that since mid of April 2009 a vote is carried out on all Wikipedia versions in order to decide whether to replace the terms of the GFDL with the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike license (CC-BY-SA). The change is mainly favored because of incompatibilities with the GFDL that originally was developed for free software. For a detail outlook see <http://blog.wikimedia.org/2009/04/14/vote-on-wikimedia-licensing-update-underway> [18/04/2009].

In other words these license's principles are about "making things public" (Kelty 2008: x) as 'commons' based on the idea of freedom. Commons-based knowledge production shows some parallels with the approach of 'doing public' being embedded in culture that I have sketched in the introduction. From a similar angle Christopher Kelty has looked at the free software movement as 'recursive publics' "that is constituted by a shared concern for maintaining the means of association through which they come together as a public. [...] I call such publics [...] in order to signal that this kind of public includes the activities of making, maintaining, and modifying software and networks, as well as the more conventional discourse that is thereby enabled" (Kelty 2008: 29).

Since Wikipedia is built upon a 'merger' of open software and open culture it has further established rules on how to deal with divergent positions on content level. The fundamental rule is the so called neutral point of view (NPOV) which says that no article should be biased towards one position or another, rather different points of views – deemed as significant – should coexist ([\[:en:Wikipedia:Neutral Point of View\]](#)). Against this backdrop it is unsurprising that empirical research on Wikipedia suggests that Wiki debates are often conflictual, their solution is found in ambiguity and that neutrality depends on personal interpretation (Matei/Dobrescu 2006). This finding is underlined by the fact that NPOV itself is subject of meta discussions among Wikipedians. For instance, in late April 2009 evolved a debate on the foundation mailing list about NPOV as common value of Wikimedia projects in general. Other core policies include Verifiability ([\[:en:Wikipedia:Verifiability\]](#)) and no original research ([\[:en:Wikipedia:No original research\]](#)). On the same mailing list the discussion about core policies moved further and asked if there should be one standard for all language versions:

„The question is - shouldn't there be one set of standards for all Wikipedias? I think it is ‚unfair‘ that I can read about Simpsons episodes in the English Wikipedia, while those how speak Hebrew cannot.“ (Foundation-I mailing list, 02/05/2009)

„I do think that there should be one set of standards for all languages. But it may be hard to enforce it on an existing community. WMF [Wikimedia Foundation; JN] can try and enforce copyright policy or maybe Biographies of Living People policy, because these issues may have severe legal implications, but it is next to impossible to enforce Notability or Verifiability policies. Few he-wikipedians care about it, but he.wikipedia did quite well for several years without a clear written policy on any of the following: Living People, Notability, Original Research and Verifiability. All decisions on these matters are made ad hoc. To our friends from en.wikipedia it must seem surreal :)“ (Ibid.)

While this discussion remained itself ambiguous, the statements found on [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) do reflect vagueness. For instance the German Wikipedia<sup>10</sup> outlines that all language versions should follow the basic concept of the first, English speaking version in terms of a free encyclopedia ([\[\[\[:de:Wikipedia:Sprachen\]\]\]](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sprachen)). Also, the English and French speaking versions do not mention explicitly the policy issue but focus on the common vision of a free encyclopedia. Additionally they provide statements with regard to consistency and similarities of content:

„This WikiProject aims primarily to provide a consistent treatment of each language on the Wikipedia. Many languages already have extensive pages, and the systematic information on those pages is not presented in a consistent way. The purpose of this WikiProject is to present that information consistently, and to ensure that each of the major areas is covered at least briefly for each language.

These are *only* suggestions, things to give you focus and to get you going, and you *shouldn't* feel obligated in the least to follow them.“ ([\[\[\[:en: Wikipedia:WikiProject Languages\]\]\]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Languages), emphasis in original)

„Il ne faut pas uniquement voir dans Wikipédia un projet anglo-saxon, auquel auraient la chance de se greffer quelques projets annexes, mineurs, alors que la seule différence majeure serait la langue. Certains d'entre nous attendent au contraire de ce projet la construction d'une **communauté mondiale unie**, travaillant **ensemble dans la paix et dans l'harmonie**, pour le **bénéfice de tous**. Il y a de nombreux avantages à travailler ensemble, tous dans un objectif commun de **construction d'une encyclopédie accessible à tous et gratuite**.

Nous partons de l'idée que les *similarités entre nos différentes communautés sont plus importantes que les différences de langues qui nous séparent*.“ ([\[\[\[:fr:Wikipédia:Diplomatie internationale\]\]\]](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diplomatie_internationale), emphasis in original)

The quotations illustrate that there is a tension constructed between heterogenization in terms of language diversity on the one hand and universalization in terms of values on the other hand. Although there is a growing research interest in the Wikipedia,<sup>11</sup> Wikipedia has not been approached qualitatively as a translingual space yet. Only one study could be identified which looked through the use of content analysis methods at cultural differences between different language versions by investigating four articles on the topic game in the French, German, Japanese, and Dutch Wikipedia. The study concludes that

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<sup>10</sup> In this paper the terms ‚German‘, ‚English‘ and ‚French‘ are used with reference to language, not to nationality – if not mentioned differently.

<sup>11</sup> A apart from the cited references in the text there have been concepts of production developed (e.g. Ciffolilli 2003). Another strand of the so called ‚Wikipedia studies‘ deals with collaboration culture in terms of structure and content (e.g. Ortega 2009, Ortega/Gonzalez-Barahona 2008, Reagle 2008, Viégas et al. 2004, Voss 2005, Wolf 2006), as well as the underlying social networks (e.g. Schroer 2008, Stegbauer/Bauer 2008) Other studies have examined effects on journalism (e.g. Bruns 2006, Lih 2004) or discussed the question of article quality (e.g. Willinski 2008).

“[...] Wikipedia [...] is not a culturally neutral space, but that differences in behavior across cultures can be observed. The amount and strength of the correlations between changes made in Wikipedia and Hofstede's cultural dimension shows that cultural differences that are observed in the real world can be related, carefully, to the virtual world” (Pfeil et al. 2006).

The authors themselves are aware of the study's limitations as the cultural dimension (Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance/Power distance) they relied on have been developed originally in the former Federal Republic of Germany before the German Unification took place (ibid.). Moreover this approach appears to be problematic since culture dependency can hardly be connected to language spaces that move beyond the borders of nation states. Against it, Wikipedia represents as platform of discourse in which first both territorialized and deterritorialized knowledge practices take place in which culture contextualizes knowledge (Hepp 2006). Moreover, connectivities between the diverse language versions are built through various techniques and practices such as interlanguage links between different lemmata, translation projects ([[[:Meta:Babel]]]), interlanguage reports about certain language versions, or users with so called single-user-login accounts that allow to operate in different language versions with one user name.

In the following, by taking different language versions of the Wikipedia as an example, articles and their related discussion pages about the issue of genetically modified food are analyzed in order to provide tentative insights to similarities and difference of ‚cultures of publics‘ on Wikipedia. In this vein, the production of discourse and counter discourse is investigated and translingual connections are explored: With regard to inclusion and exclusion, which similarities and resp. differences in the struggles over meaning by the Wikipedia editors can be identified? To what extent these practices can be said to be translingual?

### **Debating about Genetically Modified Food**

The issue of genetically modified food has been chosen as it can be categorized as a risk conflict (Beck) that interrelates health resp. personal risks and environmental risks in a ‚borderless‘ world. Hence, genetically modified food is not a genuine ‚European problem‘, so that the Europeanization of public space in terms of communicative thickening can be pulled together with transnational, maybe even global contexts. Speaking about the interrelations of formal politics and public debate, a communicative thickening can be assumed since genetic engineering is linked to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy which is a highly integrated field of EU policy. On the level of politics this issue can serve as an example

of ‚everyday EU politics‘ in contrast to issues such as the accession of Turkey to the EU or the treaty establishing a constitution for Europe. Moreover, since the issue of genetically modified food addresses the citizen as consumer or vice versa – the consumer as citizen –, the issue of genetically modified food appeals to a broader public (Rucht et al. 2008: 15; 31; 36). The conflictual and transnational dimension of this issue is further emphasized through protests against genetically modified crops and food. In the mid 1990s the first imports of genetically modified soy evoked European wide protests (Kettner 2001). After the intensive years of 1996 and 1997 protests decreased which may be explained through the enactment of the EU moratorium on genetically modified crops in 1998. Since in 2004 the European Commission has put an end to the de facto moratorium protests have increased notably and lead to an Europeanization of protest (Rucht et al. 2008: 36; Parks 2007).

The analysis compares different lemmata around the issue of genetically modified food in the three biggest Wikipedia versions – the English, French, and German versions of the Wikipedia.<sup>12</sup> All of these languages are pluricentric languages and considered as useful object of research as language and the national identity of its (native) speakers do not necessarily coincide. This allows to trace translingual communicative thickenings also within one language version. Concretely speaking the lemmata `[[[:en:Genetically modified food]]]`, `[[[:de:Gentechnisch verändertes Lebensmittel]]]` and `[[[:fr:Organisme génétiquement modifié]]]` are chosen as units of comparison. By the time of analysis<sup>13</sup> the English and German articles were bidirectional linked through interlanguage links. In the French Wikipedia exists no lemma dealing explicitly with the issue of genetically modified food. In order to find a French equivalent articles in the overall category `[[[:fr:Organisme génétiquement modifié]]]` have been inspected closely finding that the broader lemma `[[[:fr:Organisme génétiquement modifié]]]` discusses also the issue of genetically modified food.<sup>14</sup> In a first step the historical formation of the selected main namespaces is traced. In a second step, these articles dealing with genetically modified food are mapped and their

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<sup>12</sup> Each version consists of eighteen namespaces, e.g. article namespace or user namespace (`[[[:en:Help:Namespace]]]`). Beyond that various backchannels exist, e.g. chats, mailing lists, blogs, groups and user accounts on social web platforms and applications (e.g. facebook or skype), local, regional, national, and European community driven meetups, workshops and meetings of national chapters of the Wikimedia Foundation or the international conference ‘Wikimania’. In the following the different language versions are denoted in wikisyntax with prefixes referring to the ISO639 language code that are used on the Wikipedia to set interlanguage links: `[[[:de:Wikipedia]]]`, `[[[:en:Wikipedia]]]`, and `[[[:fr:Wikipedia]]]`.

<sup>13</sup> If no other date is explicitly named, the websites were accessed on 27 March 2009.

<sup>14</sup> After the selection was made already, on 16 April 2009 a user added an interlanguage link from `[[[:en:Genetically modified food]]]` to `[[[:fr:Organisme génétiquement modifié]]]`. On the German speaking lemma no interlanguage link has been set so far [01/05/2009].

content is analyzed in order to capture discourse and counter discourse organization as well as translingual connectivities at a specific point of time. Starting from there, sequences of the attached the talk space understood as micro interactions of public speech are examined. Thereby also 'Quick Diff' sites showing differences between two edited versions that are available through the history space of a lemma, older versions of the article as well as connected discussions in the user talk space and self-presentations on user pages are considered in order to backup the analysis. In doing so, I use the method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as it pays attention to power and exclusion and further highlights the significance of context (Wodak 2002). CDA refers to the works of Antonio Gramsci as well as to the approach of the Frankfurt School and understands Jürgen Habermas' ideal speech situation as an utopia and foregrounds the historical context of interaction. Against this backdrop the term *discursive strategy* is introduced and operationalized (Wodak 2007: 663). Strategy of argumentation is not conceptualized as only rational but as dependent on subjective evaluations that can be also irrational and emotional (Titscher et al. 1998: 179-191; Wodak 2007: 662).

*Article Namespace: de|en|fr*

> Looking Back

In comparison, the French speaking lemma was created first in September 2002<sup>15</sup> while the English-language lemma was added in April 2003 and the German written entry in July 2003.<sup>16</sup> The latter can be contextualized to an international external cause: In May 2003, the USA, Argentina and Canada made a formal complaint to the WTO about the de-facto moratorium on GM crops and food in the EU which evoked a public debate public debate on GM crops and food in the following months. Correspondingly, the first stub<sup>17</sup> entry on the [[de:Wikipedia]] already headlined its content 'controversies', 'international complications' mentioning the 2003 trade disputes as well clustered external links in links to 'producers' and 'opponents'. Besides, the first use of the talk namespace can be put in the context of the international trade dispute. The French and English talk pages have been first used in 2003, the German

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<sup>15</sup> The lemmata [[:en:Genetically modified organism]] was created in July 2001, the entry [[:de:Gentechnisch veränderter Organismus]] in July 2004.

<sup>16</sup> The history of single lemma is traced partly by using the tool ,wiki history' which was developed by the [[:de:user:APPER/WikiHistory]].

<sup>17</sup> „A stub is an article containing only a few sentences of text which is too short to provide encyclopedic coverage of a subject, but not so short as to provide no useful information.“ [[:en:Wikipedia:Stub]]

talk page in 2004. Discussions on the French talk space started around the question whether the definition of GMO given in the EU directive should be taken or not. Thus the discussions connects directly to the regulation concerning the traceability and labeling of genetically modified organisms and the traceability of food and feed products produced from genetically modified organisms being published in September 2003 by the EU (e.g. EC No. 1830/2003). Further, the English talk page began with the criticism that “[t]his article has way to much about trade disputes and not nearly enough about the history and development of GMOs”. (Graft, 13/06/2003, [[:en:Talk:Genetically modified food/Archive 1]]) Against it, the first entries on the German written talk page were added after the trade disputes and did not allude to any specific policy documents or political conflicts, rather is questioned to what extent some sentences of the article contain evaluative statements.

Besides *contextualization* on the level of article structure and discussion fuelling, *translingual synchronization* can be identified by tracing the history of the lemmata: One can see that the [[en:Wikipedia]] was the first who separated the discourse fragment of genetically modified food from the broader issue of genetically modified organism. Nevertheless this separation was accompanied by a small edit war, since the user BigFatBuddha made the first edit redirecting it to [[:en:Genetically modified organism]]. It was then actually a user with French origin – Anthere – who reverted the redirection and argued “genetically modified food’ is different from ‘gmo’” (Revision as of 22:00, 25 April 2003) in the edit summary. Despite of this engagement on the English article’s version, the [[fr:Wikipedia]]’s organization of discourse handles these issues together, while a the synchronization of the [[de:Wikipedia]] and [[en:Wikipedia]]’s discourse structure can be observed at this point. Towards synchronization points also that [[:de:Genfood]] is redirected within the [[de:Wikipedia]] to [[:de:Gentechnisch verändertes Lebensmittel]]. The term ‘Genfood’ marks ‘language mixing’ that is to be understood primarily as a indicator of contextualization (Androutsopoulos 2007) and thus points tentatively to a migration of the debate from the Anglophone discourse to the German-language one. Given that the first English entry did not point to controversies and did then, translingual synchronization can not be depicted as purely uni-directional. In the study of Dieter Rucht et al. about the debate on genetically modified food the ‘German angst’ and skepticism is said to be diffused also in other European countries in which large parts of the populations have favored genetically modified food before (Rucht et al. 2008: 38-39).

However, the different lemmata remained quite a long time unrelated – about two and a half years – as only in January 2005 an interlanguage link from the English to the German written article and vice versa

were set by user HaeB who owns a single-user-login account for the [[en:Wikipedia]] and the [[de:Wikipedia]]. Hence, the lemmata's history outline reveals that differentiation of discourse fragments is both independently and synchronized. While translingual synchronization of discourse structure can be rooted outside of the Wikipedia as illustrated above, users operating in different language versions may own a lot of power in terms of opening meaning to another context. Though User HaeB's adding of the interlanguage link remained the only edit he made in the [[en:Wikipedia]] and the [[de:Wikipedia]]'s lemmata about genetically food, his editing has a great impact in terms of discourse organization across language versions. Further, translingual connectivity production does not only imply the technique of linking but also the direct involvement of users in editing content of different language versions which can be described as process of *translation* that is not restricted to linguistic translation. They engage in translating as a broader process of intermediation between different contexts of knowledge. For instance the user Anthere engaged in the editing of [[fr:Organisme génétiquement modifié]] with twelve edits between 2002 and 2003 as well as of [[en:Genetically modified food]] with twenty-five edits between 2003 and 2005. While her edits in the French article mostly deal with questions of definition and biological explanation, the edits Anthere contributed to the English article – which formed the beginning of the English lemma – point to the political European situation. For instance she inserted a paragraph dealing with the trade disputes and justified it as follows: “These trading issues are very important for us europeans, and I think it is for american as well.” ([[en:Talk:Genetically modified food]]).

Further, the self-description on her user page reveals that she is truly committed to build up Wikipedia as a multilingual project:

“I have been an editor since February 2002. I first started editing only the english wikipedia anonymously, then under the pseudonym Anthere ('What is an anther ?), then joined the french wikipedia when it had possibly 200 stubs. In english, I mostly focused in editing, while in the French Wikipedia, I also took a lot of time building the project and the community. At that time, all international wikipedias were very small and not even on the same software than the english one. Most of my edits were in the following areas : agriculture, environment, ecology...[...] I also enjoyed writing on more "touchy" issues, such as the Iraq war, the veil in France or commercial war over GMOs...

In summer 2002, I decided that this project HAD TO BE multilingual... and that I would help make that happen... so I joined the mailing list (wikipedia-l at that time) and started editing a no man's land called meta meta in order to help this to happen. Since then, I have not quit trying to take care of all projects and all languages.

In 2004, I joined the founding mediation committee on the english wikipedia and wrote quite a lot of things about mediation and conflict resolution, one of those being w:en:Wikipedia:civility.” ([[m:User:Anthere]])

Anthere's history of commitment shows that she considers editing in the [[en:Wikipedia]] and participating in Wiki politics on the [[en:Wikipedia]] as important despite she is of French origin. On this level of her subjective perception the English Wikipedia is said to be somewhat the 'Leitmedium' of the different Wikipedia versions which stays in contrast to her expressive normative claim of language diversity. Against this backdrop the question arises to what extent the intra Wikipedia link structures of the selected articles are synchronized and follow the English lemma in terms of in- and exclusion of certain actors and controversies.

#### > Mapping Intra Wikipedia Networks<sup>18</sup>

On the level of link structures the networks reveals diversity. In all, the attached visualizations show that the networks vary very much in size as the amount of starting points<sup>19</sup> differ from four (network of [[:de:Gentechnisch verändertes Lebensmittel]]) to eight (network of [[:en:Genetically modified food]]) and forty-one (network of [[:fr:Organisme génétiquement modifié]]). The nodes with the highest degree of incoming and outgoing links also differ between the networks and hence reveal different 'discursive nodes' (Jäger). Within the English network the agricultural company Monsanto shows the greatest centrality, so that one key actor in the debate about genetically modified food is highlighted. Against it, the German network is centered around the maize plant and the French network around the process of domestication. The latter might be due to the fact that the French lemma about genetically modified organism captures a broader issue. Yet genetically modified food as controversial debate is reflected especially in the English and French network, even through direct links from the selected lemmata. [[:en:Genetically modified food]] links directly to the lemma [[:en:Genetically modified food controversies]] which discusses advantages and disadvantages of genetically modified food crops. Also it is linked to the [[:en:Category:Anti-globalization]].<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the lemma [[:fr:Organisme génétiquement modifié]] links to [[:fr:Débat autour des organismes génétiquement modifiés]] as well as to the lemma [[:fr:Mouvement anti-OGM]].

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<sup>18</sup> The mapping was created with the so called Wikipedia Network tool that discover clusters of link related Wikipedia articles and ranks them by their prominence within the network. Before visualization the retrieved data was manually 'cleaned' so that only lemmata of one language version are displayed, also special pages or connected sites of other language more general pages such as the 'about page' have been removed. The Wikipedia Network tool is available at <http://www.justlol.net/devel/cvs/wikipediaNetwork/index.php>. For visualizations of networks see attachment.

<sup>19</sup> The tool fetches starting points through the search of outlinks from and inlinks to the selected lemma and uses then the common list.

<sup>20</sup> This category was removed later.

On the level of direct linking to conceive actors the German written lemma depicts the different camps included in the overall network based on the common list of starting points. While all three lemmata point to articles about Monsanto, the English article also connects to the Canadian Supreme Court case [\[:en:Monsanto Canada Inc. v. Schmeiser\]](#).<sup>21</sup> Further, the French and German lemmata link to Syngenta. Regarding corporations the German article also links to the Germany based corporation [\[:de:Bayer CropScience\]](#) as well as to the corporation [\[:de:DuPont\]](#) which is based in the USA. This picture looks different with regard to contesting actors. Here the French lemma links to articles to about the civil society actors [\[:fr:Faucheurs volontaires\]](#), [\[:fr:Forum Social Mondial\]](#), [\[:fr:Greenpeace\]](#), [\[:fr:Les amis de la Terre\]](#) and [\[:fr:Via Campesina\]](#),<sup>22</sup> while on the German network the environmental NGOs [\[:de:BUND\]](#) are [\[:de:Greenpeace\]](#) are directly linked to. Though [\[:en:Greenpeace\]](#) is included in the overall English network the article [\[:en:Genetically modified food\]](#) does not directly link to it. In sum, the visibility of the corporation Monsanto forms a common reference into the network, while the picture of conceive protest actors looks more diffuse. Similarly to the only common reference to Monsanto in terms of a communicative thickening, the EU is the only political actor that is included in all three intra Wikipedia networks and which is direct linked to by the selected lemmata.

> Looking Inside

### *Article Namespace*

Next to article naming, the Wikipedia policies regard the internal structure as important element in order to protect neutrality. Against this backdrop it is unsurprising that the selected articles put sections headlined with terms such as ‘debate’ or ‘controversy’ towards the end of the entries. Nevertheless, the German lemma starts with a definition pointing to the legal situation and consumer’s concerns, while the English article includes the public general acceptance of genetically modified food in the introductory part:

“**Genetically modified (GM) foods** are made from crops that have been given specific traits through genetic engineering, unlike crops developed through conventional genetic modification (ie, conventional plant breeding) that have been accepted and consumed by the public for years.” ([\[:en:Genetically modified food\]](#), emphasis in original)

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<sup>21</sup> This case goes back to the end of the 1990s and deals with the question of patent rights for biotechnology.

<sup>22</sup> Also the rather critical film documentary [\[:fr:Le Monde selon Monsanto\]](#) is included in the network and direct linked to from the selected French written lemma.

In contrast, the French lemma presents agonistic point of views already in the third paragraph of the first section:

“Si certains OGM peuvent présenter des risques, principalement sanitaires ou environnementaux (dissémination non désirée de gènes), certaines organisations scientifiques internationales, et notamment le Conseil international pour la science, affirment que les OGM commercialisés ne sont pas dangereux pour la santé humaine, et que les risques de dissémination sont correctement contrôlés. Les partisans du mouvement anti-OGM estiment que dans le domaine des cultures en plein champs les précautions prises ne permettent pas d'éviter la pollution génétique de l'environnement.”  
([[fr:Organisme génétiquement modifié]])

Along the lines of these differences in the introduction of the issue, in the last section the German lemma highlights the legal international complications, whereas the English written pendant emphasizes individual health risks for consumers and the French lemma outlines the debate between proponents and antagonists, the latter represented through the 'Mouvement anti-OGM'. Contrary to the German and French articles which deal with controversies at the end of the entries, the English article depicts the controversies in the sixth of twelve sections. Moreover

, the German and French lemma provide subjective point of views by providing external web links headlined with pro- and anti-GMO whereas the English article does not cluster its external web links.

Since verifiability forms one major aspect in the overall Wikipedia content and style policies the citation sources to underpin claims stated in the article can be said to be the core instrument for voice inclusion. In contrast to the emphasis on the legal situation in the German lemma, it is the French lemma which proportionally cites the most government bodies and actors close to governments on all levels – local, national, European and supranational. It is the English article which provides proportionally the most scientific references and the German sources proportionally most NGOs while not referring to a single corporation. The English and French pendants cite once resp. twice the corporations Monsanto and the in France based seed producer Limagrain. However, these citations build the smallest group of references in both lemmata.

Within the text corpus corporate voices in favor of genetically modified food are labeled as proponents in the German and English lemmata. While the English lemma does not name NGOs, it names most often corporate actors and provides an overview over a number of foods of which a genetically modified version exists by also directly linking some of them to the company Monsanto as producer of so called Roundup Ready (e.g. soybeans). Also the German lemma names most often corporations along with

government bodies and actors close to governments. On the level of referencing within the text corpus the French article names most government bodies and actors close to governments, followed by NGOs and corporations, here scientific actors and projects form the smallest group.

With regard to personalization, the German lemma mentions further the former US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick as well as the former US president US Bush as advocates of genetically modified food when outlining the trade disputes. Scientific voices are connected in all three lemmata to pro as well as to contra arguments. On the sides of critique the English and German article pay attention to the conflict which evolved around the findings of scientist Árpád Pusztai in the late 1990s. While both lemmata agree on the level of scientific results that showed “[...] that consumption of potatoes genetically modified to contain lectin had negative intestinal effects on rats. As a consequence, he became the victim of a smear campaign, but was eventually vindicated. The results he argued that the effects could not be attributed entirely to lectin, which is known to have toxic effects, and stated that “other parts of the GM construct, or the transformation, could have contributed to the overall effects”([[:en:Genetically modified food]]), they depict the consequences differently. The German lemma states that the publishing of the findings lead to the release of the scientist. Against it, the English lemma formulates it more tentatively: “As a consequence, he became the victim of a smear campaign, but was eventually vindicated.” (ibid) With regard to personalization in particular the role of farmers is dealt by mentioning the role of the Canadian citizen Percy Schmeiser in the English lemma and the role the French citizen and cofounder of the farmer’s association Confédération paysanne José Bové in the French article.

In contrast consumer concerns are connected exclusively to the rather broad label ‘consumers’ in all three lemmata and also more specifically to ‘European consumers’ in the English and German articles. The European dimension is emphasized on the level of consumers and legislation within the English and German lemmata, while the French highlights the European dimension exclusively on the site of legislation. All lemmata mention the EU as actor several times, other supranational actors such as UNO or the WTO are mentioned but not commonly by all three articles. Besides, various geoterritorial references are made by naming countries or by naming the country origin of certain actors and/or sources. Member states of the EU included in the three articles are not shared by all lemmata: Germany in only mentioned by the German lemma, Hungary only be the English article, France by the French and

German lemmata and Great Britain by the German and English articles. Thus, the German article shows the most references to EU member states.<sup>23</sup> In terms of communicative thickenings the non-EU member states – Argentina, Canada, USA – are referred to by all three lemmata. While all lemmata refer to the broad term of developing countries and also mention some explicitly, it is in particular the English lemma which includes most often these countries, e.g. India, Malaysia or Venezuela. Besides, it is the French lemma that refers also to the local dimension by referring to the demonstration in Montpellier of Greenpeace and José Bové on the occasion of the first meeting of the intergovernmental committee for the Cartagena protocol on biosafety in 2000, also it is referred to the world social forum in Porto Alegre in 2005. Overall, corporations and the EU form common point of references, while also on content level the side of antagonists remains diffuse. While now NGOs such as Greenpeace remain absent in terms of not being named, they now appear on the level of cited references and the example of Percy Schmeiser is cited. However, activists and NGOs get the most visibility on nearly all levels (article structure, cited sources, text reference) in the French lemma, followed by the German article, the English article remains in comparison more vague and ambiguous. Hence on this level there no synchronization taking place that is geared to the English version.

With regard to language choice, ‘code-switching’ (Androutsopoulos 2007) is done within the German and French lemmata. The German article introduces the English abbreviation for genetically modified organism ‘GMO’ in the first sentence of the article and links a few paragraphs below to the entry ‘Functional food’ in the German Wikipedia which adopted the English expression for food which supplies not only nutrients but are for instance vitamins enriched. While also English sources are cited in the German article, the French lemma explicitly mentions if sources (as well as external web links) are written in English language in the following way: “(en) [New Genetics, Food and Agriculture: Scientific Discoveries – Societal Dilemmas \[archive\]](#), International Council for Science, [mai 2003](#), p.8 “ ([[fr:Organisme génétiquement modifié]], emphasis in original).<sup>24</sup> This example shows that one can hardly interpret these devices of code-switching as an indicator for the migration of the debate from the Anglophone discourse, since references mostly point to a translingual scientific debate as well as to a debate which takes place within transnational and international politics as English references to actors such the European Food Safety Authority are included.

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<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the German lemma refers to the Swiss situation. The Swiss citizens voted in a referendum in 2005 in favor of “for food from GMO-free farming” initiative and thus in favor for a five year moratorium.

<sup>24</sup> Also one Japanese scientific source is included in the French lemma.

### *Talk Namespace*

The talks namespaces have been used to different extent which may due to the different degree disputes emerged:<sup>25</sup> The English lemma was twice semi-protected in 2006 and 2008, once protected in 2008 and NPoV tagged in 2005. Most contested was the French article that was three times semi-protected in 2008 and 2009, three times fully protected in 2008 as well as NPoV tagged in 2004 and 2008.<sup>26</sup> Also in 2008 informal mediation was sought by calling the ‘Wikipompier’ to help solve disputes. Against it, the German lemma remained relatively uncontested in terms of not being NPoV tagged or (semi-)protected. Against this backdrop talk pages have been chosen with reference to the highest degree of contestation. Since the German talk page has no archives and also no ‘visible disputes’ emerged, the only existing version is chosen ([\[\[de:Diskussion:Gentechnisch verändertes Lebensmittel\]\]](#)). The English talk page of 2008 – [\[\[en:Talk:Genetically modified food/Archive 4\]\]](#)— is selected since here the article was semi-protected as well as fully protected. Regarding the French talk namespace [\[\[fr:Wikipédia:Wikipompier/Feu-2008021112316\]\]](#) was chosen as here the informally mediated discussion in 2008 was carried out.

On the English and French discussion spaces complaints are encountered that the articles are biased, e.g. an anonymous editor describes the French article as “site particulier ‘Anti-OGM’ (première référence google anti-OGM)” and the user GM Pink Elephant characterizes the English article as “hugely biased towards the anti-GM lobby” while the user Glacerman publishes a contrary view: “I find this article as a whole to be non-neutral. It heavily over-represents pro-GM views and heavily under-represents concerns about GM foods. There is also an assumption that runs through the article that the science is for the most part supportive of GM food safety and that concerns are emotional or irrational”. Hence the discursive strategies of predication refers to the views expressed in the article name space. The discussants on the English talk page agree on solving the problem by backing up opposing views through citing scientific evidence. The question of labeling social actors as explicit proponents or opponents is linked on the German talk page to the display of external web links. In contrast, the French discussants

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<sup>25</sup> „Full protection prevents editing by everyone except administrators. Fully protected media files cannot be overwritten by new uploads. Semi-protection prevents editing by unregistered contributions and contributors with accounts which are not autoconfirmed. Creation protection prevents a previously deleted page from being recreated. Move protection protects the page solely from moves.” ([\[\[en: Wikipedia:Protection policy\]\]](#)) Further, within the article name space articles can be NPOV tagged in order to start a discussion about the article’s neutrality.

<sup>26</sup> These lists of the articles’ history may not be complete. There were composed by examining the edit summaries displayed on the history name spaces of the selected articles.

shift the question also from content to personal levels. In particular the user MaCRoEco is object of dispute and attacks also other editors:

„Je précise également que deux wikipédiens aguerris DocteurCosmos (d · c · b) et Christophe Dioux (d · c · b), ont tenté de participer au débat, puis ont renoncé en raison des débats interminables, leur non-spécialisation, et, pour DocteurCosmos, un parti-pris et des erreurs qui lui devenaient dangereuses.“ MaCRoEco [14/02/2008]

„Je porte votre attention sur le fait que plusieurs personnes se sont prononcées en faveur du scindage de l'article. Seul MaCRoEco semble encore s'y opposer. J'ai vraiment de la difficulté à croire en la bonne volonté de MaCRo dans cette histoire. Mais il daignera peut-être m'apporter des éclaircissements.“ lluvalar [17/05/2008]

In doing so, the discursive strategy of perspectivation aiming at expressing involvement and positioning speaker's point of view is further applied. This is also by selecting certain user names, on his English user page MaCRoEco explains for instance his interest in macroeconomics. However, on the French talk page he distances himself from being in favor of pro-GMO view:

“Enfin, pour répondre aux accusations, je ne suis partisan d'aucun parti politique, je ne défends pas bec et ongles les OGM, dont je juge que les risques de dissémination (ou "contamination" pour employer un terme choc) – signalons que ces risques n'existent que pour une partie des OGM – sont importants et doivent conduire à une utilisation prudente, mais je juge qu'il faut restreindre à portion congrue la propagande politicienne de divers lobby (semanciers, agriculture biologique,...) sur un site tel que le notre.“ MaCRoEco [14 février 2008]

In contrast to this on the English discussion page, there is one anonymous user who emotionally expresses involvement by adding the entry “I think genetically modified food is fantastic!”. While the English and German discussants engage predominantly in rational debate about how to balance views on content level, it is only the French discussion which also uses referential discursive strategies aiming at the construction of in-groups and out-groups regarding Wikipedians themselves. For instance one of the ‘Wikipompier’ formulates the common vision of building a collaborative project in which single user needs to follow the majority as well as the ‘Wikiquette’ in terms of collegiality, mutual understanding, respect and civility:

“MaCRoEco (d · c · b), je pense que ton attitude est pénalisable. Vouloir améliorer Wp c'est bien, on est tous là pour ça. Cependant, il s'agit d'une encyclopédie collaborative. Je pense qu'il faut parfois se ranger aux côtés de la majorité des contributeurs, ou du moins ouvrir le débat et discuter. Depuis un moment, Flop (d · c · b) et lluvalar (d · c · b) te posent des questions, proposent, et montrent des signes de bonne volonté. Je ne peux pas dire que tu en fasses autant. Bientôt, si le débat est toujours fermé comme c'est le cas en ce moment, je ne pourrai plus rien faire pour vous. Je pense que ça serait dommage d'en arriver là et pas bénéfique pour tout le monde.“ Gscorpio [16/06/2008]

Not only as consequence of the dispute around the French lemma about genetically modified organism, user MaCroEco has left the Wikipedia. On his user site which he has not deleted, he states several reasons, amongst the following which expresses that he does not share the French Wikipedia in its current state:

“Wikipédia francophone est sujet à de graves problèmes, et à des comportements inacceptables d'une petite clique d'individus qui se croient tout permis et ne tolèrent pas la contradiction. [...] Wikipédia.fr n'est pas neutre. Les théories les plus fumeuses, altermondialistes, y ont une place disproportionnée. Les militants d'extrême-gauche, marxistes, écolofascistes, ou encore technophobes sont sur-représentés.”  
[[:fr:Discussion utilisateur:MaCroEco]]

Unsurprisingly, it is also MaCroEco who draws on guidelines offered by the English Wikipedia within the talk page of the French lemma in order to underpin his claims, while the other discussants draw explicitly on guidelines being formulated on the French Wikipedia. On the German and English lemmata no references are made to other Wikipedia versions. This may be due to the fact that discussion evolves mainly on the content level. Nevertheless, the English discussion pays attention how to systematize the “Debate Around the World” while the German pendant discusses how to insert an European focus through external web links and how to correctly present European legislation with regard to food labeling.

### **Conclusion & Perspectives: “United in Diversity”?**

On the different levels of content evolution, content structure and user discussions the analysis has shown that the debate around genetically modified food on Wikipedia is firstly a controversial, contested space and secondly not purely Eurocentric. Rather it depicts a European public space as being embedded in a broader public space through communicative thickenings, which seem at least from this snapshot rather Western centric. Further, it could be shown that the different lemmata are hardly synchronized, rather differences could be traced in terms of different cultures of public. On the different namespaces the French lemma shows by far the highest degree of controversy and included strongest voices of activists and protesters. The German lemma is less contested but includes more references to NGOs than its English pendant. The latter rather focuses on consumer concerns and individual risks and is the only example which is accused to be pro-GMO. While the German discussion is exclusively centered on the level of content, one personal perspectivating statement has been found on the English discussion page. Against it, the French discussion struggles to achieve progress on the level of content as it is focused on

the personal level which is centered around the contributions of one user. At this point also meta conflicts about Wikipedia guidelines emerge. These disputes are only slightly visible on the article namespace if (semi-)protection or NPoV tags are inserted above the articles' content. As in the introduction outlined, Wikipedia rather tends towards ambiguity, one should ask the question if it would be a more transparent debate, if point of views would not be 'neutralized' but highlighted by the interface design. Also this would acknowledge the actual collective knowledge production as dynamic process.

Thirdly the analysis points to Wikipedia as both a translingual and multilingual space, in which in particular forms of contextualization and translation take place. The example of the user Anthere shows also that identifications, such as European or French citizen self-description, on the user and discussions are discursively formulated. National, European or even cosmopolitan identification formulations build a further strand of research with regard to questions of emerging transnational public sphere, so that also this line of research should be stronger considered in future Wikipedia research through analysis of user spaces and interviews with users. Wikipedia statistics of 2006 state that the biggest group editing the English Wikipedia are users from USA (52 percentage), the German by users from Germany (76 percentage) and the French by users from France (67 percentage) ([\[:en:Wikipedia: Edits by project and country of origin\]\]](#)):<sup>27</sup> To what extent and how do these users construct (trans-)national identities and open spaces for the 'other'?

The conflict chosen in this paper falls into the category of risk conflicts and is centered strongly around scientific debate. The interrogation of different cultures of publics on the Wikipedia should thus further examine rather value-laden conflicts. On the English Wikipedia has been even a [\[:en:Wikipedia:Working group on ethnic and cultural edit wars\]\]](#) set up:

"The Committee shall convene a working group, composed of experienced Wikipedians in good standing, and task it with developing a comprehensive set of recommendations for resolving the pervasive problem of intractable disputes centered around national, ethnic, and cultural areas of conflict." (ibid)

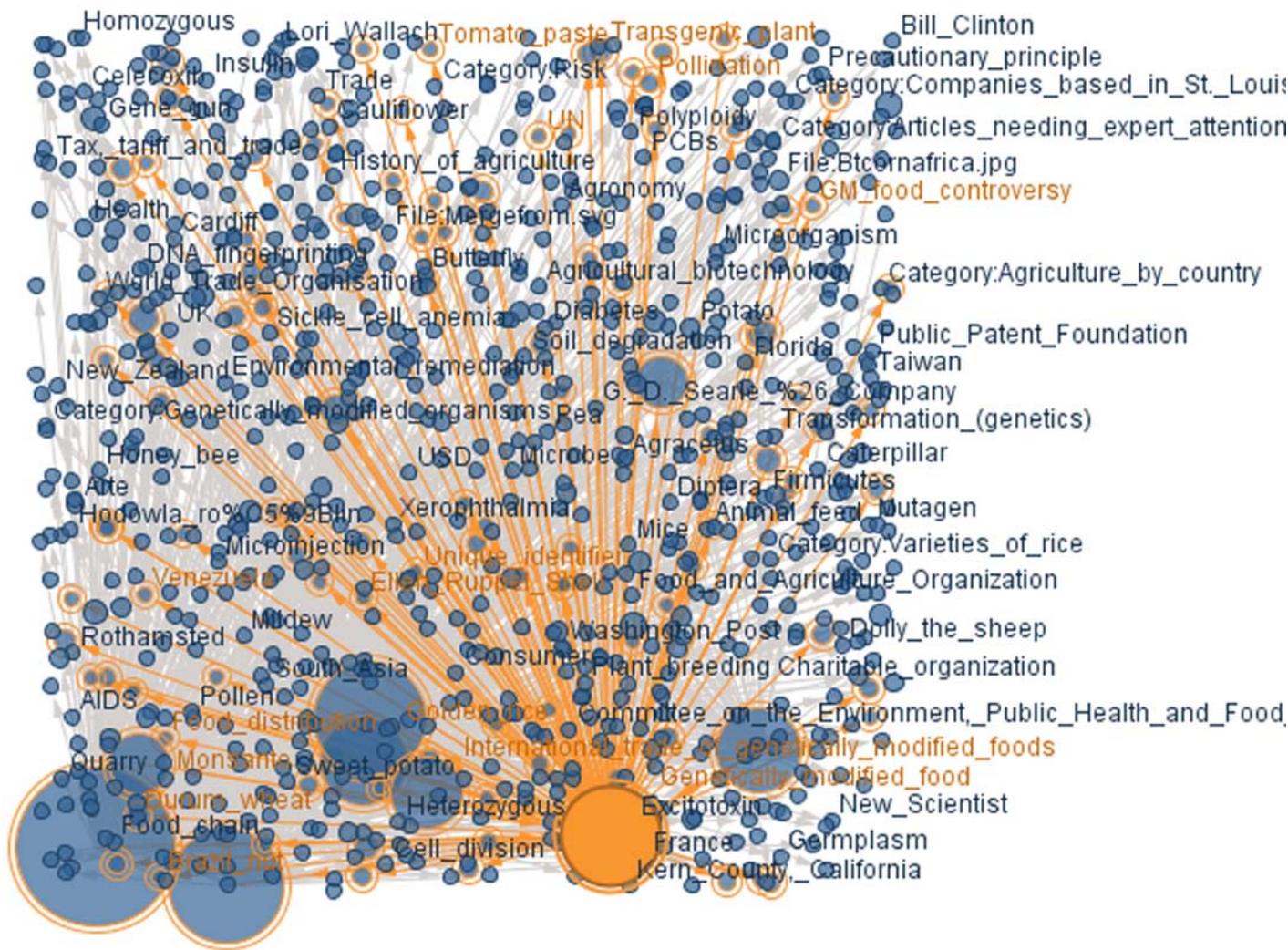
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<sup>27</sup> Please note that the data can only be interpreted tentatively since country of origin was detected by taking the IP of the edit and using a geolocation database.

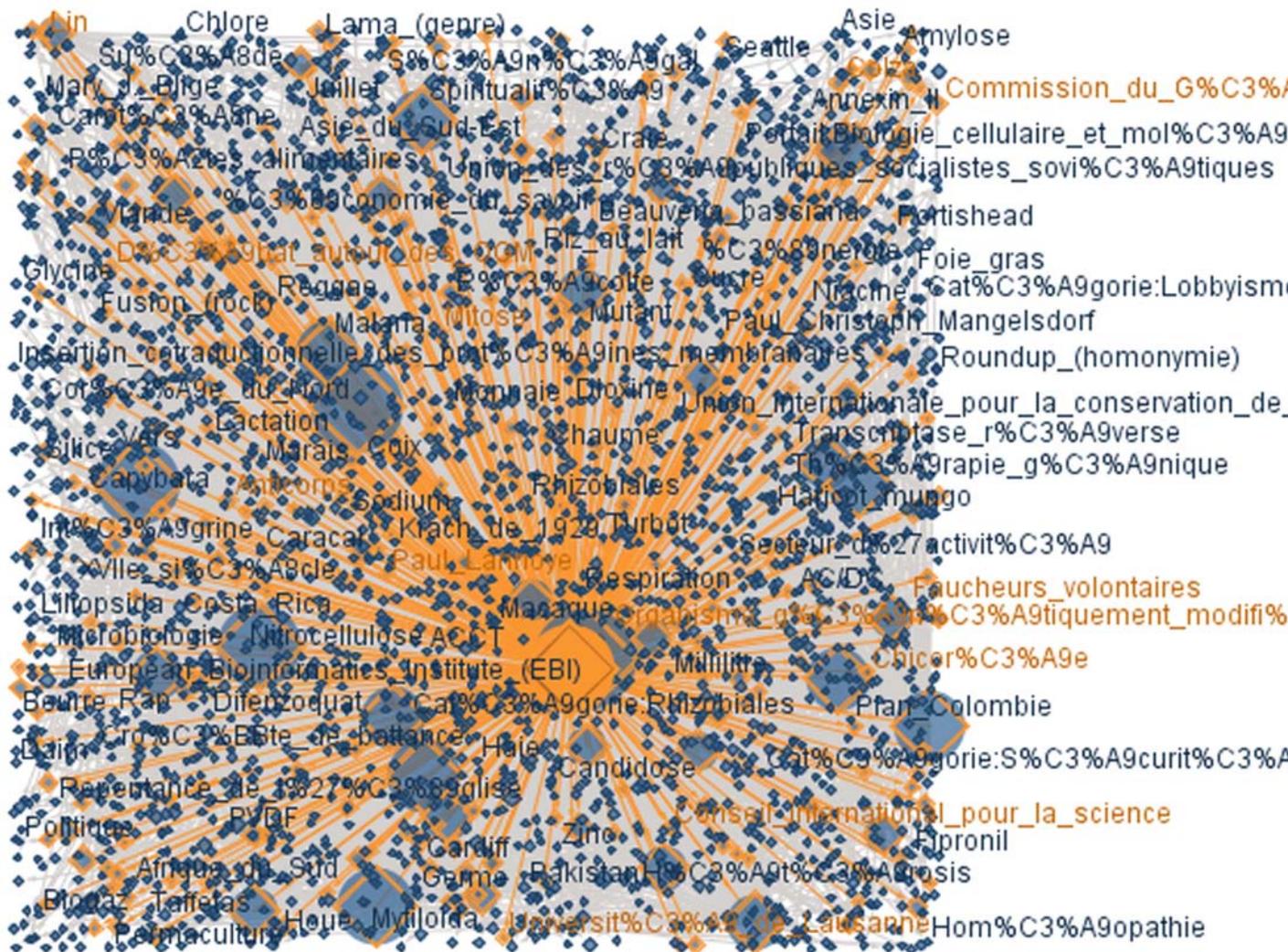
Can this said to be an attempt of universalization through the introduction of moral standards being nurtured of those who served the techno-merocratic culture of Wikipedia in terms of reasoned rational and informal debate in purely Habermasian terms?

**Appendix**

[1] Intra-Wikipedia network of the lemma [[:en:Genetically modified food]]



[2] Intra-Wikipedia network of the lemma [[:fr:Organisme génétiquement modifié]]



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## References

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