

Faces of the Commons

Assessment of Network Potential of the Creative Commons Community

*To the people of Creative Commons
who in all time zones and climates, in freedom and in captivity, in peace and at war,
work tirelessly to make this world a better place for us all.*

Global Report

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Executive Summary

Subject matter

The objective of the research is to reinforce the Creative Commons strategic process with a landscape of CC affiliates, their motivations, needs and potentials. The idea is to understand what the affiliates bring into the network: who they are, what motivates them to be part of it and what challenges they face. It is also important to understand how the network can help them to make their groundwork easier. It is also verified what sense of collective identity the affiliates have and what they perceive as greatest accomplishments of the global movement.

Methods of Analysis

Since Creative Commons affiliates work on all inhabited continents and they are divided into regions that all have a regional coordinator each, we decided to group the affiliates according to that breakdown also for the purpose of this research. The regions and countries taken into consideration are:

1. Africa - affiliates in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Tanzania, South Africa, Uganda
2. the Arab World - affiliates in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Qatar
3. Asia & Pacific - affiliates in Australia, Indonesia, South Korea
4. Central America - affiliates in Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador
5. Europe - affiliates in France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, UK
6. Latin America - affiliates in Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay

The research is based on in-depth interviews (individual or group) with representatives of 3 Creative Commons Affiliates per region. Criteria for choosing the affiliates to be interviewed in a region:

- a) Geographic distribution
- b) Size and model of involvement
- c) Duration of involvement
- d) Diversity

The interviews and any background information feed into 6 regional reports prepared in English. The products were the interview recordings and transcripts, and a regional report.

Limitations

The research has been ridden with a few limitations that stemmed from tight timing and budgetary constraints. First, the findings needed to be collected in time to feed in the ongoing strategic process; otherwise the usefulness of the report would be mostly anecdotal. Since the funding came from Creative Commons and not from an external grant that was impossible to secure at such a short notice, most interviews were carried out long-distance and the possibilities of observing the affiliates and their work were limited.

The whole idea, methodology, and questionnaires were designed by a Westerner and it is already a sufficient ground for admitting to a bias of the Western tradition in framing of problems, where the majority of interviewees have a non-Western cultural background. Therefore, the whole process included consultations of the research documentation and questionnaires within the research team to ensure it responds to the widest array of settings possible.

Results

The interviewees are a group of individuals with strong internal motivations to follow the values they recognize and incorporate them in their everyday work. They both practice and preach openness and sharing and structure their work around these values and on the skills and expertise they have. Their individual potential and abilities have an exponential influence of the course of interests and work they successfully undertake.

At the same time they experience difficulties in strategic structuring of their teams, recruiting new volunteers, and reaching out to communities they have little common expertise with. Functioning on minimal material resources they base their work on their high emotional intelligence and resulting persuasive abilities.

The network of affiliates is at a turning point. On one hand they wish to be a part of the global discussion, which is substantiated both by their direct declarations and by the amount of frustration they express when commenting on their sense of isolation. The affiliates want to feel the case they fight for is larger than their everyday life; that they contribute to the global change, which should be an effect that can be seen, discussed and celebrated in their small corner of the world.

On the other hand they face stagnation in their organization of work, lack of resources and rapidly changing environment. This sentiment, if unaddressed, may thwart their energy and drive them away from the movement in a few years.

The interviewees were satisfied with the interview-based research process to a great extent. They underlined how important it is for them personally to have the space to focus on the legacy of their work, the relationship with the global community and the future of Creative Commons. They felt heard and appreciated by the fact that the HQ drives a global effort that is based on their opinions and views.

Conclusions

Both the governance planning and the strategy discussion come in a good moment. Both can capitalize on the circumstances and transform the energy of frustration into a constructive community process. But it also means that there needs to be a space for debate, a safe environment for airing out concerns, and an atmosphere that these concerns are valid. Also, there needs to be a parallel channel of harvesting insights and ideas for a positive narrative that can feed into the strategy.

Recommendations

The first recommendation focuses on reinforcing a culture of appreciation within the network by the HQ. The culture of appreciation should be based on celebration of diversity in practice, by creating functioning procedures and processes of inclusion of diverse voices and languages in the key activities and milestones of the organization.

The second recommendation concerns accelerating the power of networking to assist strategically planned development of its affiliates and their agenda. It needs to be verified how the network can self-reinforce before other measures are used. It needs to be clearly communicated that it is the affiliates who are primarily responsible for their own sustainability and execution of their local work and the HQ and the network have an ancillary role. HQ could provide a certain targeted set of interventions on a short-term basis to assist growth of missing capacities.

The third recommendation suggests providing a platform of strategic thinking about how the openness model can become an exponential factor of a societal change. A strategy discussion needs to take into account not only current circumstances but also a foresight. It seems that there are enough affiliate representatives who could successfully contribute to the strategic thinking with such insights.

It could be the role of Creative Commons HQ to create such platform to discuss how the network can work together, acquire funds, produce and deliver resources and advocate for a change where it is a dilemma of open access or no access and not of getting for free or paying for a textbook. Creative Commons has the means and the capacity to lead a discussion on how lives of millions could change. It would be a waste of a great potential if that opportunity were left unexplored.

1. Introduction

Idea behind the project

Faces of the Commons research emerged from the two important processes currently happening in the Creative Commons network: strategy building and the need to remodel the network's governance. With its network of over 500 volunteers in 85 countries all over the world, CC puts a considerable amount of resources and energy into this process. This research's findings are supposed to feed into it.

The idea was, however, not to have another headcount or simply a look into a material capacity of any kind. With another initiatives, such as the Global Affiliate Network Research focusing on successful projects or the State of the Commons, a comprehensive periodical report assessing the wealth of CC licensed resources, CC is already running an overview of its impact.

We decided to focus on the faces behind the work Creative Commons is carrying out around the world. We zoomed onto the affiliates as people, as teams who have valuable experience, excellent insights into the practicalities of spreading the Commons as well as plans and hopes for the future. We wanted to see what and how they have contributed to the global sharing, how they function as a regional and a global community.

The idea was to understand what the affiliates bring into the network: who they are, what motivates them to be part of it and what challenges they face. This part of the assessment was especially important in understanding what challenges the open movement faces and how well it is prepared to bring lasting change.

It was also important to understand how the network can help them to make their groundwork easier. This aspect is very important in revising an affiliation model and in designing a tangible offer that is both well targeted and affordable.

For strategic reasons we tried to verify what sense of collective identity the affiliates have and what they perceive as greatest accomplishments of the global movement. These findings could directly feed into the strategy and communications to reinforce existing affiliations and possibly attract new partners.

Regions and their general characteristics

Since Creative Commons affiliates work on all inhabited continents and they are divided into regions that all have a regional coordinator each, we decided to group the affiliates according to that breakdown also for the purpose of this research. The regions and countries taken into consideration were:

7. Africa - affiliates in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Tanzania, South Africa, Uganda
8. the Arab World - affiliates in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Qatar
9. Asia & Pacific - affiliates in Australia, Indonesia, South Korea
10. Central America - affiliates in Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador
11. Europe - affiliates in France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, UK
12. Latin America - affiliates in Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay

The research showed that only Europe, with all its cultural and economic diversity, shows some degree of “regionalization”. It would mean that there are common overarching characteristics of the affiliates in the region that stem from external factors, such as the jurisdiction of the European Union, the relative small size of the region, or the fact that there is no predominant national language and therefore English is not only the most common but also uncontested “lingua franca” of the continent.

All this contributes to a quite intense communication and exchange of good practices between the affiliates. So even if in Europe there are differences from country to country in terms of economic or political situation, the affiliates included in the research are more on less on par with their capacities and potentials.

As for other regions, similarities between affiliates in a region are not that obvious, sometimes even inexistent. South America¹ and the Arab World share the phenomenon of communicating cross-border in a language that is an official and the most used in the countries the affiliates operate in - Spanish and Arabic, respectively. But that advantage does not make up for the fact, that the differences of quality of life, economic situation, political landscape, and considerably national security are so substantial from country to country heavily influence the impact of the affiliates on their communities.

The division of the researched affiliates into regions is an artificial one. It leads to a conclusion that for some affiliates the regional grouping brings little added value.

In Asia & Pacific, the geographically largest portion of the Creative Commons World, there is no universal first language shared across borders and English is also not that widely spoken as it takes place in Europe. There, as well as in Africa, on top of all the cultural and economic differences between the countries, some affiliates struggle with a myriad of domestically spoken languages, such as the Indonesian one. So not only do the affiliates face various settings, work in large populations, but also they need to address the multilingual challenge in their domestic work.

All this creates a situation, where the division of the researched affiliates into regions is for a large part an artificial one. It helps organize the research but also leads to a conclusion that for some affiliates the regional grouping brings little added value. The Salvadorian affiliate may have more in common with the Egyptian one in terms of capacity and experience than with the Colombians. An affiliate that operates in a country with overwhelming state-level corruption may have little to adopt in terms of know-how from a country in the same region that is a well-functioning democracy.

The researchers working on the regional reports need to be commanded on how they balanced out the need for a wider outlook to identify patterns and good practices with a fact that in some regions every affiliate presents a story with a unique trajectory.

¹ The term “South America” is used in this report whenever the issues described concern both Central and Latin America, as encompassing the whole continent.

The regional reports and the global report

Following the plan of investigating research problems in 6 regions, 6 regional reports have been created. They focus on 3 fundamental aspects described above for each region: what the affiliates bring to the network, how the network can help them in making impact, and what are the shared traits of identity and commitment to both the local² work and the global movement.

We specifically asked the researchers to look, listen and feed their insights into each regional report. We did not want to solely focus on reflections coming from the affiliates because derived from the context they would not provide comprehensive answers to the research questions. Instead, we wanted to capture not only the rationalized and consciously perceived notions but also the potentials and opportunities that have not occurred to the interviewees.

We tried to engage affiliates in a conversation that was a bit broader and followed up on threads that lead researchers to formulating conclusions. In practice it meant, that the answers to questions the researchers asked the interviewees fed into the questions they needed to ask themselves to write the report.

Repeating the very same structure of 3 research questions for the final report, however, would be a mistake. It would mean that the synthesis to identify trends and patterns for the diversified regions is further condensed to present a global picture. This would pose a risk of oversimplification that would not depict any existing reality.

Instead the global report focuses on the most interesting issues and crucial trends coming from the regional reports. It groups them where possible but also adds a layer of possible cross-pollination between regions and affiliates; from them to HQ and then top - down. For such a diverse network there is no one-size-fits all description. Instead, there is an enormous opportunity for creative synergies that this report tries to identify.

As a result, the global report is not a summary of the regional ones but rather a reflection on those substantiated in their content and in affiliates' own words. These two - the global one and the set of regional reports - complete one another. It is advisable to go through both to scoop out all the crucial issues that Creative Commons is facing.

² Since the report has a global scope, the term "local" refers to an affiliate's work in their country.

2. Methodology and sample choice

Method and sample

The research was based on in-depth interviews (individual or group) with representatives of 3 Creative Commons Affiliates per region. These were conducted online, unless a researcher could meet the person interviewed. The interviews were conducted in English or the interviewees' first languages if the researcher speaks it.

Criteria for choosing the affiliates to be interviewed in a region:

- e) Geographic distribution: every region is diversified somehow in terms of culture, ethnicity, languages spoken, political situation - for example "old" and "new" European Union countries have different conditions for civil society activity.
- f) Size and model of involvement: organizational vs. individual involvement - generally we want to look into a more established model of involvement in countries where CC affiliates thrive.
- g) Duration of involvement: founding members and newer affiliates (at least 2 years in the network)
- h) Diversity: gender balance, cultural and ethnic background (focus on representatives coming from the local/regional community but also foreigners if relevant), areas of activities/expertise (universities, wikimedia chapters, creative artist communities, copyright /human rights advocacy groups etc.)

The final sample choice should represent a diversity of experiences and practices available in the region from the cultural, linguistic, and societal point as much as it is possible. The universal baseline was that all the researched affiliates should be active and operating.

As mentioned before, the interviews and any background information researchers needed to gather fed into 6 regional reports in English. The researchers were provided with the research description and a discussion guide that included methodology, questionnaires, a report structure, as well as information on data processing and research ethics. The products were the interview recordings and transcripts, and a regional report.

Tackling the Western bias

From the beginning we wanted the regional interviews and reports to be carried out by researchers based in the region. Especially for a research of this kind, where the researcher's mindset and ability to draw conclusions heavily influence the outcome, we wanted it to be done by someone who understand the local setting to the extent possible.

The whole idea, methodology, and questionnaires were designed by a Westerner and it is already a sufficient ground for admitting to a bias of the Western tradition in framing of problems, where the majority of interviewees have a non-Western cultural background. Therefore, the whole process included consultations of the research documentation and questionnaires within the research team to ensure it responds to the widest array of settings possible.

The contributing researchers were:

1. Africa - Isla Haddow-Flood, an external contractor based in South Africa; interviews were conducted by the regional coordinator Alex Gakuru
2. the Arab World - Gülşah Neslihan Akkaya, an external contractor based in Turkey and supported by the regional coordinator Naeema Zarif
3. Asia & Pacific - SooHyun Pae, the regional coordinator based in South Korea
4. Central America - Sandra Contreras Aprile, an external contractor based in Nicaragua and supported by Claudia Cristiani, a Salvadorian affiliate
5. Latin America - Scann Evelin Heidel and Guido Gamba, based in Argentina
6. Europe and the global report - Anna Mazgal, research coordinator, an external contractor based in Poland

We kept in mind that in different cultures the patterns of acquiring information are different. For example, in some traditions asking direct questions may be perceived as offensive while in others the indirectness may seem evasive or indicate unpreparedness. People across the globe have different ways of admitting to a failure, or describing their own success - it may be considered as a well-earned privilege or as rude bragging.

We tried to accommodate these discrepancies with two measures. First, we developed a set of direct and indirect questions addressing one issue, and left it to the judgment of a researcher which ones to use in a conversation. Second, we had left open the option to drift away from the questionnaire as long as the researcher got answers to the questions she herself needed to answer in the report. This way we both ensured flexibility of the conversations and the comparability of the final documents across regions.

Interview-based research as a community building process

Our research has been ridden with a few limitations that stemmed from tight timing and budgetary constraints. First, the findings needed to be collected in time to feed in the ongoing strategic

The interviewees underlined how important it is for them personally to focus on the legacy of their work, the relationship with the global community and the future of Creative Commons. They felt heard and appreciated by the fact that the HQ drives a global effort that is based on their opinions and views.

process; otherwise the usefulness of the report would be mostly anecdotal. A research of this scope and methodology could easily justify travels to affiliates to experience their everyday life and work. But since the funding came from Creative Commons and not from an external grant that was impossible to secure at such a short notice, it seemed irrational to literally burn money on jet fuel.

However, the interviews designed as conversations worked long distance as well. It can be seen in the transcripts that the interviewees were satisfied with the process to a great extent. They admitted the questions were not always easy to answer, which means that they needed to think through the answers and had no preconceived token response. They underlined how important it is for them personally to have the space to focus on the

legacy of their work, the relationship with the global community and the future of Creative Commons. Finally, they felt heard and appreciated by the fact that the HQ drives a global effort that is based on their opinions and views. And that is a result that is hard to overestimate, as we will see in the findings of the research.

3. Diversity at Creative Commons

In this part we will take a look at capacities of the affiliates across the globe. As stated before, there is little sense to thoroughly compare regions; the affiliates are very diverse within basically any region and such attempt would result in an oversimplification. Also these capacities are described in detail and - what is important - in their specific context in the regional reports. Finally, capacities such as “strong team” or “advocacy know-how” may mean different things in practice depending on a team. Therefore, we try to sum up the strongest features of affiliates and explain what they mean in their unique context.

The strength of teams, the power of an individual

“The willingness for people to work without being paid. The voluntary spirit. I don't even know how to explain it. If I sent out an email for work on Creative Commons, everyone will come expecting no pay. That is rare in Uganda. We give them tea, bites and all of that and they would be very excited to share how we can transform our country with an open culture.” - Primah Kwagala, CC Uganda, Africa

Across all regions it is evident that internal motivation, commitment to values of openness and everyday practice of sharing are key features that have been stitching affiliate teams and ensured mainstreaming of CC licenses for the last years. Despite limited resources, volunteer-based involvement and rapid changes of the economic and political landscape, the affiliates keep working on their agenda. That characteristic is predominant for all working environments - from the relative predictability of the European context to the hardships of poor state structures, bureaucracy, and financial difficulties of some Arab, African or South American countries.

However, the type of affiliation plays a role in how these volunteers are engaged and it influences the possibility of team growth. There are in general two types of affiliations: with a University and with an NGO. The former has been a classic way of incubation for a majority of affiliates described in the research. It provided a good base for involving experts such as lawyers; these entities in turn benefitted from the affiliation when Creative Commons was predominantly a revolutionary concept interesting to researchers as a cultural phenomenon. However, those ties have often worn off like in Latin America or in Europe, and the affiliates have little access to their founders' capacities at the moment.

An affiliation with an NGO provides some affiliates with possibilities to liaise with a broader NGO/activist community in the country. Also, very often the model is that CC leads in a given country are employed by the NGO that provides the institutional affiliation, it also takes place in Uganda at Makerere University for example. That allows including CC-related activities at least partially into the job descriptions. On the other hand, as the example of the Latin America shows, it increases difficulties in incorporating non-affiliated volunteers into the workflow if they are not tied with an organization and have another daily job.

Affiliate teams struggle with everyday workload, have a clear idea of the limitations of such a model of involvement, and soberly judge their capacities. Nevertheless, many people have been involved with the movement for many years and CC-related work is a large part of their life despite other professional obligations.

Because people are the key resource in any setting, individual predispositions, talents, capacities and deficiencies have an exponential influence on the CC work all over the world. Both in a recollection of features they find important, as well as indirectly through attitude presented in the interviews, it is evident that the personality and the set of skills of an involved individual are crucial. Their expertise and talents become the expertise CC offers in a given country.

Most of the time affiliate teams have grown organically, and there is no evidence that they have been strategizing the enlargement of their teams in practice. Many affiliates - in Africa, the Arab World, Latin and Central America, but also in France for example - admit, that it is hard to attract volunteers that would commit long-term to advancing the CC agenda. But since the human capacity has such an influence on the affiliates' functioning, attracting the right person could significantly reinforce performance.

From laws to policies - strategies of getting the work done

“If we were only two lawyers that know something about copyright, that would be a failure.” - CC Uruguay, Latin America

As described in detail in regional reports and further below, the affiliates' capacity to operationalize plans is influenced by the general situation in their country. So not only do they define similar-sounding areas of activity differently, but also develop different methods of work.

Affiliates across the world have the ability to attract and sustain a great community of lawyers who can both explain the current copyright framework and actively implement CC licensing. They have a grasp of what could be the direction of the copyright reform worldwide, and that is a capacity that is unique both locally and globally.

Many European, South American or Asian/Pacific affiliates have a strong experience in policy work and advocacy for both a better copyright and adopting licensing by public institutions, including the recognition and implementation of OER. Some African affiliates have a quite unique experience of working in a context that hasn't fully adopted the concept of intellectual property on one hand, and also demonstrates skepticism towards openness.

Hence the strategies strongly vary, as some affiliates work in a favorable environment where there are established ways of engaging with the public authorities (Europe, South Korea, Australia, for example). Others need to maneuver in the excessive bureaucracy (Qatar) or at all cost avoid any political context that could not only jeopardize their work but also put them personally in danger of imprisonment (Syria, Egypt, Ethiopia).

On one hand, these are different capacities of getting the work done and definitely not every affiliate has a sense of a fulfillment. However, only the affiliates can judge and decide if the strategies adopted elsewhere are useful in their domestic context. Affiliates that developed a strong policy angle have quite a lot of a persuasive experience because they actually get to talk to the officials on a regular basis. Those that are struggling to introduce openness into any official agenda have developed alternative ways of mobilizing community. The learning, therefore, can go both ways and should be actively facilitated.

It is important, because depending on a local context, a policy example from elsewhere may have a double-edged affect. In regions such as the Arab World, license applications from the US or Europe have a limited appeal, since these contexts are perceived as culturally and politically foreign. In Nigeria the affiliate even needs to convince authorities that open licensing is not an “American ideology”. In both regions an example of application in the region would work better and in the Arab World the wide usage of Arabic could contribute to the familiarity of such a practice.

On the other hand in other places, such as in Latin America, the fact that there are open policies working in the Global North is a useful point of reference and in fact an aspiration for some local authorities. So these exchanges of practices and resources are crucial for affiliates that need more foreign evidence in their persuasion.

In regions such as the Arab World, license applications from the US or Europe have a limited appeal, since these contexts are perceived as culturally and politically foreign. In Latin America the fact that there are open policies in the Global North is a useful point of reference for some local authorities.

Community building in times of crises

“A good crisis cannot go to waste” - Europe regional report

We live in turbulent times, and many CC communities all over the world experience a crisis of sorts. It can be as serious as the war in Syria or unrest in Egypt, the violence and crime in El Salvador, poverty and poor internet access in Africa, or economic hardships in Southern Europe. In those circumstances the affiliates try to expand their outreach while staying relevant to everyday problems of their communities.

A community is needed because any attempt to change the world into a better, fairer place does not make sense in a societal vacuum. The affiliates that work with various stakeholders on a regular basis see the difference between servicing clients and creative exchange within the community. And some express disappointment that while successfully working with the former, they have little time to properly advance the latter.

Syrian affiliate’s work is the extreme example of an activity resulting from a dramatic situation. It is oriented towards freeing Bassel Khartabil, a Palestinian-Syrian CC volunteer and a political prisoner in Syria since March 15, 2012. The campaign requires a lot of energy and effort. But at the same time, as Gülşah Neslihan Akkaya writes in her Arab

World report, through the #FreeBassel Campaign people from a very diverse backgrounds and communities such as artists, creative writers, journalists, graphic designers started to contribute simultaneously to Creative Commons and Free Internet Movement.

In Greece, the dire economic circumstances and high unemployment have been the central point of reference for any social change ever since the crisis started. The Greek affiliate got involved with drafting a crowdsourced, CC-licensed draft of a new Greek constitution. Owing to that, they were able to reach out to communities that had little bandwidth to develop artistic projects. But these communities benefitted first hand from an open process with a political and societal dimension.

In Portugal, Indonesia, Paraguay and Uruguay to name a few, societal unrest has been channeled into artistic endeavors, for which the concept of openness became a useful tool. These affiliates have experiences in cultivating relationships with artists and promoting sharing of creative output. For Portugal, the crisis was an opportunity in the sense that the society facing deprivation turned to non-financial methods of creation. The affiliate was able to use this momentum, as described in detail in the Europe regional report.

The affiliates present admirable agility in adapting to the circumstances. They are able to provide added value to their communities that experience societal shifts, economic hardships, a gag on free speech, and even war.

Even if tired and frustrated, the affiliates present admirable agility in adapting to the circumstances. They are able to provide added value to their communities that experience societal shifts, economic hardships, a gag on freedom of speech, and even war. All this has been achieved without sustainable funding and through volunteer-based structures. The question is therefore: how to ease the frustration and create synergies without thwarting the agility?

4. Key challenges and innovative potential of the global community

How to help an agile community?

“Being a volunteer-driven space, you need to have a fair amount of fun too, something that motivates you. The formality of the mailing lists isn’t what we are looking for. We need a more informal and relaxed channel to build up communities.” - TEDIC - CC Paraguay, Latin America

As described in regional reports, the work the affiliates is not easy and they could use some help. To a various extent in all regions there are affiliates that have lost touch with their founding university or organization,³ experience difficulties in bringing new people to the team and who feel that the self-motivation fuel may soon burn out if they have no financial resources to produce handouts, guidelines or even remunerate a staff member.

These are authentic concerns of the affiliates and before they can be judged as legitimate or not, they should be seriously looked into by both the network (steering committee) and CC staff (regional coordinators and other experts on board). Being a long-time volunteer is hard, attracting new volunteers in cultures where making ends meet is the primary concern is very difficult, and it is very important from the point of the community dynamics that its members have space to air out these concerns and speak openly what troubles them. As noted before, the very process of gathering material for Faces of the Commons research has been perceived as a step in that direction by the interviewees.

It must be noted, that across the CC world, the perceptions of the support that CC should or could offer to affiliates vary. In the Western tradition (that Australia may also be counted as a part of) and to some extent in Asia, it is rather obvious that the affiliates are pretty much on their own with securing sustainability of everyday business. In other regions the expectations of help and assistance are greater, especially from affiliates that are relatively new to the network or experience extreme difficulties.

So it is not equally evident across the world what sort of affiliation model is envisioned - if it is more a franchise type or a branch type of a relationship. That uncertainty must be addressed by the network before any other measures of assistance are discussed.

Another important point is that despite challenges and a visible sense of burnout in some teams, they keep doing their job with dedication and resourcefulness. Any attempt at assisting them should stimulate these capacities. They need a realistic conversation about what they can expect. Possibly also some help in finding their own solutions to problems only they themselves may fix.

³ Such a point was brought up by the affiliates in the Arab World and in Africa where attracting people to a voluntary long-term contribution is very difficult because being able to sustain oneself and one’s family is still a primary concern due to the economic instability and social stratification.

At this point it seems that the process of engaging them into talking about their frustrations and ways to cope and counteract is as important, if not more important, than the actual solution. These affiliates who have certain useful experiences should be enlisted to share and instruct those less experienced and more burdened. The affiliates need to feel empowered to be able to cope with their very concrete problems that are presented in the regional reports and will be summarized further on in this document.

Exponential value of networking

“It’s more valuable than the money than people get together... You pick up things and you think about things differently once you meet people... I would like to see that more put into ensuring that affiliates are able to meet together more often. A lot can be gained through closer communication, in particular in personal communication with other affiliates.” - Anonymous interviewee, Asia Pacific Regional Report

All affiliates underline how important it is for them to be a part of the CC community. Just an example: in Europe networking is the key gain from belonging to the global network and the affiliates identify many positive effects on their local work from these encounters. Somebody referred to it as an opportunity to come back home on one’s own wings as a metaphor for inspiration. Other interviewees brought up enormous intellectual capacity of the community to discuss wider problems but also to learn from the best IP lawyers. Learning about best practices and getting emotional support in the hardships of everyday work were also mentioned often.

Across the world the affiliates express the need to learn from one another, to have a more systemic communication on topics of concern. In Africa the affiliates feel very proud that the initiative called the School of Open was conducted simultaneously in 5 countries. But they all also feel that the huge potential of the global network has not been fully achieved due to limited human and financial resources as well as inefficient communication.

It seems clear that the greatest experiences of networking come from the face-to-face gatherings Creative Commons organizes. Between those meetings the communication seems to fade as it lacks frame and a tangible point of reference. Affiliates admit that they have little time to just keep up with the general developments of the network. At the same time, as evident in the European or in the African example, a structured and goal-oriented cooperation boosts activities of the affiliates and helps them perform better in their local context.

If CC is a global village, then the map of that village does not mimic the continental division. The streets run along issues and certain capacities that the affiliates have in common.

So the question is how to structure communication and exchange to create fertile ground for peer-to-peer learning, support and synergies? HQ has appointed regional coordinators and that certainly is a step in this direction. However, as the research shows, in some

regions there is little to unite affiliates in terms of capacities and scopes of work. Since the affiliates report that they do not know exactly what are the terms of engagement with the HQ, it would mean that either the regional coordinators are uncertain themselves or they struggle with explaining it adequately and making sure it is common knowledge. In Africa for example, they became a sort of a bottleneck lengthening the communication chain between the affiliates and the HQ but not following up enough with the affiliates neither with updates from the network or with adequate interest in the affiliates' affairs.

It seems that regional coordination makes sense if it builds up affiliates' capacity as organizations, as advocates, or if it serves as a directory facilitating navigation in the network of affiliates' competencies. The research demonstrates that affiliates need to reach out to a network based on relevance to their interests and projects. It may turn out that it is best if the Indonesian affiliate cooperates with the Portuguese one, the Australian one with Europe and Colombia, and Qatar with Poland, for example.

If CC is a global village, then the map of that village does not mimic the continental division. The streets run along issues and certain capacities that the affiliates have in common. Mapping out that interests and directing traffic into those lanes could be one of the most important tasks for the HQ.

Knowledge management that assists sustainability

„There should be a minimum standard of knowledge/information that affiliates need to know in order to operate. Without this the global movement will have a limited ability to pursue its agenda.” - Central America and Colombia Regional Report

It is evident that across the world affiliates experience various challenges in building their capacity. Recruiting volunteers and attracting a new generation of CC enthusiasts is a prevalent difficulty almost anywhere. Here the troubled affiliates could use some mentoring either from other community members or from external experts. The HQ, through community management expert or regional coordinators, is in a good position to facilitate such a process by providing some basic training or fostering the creation of mentoring groups between affiliates.

It also seems that there are a lot of practices that affiliates feel could be standardized and written up as manuals or guidelines for doing various things. They observe their well-established, successful counterparts and feel they could benefit from that knowledge. It can be imagined that when such an experienced affiliate has succeeded in, say, recruiting volunteers they could be persuaded to write up a few-step guideline on the process knowing somebody else can benefit from it. This way the burden does not fall on a few people or the HQ, but rather everyone does a little collecting the vast organizational memory of the movement.

It is important because many affiliates especially in South America and in Asia/Pacific express that they have no clue what is expected of them and what they could expect in return. As reported, they do not have a clear answer on what is the scope of activities that

fall under the definition of a CC-branded project. They express a sense of isolation and confusion and it seems that a very basic assistance is needed.

The Ecuadorian and French affiliates indicated they would need a very practical introduction such as “20 things every affiliate needs to know” to launch (or re-launch) their organizational life better against the community standard: a basic package of key information about licenses, CC’s background and regional agenda that affiliates should have as a common baseline. Others underlined the need of creating a “who is who” at HQ and in the regions, to be able to make connections on specific areas of expertise. Asia/Pacific region would love to see an online resource of information materials and project descriptions to be able to get inspired and cooperate with other across the region and the world.

Perhaps not all of those ideas can be implemented or are realistic to be updated and maintained by a large community of overworked volunteers. It is also possible that some guidelines exist already but the affiliates have no awareness of that. However, various options of knowledge management and sharing should be explored further because such a community has an enormous wealth of experiences and good practices that has not been reused. Perhaps the most efficient version of such a process is one-on-one between affiliates or small teams of teams looking for a solution to a shared problem. But to organize that, the affiliates need to know who is out there to connect on topics of concern.

Does the movement need funding?

“To make this a genuine global movement, we should have a global fund, to which everyone chips in and uses as a kind of co-budget to support each other globally.” - Jennifer Kang, CC Korea, Asia Pacific

For many affiliates across the world, funding comes up as a need to create online and offline resources that would help explain openness, licensing, OER, and other issues the movement is promoting. These are resources that seem to be difficult to produce, translate, or localize by volunteers and the affiliates see that having these costs covered would boost their work and reinforce the professional image of the movement.

Another need that comes up in South America, Africa, the Arab World and in Asia is the burn out of volunteer engagement that, in an opinion of some affiliates, could be counteracted with creating part-time paid positions for people that are regularly occupied with tedious tasks of running the operations. However, only a few affiliates present a track record of securing some funding to remunerate labor or produce resources. Positions are mainly funded by hosting organizations that employ the CC team members in roles that are usually broader than the CC-related functions. Many affiliates are looking at the global structure that in their opinion should help with such costs.

Again, it does not seem that any promises of that kind were made. The Awesome Fund is perceived very positively in every region and it is widely appreciated that the affiliates can

put forward their own proposals of initiatives they wish to have financed. It may be that the fund created greater expectations for a more structured top-down funding stream. It may also be that many affiliates do not have substantial fundraising experience or to no avail try to fundraise in an environment that is either oblivious (as in El Salvador) or even hostile to funding a movement (as some affiliates in the Arab World experience).

Those affiliates that do have both the experience and some success in fundraising for projects are based mostly in Europe, but even here their track record is modest. It seems that the potential of funding consortium-based projects on various aspects of social change, culture, or activism that the EU provides has been only modestly explored by the affiliates⁴ and the global structure. It would be optimal if the affiliates pick that up but to ensure a better sync with the global strategy and planning, the regional coordinator or another representative of the HQ should be also involved in planning and programming.

The Western World has the potential of providing funding to the economically unprivileged parts of the globe, especially if the issues to be funded concern education, cultural and digital literacy, and other ways of equalizing access to knowledge and information. Certainly, many issues of concern at CC would fall into that sphere and the network's unique advantage is that it has proven partners in both the funding and the receiving parts of the world to ensure effective execution of projects.

The movement has been running with little sustainable funding for a long time and it may seem that the status quo is not harmful to the network. However, looking into some regional reports (South America especially) the level of burnout and frustration is tangible and in the long run this issue may alienate affiliates from both their work on the ground and from the global network. And that would be a great loss on both these levels.

It is up to the affiliates' imagination to design initiatives that may ensure mainstreaming and upscaling their best practices in collaboration with the counterparts in the network. For some reason, are these opportunities not only unexplored but also the affiliates seem not to be aware of them. The HQ and its staff are in a unique position to create space for such a discussion and to encourage partnerships, perhaps help incubate ideas into plans, and motivate affiliates to actively drive such cooperation. The responsibility, however, to obtain and adequately spend external funding should rest on those who take responsibility for making a change in their local community.

Semiotics of the Commons

“Affiliation to the global network brings legitimacy, which makes things easier to explain and continue.” - George Abdelnour, Lebanon, the Arab World

As described above, the rules of engagement with the global network and the structure of Creative Commons are blurry for many affiliates. Their sense of belonging to the

⁴ The COMMUNIA project is an example of such an initiative. Financed with an EU grant and focused on the preservation of public domain in Europe, the project subsequently got transformed into an independent association with the same mission, that is also very active in the undergoing copyright reform in Europe.

movement varies, from quite a strong identification with the community, to a bit instrumental use of a franchise that provides useful tools and branding, but not much more than that. It is useful to try and distill what is Creative Commons to the affiliates.

The key takeaway are the licenses as a tangible tool advancing the agenda affiliates have. In other words, Creative Commons is a theory of change that is based on a product, as one of the Polish affiliates noted. Generally affiliates are happy with the quality of the 4.0 license as well as with the process ensuring that quality around the world. It may be that this experience inspires them to thinking of the aforementioned greater standardization of network procedures and onboarding of affiliates.

But there is more. As the Latin American researchers put it, “in a rather symbolic skew, CC Community represents recognition and credibility credentials for the affiliate”. So there is the brand that is credible, international, and recognizable. Affiliates admit that using it boosts the impact of the solutions they propose.

The brand strength may reinforce the movement strongly in cultures where symbolic and physical manifestations of presence are required to validate any endeavor. The Qatar affiliate observes that a high-profile CC HQ visit is necessary to strengthen their work in the country. In Africa a logo on the stationery or an office with the organization's name on the door are seen as a condition for a serious business. There it is not about a volunteer wanting a desk to feel better, it is about a culture that requires a desk and a phone number as a proof of capacity and ability.

Many affiliates across the globe express their view, however, that Creative Commons carries out values that build up on mainstreaming of the licenses. Openness, sharing, social justice, access to knowledge and education are primary interests of many affiliates. They reach out to communities to advance social change in these areas and from that perspective there is an area of activity for the network to formulate its agenda broader than ensuring freedom of creation, as important as it is for the whole movement.

Creative Commons has managed to stay non-political for many years. In the changing world where access to education, support for fundamental rights, and personal freedom are often seen as a matter of a political choice, maintaining this position could no longer be possible.

Here the network as a whole and the organization as an entity in particular are in a delicate position. Creative Commons has managed to stay non-political for many years if by that term we understand avoidance of topics that are charged politically in their local contexts. In the changing world where access to education, support for fundamental rights, and personal freedom are often seen as a matter of a political choice rather than a personal set of values, maintaining this position could no longer be possible. Especially in countries where the democratic sphere is being narrowed or does not really exist, pursuing any topic of that agenda by an affiliate may reflect upon the whole network as politically oriented.

Is that a bad thing? Maybe not, but it is a call to make and an important topic to discuss with all interested affiliates. They need to know what positions the movement is ready to take and how the CC branding would work, should they be considered as a politically oriented organization in their local context. This is an important safeguard for them and for the organization on top of the movement.

Copyright and openness - the first world problem?

“If we don’t have universal access to knowledge, if we don’t all have the same rights and opportunities to access knowledge we will continue to be unequal societies that cannot reach their highest potential. Access to the cumulus of knowledge generated by humanity is a human right and that’s how it should be.” - Claudia Cristiani, co-public lead CC El Salvador

In terms of advancing the openness agenda, fixing the copyright comes to the forefront of problems the affiliates address in their work or hope to work on more intensely. The vision is ambitious: affiliate see Creative Commons as a global lobby for the copyright reform. CC could be the entity that leads the discussion about the need of the reform and ways to achieve a fairer, more free world through amending copyright.

Here, however, the affiliate voices present a dichotomy in terms of what is possible to achieve in their specific context. First, many affiliates in Europe, South America or Asia Pacific advocate for changes of both awareness and policies, with moderate successes. In the African context, copyright is often perceived as a Westernized concept and the affiliates aim at localizing it rather than adopting solutions working elsewhere.

Some success is possible in countries that enjoy certain economic and political stability; where innovation, information economy and copyright-intense industries are perceived as important civilizational issues. In these contexts, both the copyright discourse and openness norm are advanced and diffused to many audiences.

Maybe the issue of a legal framework for creativity and access to knowledge is the first world problem, but not in a sense of an intellectual challenge. Maybe for a movement such as Creative Commons it should be a responsibility that is broader than the local context.

However, as other affiliates recollect, the diffusion of norm seems to be the first world problem. In countries plagued by poverty, inequality, crime, crisis, authoritarian governments, censorship and even war, the state of play is different. The framework for creativity always is a secondary concern for both citizens and authorities where there are no jobs, and the threat of falling into poverty is imminent. The paradox is that these countries could benefit exponentially from a better copyright and the openness principle put into practice.

In places such as Europe there is a choice between buying a textbook and getting one for free, as much as the costs of the first option can be a burden on a family. In poverty-stricken regions of the world there is no such choice and therefore open educational

resources are desperately needed. There is no policy space and little infrastructure to develop these tools, and therefore the organizations need to create subversive strategies and spend a considerable amount of energy in securing support, also internationally.

So perhaps the issue of a legal framework for creativity and access to knowledge is the first world problem, but not in a sense of an intellectual challenge. Maybe for a movement such as Creative Commons it should be a responsibility that is broader than the local context and that encompass assisting regions in desperate need of such solutions that are not a matter of a choice but of survival of a civilization and culture.

The Lebanese affiliate observed that open resources could be a solution to many problems in education related to capacity and connectivity of rural communities in Lebanon. They think that the scope of the OER projects should be expanded to the refugees in the camps in Lebanon and Jordan. Would CC community hear that call and look into possibilities of assisting that sort of work? It seems that those that struggle with poor-functioning infrastructure and political instability may be too frail to take it up on their own.

Combatting the sense of isolation

“I just feel that there is a bit of a distance that has been created. That's what I feel like. I just feel like nowadays when a communication comes, it feels like it's coming from heaven. You just feel like, who are those people? What are they saying? Why are they saying that?” - Primah Kwagala, CC Uganda, Africa

It is important to recap that affiliates are on a spectrum from deep connection to the values and to the movement and their peers to a sense of everyday isolation. These two notions are coexistent for Central and Latin America, the Arab World, Africa, and in Asia. There is a “push-and-pull” dynamics in their relationship with the broader network.

The affiliates feel unseen and unrecognized by the network. They do not see any regional agenda they can feel a part of; do not get assistance from the regional coordinators. It is perhaps because the regional coordinators have a set of tasks that are not communicated widely, so the affiliates do not know what the coordinators are exactly for. They also report that when they reach out, as in the case of CC Uruguay, to present the roadmap, they received no feedback or comment whether this is good enough and how this fulfills the overall CC goals.

Interestingly, these sentiments are not really voiced in Europe. It may be that quite strong regional ties between at least some affiliates and the sense of participating in the broader-than-local structure of the European Union gives them a sense of community. Especially with issues such as the copyright reform that is happening on the EU level, it is almost impossible to work on the topic without liaising with organizations and individuals from another EU countries. So perhaps this unique setting is not replicable.

As for other regions the sense of isolation has two basic features. First, it is a sense of not being heard by the community and HQ and of feeling excluded from the global CC strategy

discussion. Creative Commons develops its strategy with its steering committee that where representatives of many regions are represented. It may be that these individuals insufficiently communicate with the affiliates within their regions, and could do better in harvesting ideas, insights, and taking them back to the global level.

The other very important issue stems from the usage of language and the challenge is larger than its linguistic side. Reading the reports it can be assumed that (as is often the case in cross-cultural relations) the language symbolizes culture as well. One of the interviewees described the network as a club of friends who speak English. In fact many affiliates who talk about feeling isolated also note that the network, its relationships and resources are predominantly English. If we care to extrapolate, it would mean that they see the dominant culture of the network as Western. This may also explain why the Europeans do not express that much disappointment with the network's engagement model as do representatives of other regions and cultures.

The affiliates reason that the localization of resources by translating them into local languages, and especially those that are widely spoken in a region such as Arabic and Spanish, would boost their efforts in mainstreaming both concepts and tools Creative Commons promotes. This issue can be seen as a purely technical one, and a matter of securing resources (funding or volunteer time) to localize any content the affiliates wish to translate. But it is also important to remember that unlike in North America or Europe English may be often perceived as the vanguard of a dominant culture or, in extreme cases, of an oppressive one⁵.

These are not always fully conscious associations, but if we add them to the sense of isolation they may reinforce the sentiment.

A language is the oldest Commons and CC is in a very appropriate place to see the symbolic potential of that fact. It is important that there this is a network-wide, HQ-backed initiative that will give the affiliates an assurance that what they speak not only does matter but also is celebrated.

Creative Commons is in a difficult position here. On one hand, with affiliates operating in 85 countries all around the world, it is not possible to speak many languages on an everyday basis. On the other hand, perhaps the issue is not to turn fully multilingual but to simply recognize the importance and wealth of languages present at the CC global table. After all, a language is the oldest Commons that civilization gave us and CC is in a very appropriate place to see the symbolic potential of that fact.

Perhaps key documents or reports should come out in 3 or 4 languages by default. Perhaps a global campaign on turning CC multilingual could be launched and under that banner volunteer translators from all over the world could enlist to help affiliates with their materials and resources. Whatever the means, it is important that this is a network-wide, HQ-backed initiative that will give the affiliates an assurance that who they are and what they speak not only does matter but also is celebrated.

One can also adopt a view, that an effective network is a goal-oriented setting where sentiments such as a sense of isolation or a feeling of language-based exclusion cannot be

⁵ So could be French, Spanish or Portuguese for that matter, depending on a region's colonial history.

seen as primary concerns. The thing is, Creative Commons is not a global corporation but a network of highly motivated, value-oriented people that display unusually high levels of emotional intelligence. That one may be complicated to work with, but it is definitely not a liability - it is an asset. The persuasive power of the movement comes from the emotional intelligence of its volunteers. And these people currently feel the network does not care about their language. And it is as if it didn't care about their voice.

They also need to see and understand there is a channel for them to speak to the movement on issues of global concern. They want to show their work, to hear about successes of others. They are not looking for an arena, but rather for a connection to someone, perhaps somewhere in another part of the world, who has an answer to their question or a word of encouragement.

Therefore making sure the affiliates see the recognition of the significance of their original voice is important for the wellbeing and the future of the movement. The stake is high, because the research showed to all researchers that the CC community has an absolutely unique potential of skills, capacities, motivations and values guiding the work. So an accurately designed network management can consolidate a community that in 10 years may change the world. An inadequate one will simply hub volunteers who promote licenses. That is a choice the network may want to consider.

5. Recommendations

- a. Inclusive governance - how Creative Commons can include affiliates and their experience in their work - and how this could be organized
- b. Affiliation model - activities and membership offer to promote / support
- c. Communication with affiliates and about affiliates - key insights

The nature of this report makes it a one big set of detailed suggestions and ideas for action embedded into each part of the document. This part, however, focuses on how the findings and suggestions presented above could feed into the process of developing a new strategy and a model of governance. Therefore in this part there is no direct reference to recommendations from the regional reports since those focus on the realities of each region. For a fuller picture, and especially when looking for insights to proposing solutions, it is recommended to get familiarized with both the regional and the global recommendations.

Global Recommendation No 1

Developing a Culture of Appreciation

The key circumstance framing this suggestion is that the network of affiliates is at a turning point. On one hand they wish to be a part of the global discussion, which is substantiated both by their direct declarations and by the amount of frustration they express when commenting on their sense of isolation. The affiliates want to feel the case they fight for is larger than their everyday life; that they contribute to the global change and that this effect can be seen, discussed and celebrated in their small corner of the world.

On the other hand they face stagnation in their organization of work, lack of resources and a rapidly changing environment. This sentiment, if unaddressed, may thwart their energy and drive them away from the movement in a few years.

In that sense the governance planning and the strategy discussion come in a good moment. Both can capitalize on the circumstances and transform the energy of frustration into a constructive community process. But it also means that regardless of what model comes out of the process, first there is a need to reinforce the use of soft methods of conflict management. In other words, there needs to be space for debate, a safe environment for airing out concerns, and an atmosphere that these concerns are valid.

Also, there needs to be a parallel channel of harvesting insights and ideas for a positive narrative that can feed into the strategy. The regional reports are rich with such insights, but the fact that they are a result of a two-hour conversation per person renders them a starting point rather than a finish line. It needs to be verified across regions how affiliates want to prioritize and tackle the ideas, or how they can meaningfully cooperate and assist one another.

All these debates and discussions are a solid basis for maintaining a culture of appreciation that - considering the prevailing profile of volunteers in the network - should be one of the pillars of the global community of Creative Commons. As stated in the report, the high emotional intelligence of the network can be synergized into a great persuasive power -

the affiliates with renewed energy and some practical guidance can really change the world. These may be big words, but they are substantiated by the track record of their achievements so far.

The culture of appreciation sees relationships and effective open communication as a core element of efficiency. For a network such as Creative Commons, promoting openness and sharing, that is a very natural choice of practicing what it preaches. This culture celebrates diversity by practical inclusion of individuals and languages in every infrastructure it creates: from the board, through its hubs of competence, to its resources and marketing. As such, it needs to be well structured and guided so that the multitude of voices has a purpose and is focused on tangible topics of interests - otherwise it will morph into a cacophony.

In a culture of appreciation the rules of engagement are discussed and clearly stated. The affiliates, the experts, and the HQ honestly outline what they can and cannot do. They also commit to jointly look for solutions to problems that cannot be easily addressed on any level, such as insufficient funding. In looking for solutions, they use the knowledge of the network and look for specific commitments from affiliates to help others.

Finally, the culture of appreciation is based on the concept of sharing. The concept has been somewhat compromised by the elusive promise of the *sharing economy* that is in fact a new branding for the platform-facilitated and reputation-based rental model. Reinventing it for the public with examples of CC-based projects and affiliates' stories could provide a boost to the brand. It would also promote a value that is at the core of affiliates' integrity in a very constructive way.

Global Recommendation No 2

Addressing the Challenge of Development

Creative Commons needs to accelerate the power of networking to assist strategically planned development of its affiliates and their agenda. Crowdsourcing solutions seems to be a largely untapped resource and as much as it is not a panacea to all ails, it needs to be verified how the network can self-reinforce before other measures are used.

It needs to be clearly communicated, since there is confusion, that it is the affiliates who are primarily responsible for their own sustainability and execution of their local work and the HQ and the network have an ancillary role. It is both fair and doable, since the affiliates demonstrate exceptional resilience and agility. These need to be their core strength, for their own benefit and survival.

What the HQ needs to do is to communicate better a vision of an affiliate model and a set of general expectations it has towards affiliates. It should not be too rigid and in fact there is a need to base it on experiences of the affiliates. In many countries it is quite visible that the adoption of a similar set of tasks and topics as in the Western World - open access, open culture, copyright, OER, public policies of open data all at once - becomes a burden, especially for newer affiliates. Perhaps it is better to help the affiliates focus and

prioritize smaller-scale projects without a self-instilled sense of a missed opportunity. The burden of work needs to be less in tune with the strategy for better-off regions and more in tune with the existing capacities. Otherwise the expectation to even out the structural deficits will be, somehow understandably, placed on the more powerful: the global network that expects a certain standard of work.

It would also be worthwhile for both the network and the HQ to verify if there is a certain targeted set of interventions they could offer the affiliates on a short-term basis. The affiliates need guidance on fundraising or team management and enlargement. Maybe there is a possibility to provide training or mentoring to those that present a plan before and a result after, in a model similar to acquiring a grant.

Creative Commons has the means and the capacity to lead a discussion on how lives of millions could change. It would be a waste of a great potential if that opportunity were left unexplored.

Recommendation No 3 Addressing the Challenge of Exploration

Creative Commons can provide a platform of strategic thinking about how the openness model can become an exponential factor of a societal change. It is evident that many affiliates, despite advancing their core agenda of openness look and think beyond the open access, education, culture or artistic expression. This is a resultant of their overall sense of responsibility, a drive for social change, willingness to pay forward the privilege they feel they are a part of; but also the *Semiotics of the Commons*, the symbolism of the licenses as a certain approach to creativity and a communal action based on sharing lends itself inspirational.

The affiliates talk about to possibilities of employing openness and sharing into industries (agriculture for example), including them into societal and political transformation that systemically alleviates poverty and inequality, exploring the intersection of openness and privacy, discussing its meaning in the context of artificial intelligence and cognitive computing. They are knowledgeable and ready to take up these discussions, at least some of them.

It may be argued, that these issues only add to the list of the “unfinished business” or - fairly - are contradictory to the second recommendation arguing for simplifying the affiliate agenda for those that are struggling with harsh conditions. However, it is true that affiliates are occupied with these problems that sooner or later will touch everyone’s reality, such as smart cities and a massive presence of AI in our everyday life. A strategy discussion needs to take into account not only current circumstances but also such a foresight. It seems that there are enough affiliate representatives who could successfully contribute to the strategic thinking with such insights.

But perhaps the most important argument for taking that up is the 1st world problem paradox described above. At the Creative Commons network it could be easily redefined as a global responsibility to use openness and sharing as the tools to generate more equality and better access to knowledge all around the world that can tangibly change people's life. And for such an endeavor a cooperation of various affiliates is needed.

It could be the role of Creative Commons HQ to create such platform to discuss how the network can work together, acquire funds, produce and deliver resources and advocate for a change where it is a dilemma of open access or no access and not of getting for free or paying for a textbook. The recognition Creative Commons enjoy could encourage thought leaders from many paths of life to join such a debate, which would in turn reinforce the thought leadership of CC.

Creative Commons has the means and the capacity to lead a discussion on how lives of millions could change. It would be a waste of a great potential if that opportunity is left unexplored.

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Anna