

Faces of the Commons Global Report

Executive Summary

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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.