

Email Interview with User: Buidhe, 2021-2022

Shira Klein – interviewer

Q (Friday, August 20th, 2021 at 6:31 AM): I'm trying to understand how the Polish nationalist bent is so strong, how Wikipedia handles these sorts of edit wars, what you think some of the weaknesses of the system might be, and any other insights you might have on the problem.

A (Tuesday, August 24, 2021 10:06 AM): I would say the biggest weakness of Wikipedia for controversial topics is the use of consensus based system. (see Wikipedia:Consensus). What this can mean in practice is that content is determined by what the bulk of editors working in a certain area want, rather than the balance of reliable sources. In my experience, the arbitration and dispute resolution processes are best at dealing with clear-cut abuse such as name calling, harassment, and so forth. They don't deal as well with more subtle forms of abuse such as selectively picking sources (even unreliable ones) that align with a particular narrative and dismissing others. This is in theory a form of POV-pushing (which is not allowed), but is more often treated as a content dispute rather than a form of abuse. Therefore, both perspectives are treated as equally legitimate even if one of them is much better supported by reliable sources. Ultimately, I decided to quit editing articles about Polish Jewish history as I found it was a waste of time, many of my contributions ended up being deleted and contesting that got me nowhere, since the editors doing the deleting were fundamentally not interested in writing an encyclopedia based on mainstream views in Holocaust studies.

I do think there is hope for change in the area, but it would require a different group of editors. It is possible that the most problematic editors will be blocked, which already happened after the arbitration case but unfortunately they were unblocked again. Another topic I edit on Wikipedia is the Armenian genocide. Around 2007, there were heated disputes on articles related to the Armenian genocide, with Turkish and Azerbaijani nationalist editors suggesting that the Armenian genocide should be presented as an opinion or "allegation". There are still accounts that show up on talk pages making this argument but they are quickly shot down. I think what made the difference is political controversy dying down a bit as well as increasing academic studies of the Armenian genocide. So if the same thing happens in Polish Jewish relations, I think the editing atmosphere would improve. Unfortunately, it's just not something that Wikipedia dispute resolution processes do a good job with.

Q (Wednesday, September 22nd, 2021 at 4:14 PM): How do you explain that blocked editors were reinstated? The case I know best is GizzyCatBella. I couldn't figure out why her ban was lifted. I read the log on her appeal to be reinstated and it seemed to me that there were only a couple of administrators actively involved. Do you think it may be the case that administrators aren't doing their job right?

When you write that "subtle forms of abuse such as selectively picking sources (even unreliable ones)... [are] more often treated as a content dispute rather than a form of abuse," do you think that is a function of administrators not *understanding* that it is indeed abuse? Not *caring* that it is abuse? Or is it that some administrators actually harbor the nationalist point of view themselves?

What in your opinion makes the Polish case different from, say, the Armenian case, or other TAs (if you know of any) in which there was POV-pushing that resolved itself? What needs to happen for the Polish case to stop being, as you point out, a waste of time for editors like you (who bring in reliable sources)?

A (Monday, October 11, 2021 9:41 PM): >- "How do you explain that blocked editors were reinstated?" In many cases it is possible to be reinstated from a block or topic ban just by waiting six months and apologizing for what you were blocked/banned for. In theory they would be blocked/banned again if the problems reappeared. In practice, the whims of individual admins and randomness can play an undue role (in my view).

>- "do you think that is a function of administrators not understanding that it is indeed abuse? Not caring that it is abuse? Or is it that some administrators actually harbor the nationalist point of view themselves?" All arbcom and admin sanctions are applied by uninvolved administrators or arbitrators. "Uninvolved" means that they haven't edited in the topic area, ruling out almost anyone with specific knowledge or opinions. It's not an issue of the administrators harboring nationalist beliefs, but rather ignorance and how the system is set up. I wouldn't say that most admins don't care about POV-pushing, but they're only supposed to rule on conduct not content issues. POV-pushing is an overlap between the two, which could be behind reluctance to take action. Some admins may also believe that POV-pushing should be resolved with normal editing or compromises between different editors. In addition, admins likely have trouble identifying POV-pushing in an unfamiliar topic area.

There is another way editors can be banned, called community ban, applied at ANI by a vote of all editors participating in the discussion. Some editors supporting Polish nationalist opinions have been banned in this way, for example Zezen. This usually happens if they express overtly racist or homophobic opinions that are unacceptable to the average English Wikipedia editor or otherwise engage in abusive behavior beyond the pale. Over the top abuse is actually less damaging because it's easier to spot and take action.

> - "What in your opinion makes the Polish case different" The topic areas that are the worst to edit in involve a significant and long-lasting real-world conflict, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, other Arbcom cases involve one or more editors who are causing problems, without a real world dispute. In these cases once the editors involved in the case are gone there's no sign of a problem. Some real-world disputes are also temporary. For example the Armenian genocide was more strongly contested by Turkey around 10 or 15 years ago, driving problematic editing around 2007 but not as much in 2021.

My guess is that if problematic editors aren't being reinforced by newcomers driven by a real-world dispute, the problems are likely to be resolved with the removal of the editors causing them. The Polish Holocaust dispute currently affects national and international politics to a limited extent. It's similar to the Armenian genocide in that it calls into question some people's national identity, which can bring out strong emotions and problematic editing. But the Polish Holocaust is not a real-world dispute on the same level as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. So, it's possible that removing certain editors would resolve the problems in that area. Arguably that was what happened until some editors were reinstated more recently.

Anyway, I'm not sure if I mentioned this in my original email, but I completely stopped editing in the topic area at all because of people deleting content for ideological reasons (this happened,

for example, at "History of the Jews in Deblin and Irena during World War II" and the 2018 Polish Holocaust law). I found it was a waste of time to argue and my efforts were better spent in other areas where people didn't delete my work.