

*Pushing the Wind Through Digital Matter*  
The Digital Politics of a Brussels Lobby Organisation

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## **Abstract**

What does the political look like in the digital realm of the lobby organisation? This thesis is based on a stint of fieldwork within the Communications department of a Brussels lobby organisation that promotes wind power by means of both more traditional press work and via digital media. Questions that are explored are: How do digital documents flow, and how can we conceptualise their matter? What sort of distinctions do the subjects make between the analogue components of their political world and the digital ones? What do they know about their public, and how do they use this knowledge? Findings indicate that the subjects' enactments in the analogue often are referred to as lobbyism, while when they are enacting politics in the digital, it is viewed as «neutral information» or «expertise». The digital-analogue divide as practiced by the subjects in our study therefore serves to reconceptualise the boundary between politics and expertise. The thesis also raises questions about limits of authority in the digital, as well as about the lobby organisation's actual comprehension of its audiences. I argue that the politics in the digital perhaps can be usefully analysed in terms of its negatives. Digital politics is often a mess in John Law's sense – and as much as being about order and power, it is about non-authority, non-audiences, and it is not always as «public» as theory or practitioners suppose.



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My life partner Jens Oldgard – thanks for taking for granted that I should do this on top of everything else, and making it seem matter-of-fact and easy. It may just be a shrug, but it feels like love!

It has come to be about, amongst other things, the negatives of the digital, but this modest thesis is for two people who are all that it isn't – my luminous daughters Mia and Ellinor, whose general presence and own brand of raspberry fantasticness is an enrichment. TUSEN TAKK.





## Glossary

**Communications work.** I take «communications» to mean the work conducted by businesses or organisations to get their message across. What this message is varies – it can be to tell the world of the impact of their work, or a political opinion. The field of communications is broad and undergoing a professionalization. Communications work may include both the production and «pushing» of different output, or just liaising between the expertise or leadership within the organisation to interested parties beyond it. Communications departments may comprise work with events, news output, web management and content production for the web, designers working with graphics, and traditional media management work. The EWEA Communications department spans all these activities. Often, «communications» is thought of as a slightly dubious, non-transparent activity to sway politicians' and publics' opinions. This thesis tries to take a less normative approach, looking at what the Communications department actually does.

**Digital/online:** I use these terms interchangeably and adjectively to characterise human activity in the digital realm, and define the latter broadly as «all that can be reduced to binary code» (Horst and Miller 2012:3, see also chapter 1).

**Analogue/offline:** I use these terms in the same fashion; to signify human activity that does *not* take place in the digital.

**HTML:** Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) is a system for tagging text files to achieve font, colour, graphic, and hyperlink effects on World Wide Web pages.

**PDF:** The «Portable document format» (PDF) is an open standard electronic document developed by Adobe. The PDF format mimics a print document in that it «freezes» the text document, graphic or other content.

**Content:** «Something contained, as in a receptacle,» The Free Dictionary writes poetically.<sup>1</sup> In the world of web communications, «content» is the preferred word in use for all materials – text, graphics et cetera – that are produced in-house and shared via a website or other media.

**Lobby:** A lobby is a group of people seeking to influence politicians, publics or public officials on a particular issue, or set of issues, that they have a stake in.

**Digital media:** The production of all media, also print, are today digital at one or other stage of the process, for instance the laying out, the sending and the typesetting which happens at the printers. In this thesis «digital media» refers to media that are digital in output form –the output on websites or in social media – whether a PDF, an html coded page or so-called turn-PDFs (the e-mag) are reducible to the binary code 0 and 1.

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<sup>1</sup> The free dictionary, downloaded 28 September 2013 <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/content>

## List of digital document types

These are the document types produced at the EWEA:

**Reports:** Reports are produced by the Policy department, proofread by the Communications department, and designed either by the creative unit in the or by freelance designers. They are published in print form, as well as on the website.

**Press releases:** Press releases are written by the press officer in collaboration with the director and often the Policy department. They are based on reports, position papers and other output. Press releases are sent to journalists via e-mail, and posted on the website. Press releases are always given room on the «main banner» of the website.

**Position papers:** Position papers are produced by the Policy department, and express the position of the EWEA on a particular point of policy. They are circulated to key politicians, and also published on the website.

**Blogs:** Blogs are edited in the Communications department. There is a blog roll of contributing writers, some staff members and some freelancers. Blogs have a tab on the website, and its content may make it onto the main banner.

**Wind Directions:** *Wind Directions* is the print magazine that is distributed to members and other industry people. Subscriptions are free. On the website, Wind Directions is published in an e-mag format.

**Events information:** Information about upcoming workshops, annual events or offshore events. Events information is placed on the main banner only when it is reworked into the form of editorial content.

**Membership information:** The content in the restricted access members section of the website.



## **Prologue: The document**

I arrived at Brussels airport on a Sunday evening late in March 2013, just after the city had seen an uncharacteristically heavy snowfall. I came to study a lobby organisation working to promote wind power. I had found them a few Google searches after a newspaper story on controversy over wind turbines in France had caught my interest. I was drawn to wind power as a political project, and in particular wind turbines. Up close these structures are imposing, and juxtaposed with the supposedly ephemeral nature of the digital output that I wanted to discuss, their sheer material mass seemed meaningful. When I started to look into the organisation that is the European Wind Energy Association (EWEA), their form seemed to me a hybrid one.<sup>2</sup> They work politically in the digital for an interest that is part business, part allied with sustainability. Their status as a lobby connotes political scheming for many – but they also work for a «good cause», the environment. I felt their form of organisation was an example of something novel in the history of human organisation, and that it could perhaps tell me something about what is specific about the contemporary and the digital. Also, its conglomerate of commercial, political and environmentalist traits made it seem intricate in a way that appealed to me.

I was not alone in the taxi into town. I had brought my two young daughters and my partner Jens, who would be looking after the girls. I had rented a flat on trendy Rue Dansaert in the hope that they would enjoy themselves in the area while I was in the office. As it turned out, the weather would be cold, and they spent a lot of time indoors after the beautiful prints and plants of our landlord have been hastily cleared away.

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<sup>2</sup> If not in Callon and Rabeharisoa's sense (2008) – I mean in the core sense; «something heterogeneous in origin or composition» (Merriam-Webster Online).

I arrived in Brussels feeling flustered and exhausted. I was leaving my current job on the Friday before we went, starting a new one upon our return. Jens was giving up his Easter holiday to come with me so that I didn't have to do without the girls, the thought of which was intolerable to me because the youngest was only 18 months. We had had a rough year or so, marked by serious illness and death in Jens' family. I was dragging my family along to work when we all really could use a break.

Because I had been pressed for time, it was only late on the Friday night before our departure, as I prepared my interviews and my presentation of my project for the Brussels lobbyists, that I realised that I had failed to get a confirmation from the University of Oslo, saying that I am a student doing fieldwork for a thesis. I e-mailed the executive officer at the Centre for Technology, Innovation and Culture (TIK) where I am studying for this master, hoping he will be able to get back to me on the Monday morning.

On the Monday, I wave goodbye to Jens and the girls and promptly get lost on my way to the organisation's offices. After giving up finding a taxi, I enter the Brussels metro system and try to get to the EU districts where my lobbyists are to be found. I am late.

As a person who is used to being well prepared and on time, my tardiness makes me quite frantic. With all the blood rushing to my head I actually cannot work out how the ticket machines work, although I am not usually one to freak out in encounters with novel technology. I text the Communications director to say I am late, and when I get off at the Malbeek metro station I luckily find the office quite easily.

I apologise to the reader if you think, at this stage, that I am forcing my personal life on you in a way that is not customary in this sort of text. I do so because I believe it is not entirely irrelevant that when I enter the offices of the European Wind Power Association (EWEA) on Rue d'Arlon, Brussels, it is with an already sinking heart. This is also an

effort to show what Law and Singleton (2005:354) call methodological humility. They insist we cannot know a messy world by insisting it is clear, and for me it is also important to let you know that in these first encounters with the field, there was no way I could escape my fatigue-tinged glasses.

I enter, go up to the 6th floor and am met by the Communications director, whom I have only talked to on the phone. He had not received my message, he says when I ask, and my heart sinks further. He gets on with showing me around the open-plan office: The Communications unit and campaigning officer on one side of a partition wall, web and creative on the other. This is my field for the week. He shows me the coffee machine («free of charge») and the water dispenser, the kind that can add bubbles if you want them. He then introduces me to the organisation's HR manager. I say a little nonchalantly that the university is forwarding the document they have requested shortly. I regret the nonchalance immediately, as they stress that they need both the scanned document and a paper copy as soon as possible. I indicate I will have the university send the paper copy as soon as they have forwarded the digital, scanned copy, and the two seem to settle with this response. They indicate that the document should be there the next day for me to be able to continue. I think they are being a bit optimistic about the postal service, but I don't comment. They do not seem happy with me, and my cheeks are flushed.

I am allocated a space with the web/creative section of the communications staff, and things quiet down. They chitchat politely with me, but I am also left to write my notes about what I see in the office, and look at the EWEA website on my computer. After a while I am called into the director's office, and he stresses again the need for me to have the document, otherwise I cannot get access to the office the following day. Just over 12 p.m. I receive the e-mail from Oslo with the scanned document and I breathe a

sigh of relief. I forward it to the HR manager. I spend the rest of the day taking part in meetings and being introduced to their statistics, which is extremely interesting.

Duncan asks me to come in again around 3.30 pm.

His face was very grave, as it had been in the morning. I did not afterwards recall exactly how the conversation had passed, but by the end of the meeting I realized I was denied access to the office on the Tuesday. I only had one week, so this was a serious setback for me. I needed to get the university officials to get the *paper copy* couriered the next day, and come back to the EWEA office on Wednesday morning. I go to the HR manager with tears in my eyes. She is nice to me and explains that Belgian authorities want this documentation in both French and Flemish, so they are already stretching it by only providing it in English. They need it – or they can get in trouble with the law.

This all seems silly in hindsight. After having worked in a university for five years, having had dealings with the EU bureaucracy in Brussels in that time, and I have never, ever encountered that a scanned copy in a PDF format is not sufficient for all purposes of confirmation. Indeed for the Norwegian bureaucracy, the national bureaucracy that I am the most familiar with, a scanned document conveyed in a PDF is always sufficient. It was simply not fathomable to me, that when provided with the scanned copy, they needed a paper document to be couriered.

I leave the office on Monday feeling very vulnerable for having so much riding on my stay at the EWEA, and now jeopardizing it by trying to manage everything simultaneously and failing. I try to comfort myself as I walk up Rue d'Arlon to Malbeek station again, telling myself that it is also a cultural difference, a Belgian idiosyncrasy, that I did not know about. It is only in the evening that I realise this is data. The EU may



be digitized, the EWEA is entirely, but the Belgian state wants its documentation on paper, and it wants it now.

I returned Wednesday morning and although the letter did not arrive until lunchtime, that appeared to be okay. I proceeded to get a lot of interesting data on which to base my thesis. I had however made a rather appalling first impression, and in my week at the EWEA, despite their impeccable manners, I never managed to gain their full trust, as I hopefully would have if I had stayed longer. This is not to say they were not friendly, because they went out of their way to be helpful. But my stay at the EWEA never *felt* like a success, because of my initial underestimation of the importance of the analogue, physical document made of cellulose when I came to study the political life of its digital counterparts.



## **Introduction: Digital/political – or the boss and Dolly Parton**

How are politics enacted in the digital documents and flows of a lobby organisation?

This is the central question in this thesis.

To start answering it, we first have to think about what we refer to when we refer to the digital. Or to be more precise, we need to deal with what sort of existence it has, the stuff we produce in the digital. Questions about the **ontology** of digital texts were what first tickled me into embarking on this project. It was a sort of if-a-tree-falls-and-no-one-sees-it sort of argument at first: If a blog post is read by no one, has it contributed to reality in any way? Has it *done* anything? I also wondered about the **materiality** of the digital. This spun off from working on a text with my boss. It was a common enough situation, we wanted to look at the same screen to edit the text together, but we ended up bumping into each other's knees. The mutual invasion of personal space brought home why it is called a «personal computer», but also made me think: how do the material forms of computers play into our encounters with digital texts? Can we speak of the digital text itself as material?

I went looking for input in my first discipline anthropology, and found little. By the time the anthropological literature on the digital had come of age (with Horst and Miller's edited volume from 2012), I had sought out the insights of the field of science and technology studies (STS). Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have perhaps not been the most studied technologies in this interdisciplinary field, with a notable exception in Noortje Marres' work (2005, with Rogers 2005 and 2009), which I shall return to. But I found in STS a theoretical openness, curiosity and overall concern with ontology that suited my quizzical outlook and my idea for this enquiry into digital politics.

If viewed as a set of Russian dolls, my interest in the nature or ontology and the

materiality of the digital was at the core. It was «packed» in another doll, namely my interest in organisations, that I had explored also in my first MA thesis (Skorpen 2005). I wanted to chart the movement of the digital documents on the office floor, and I found, in tune with the original actor-network-theory of Bruno Latour, that the flow could usefully be understood in terms of *stoppers* and *overflows* (Czarniawska 2011). I also found that digital documents are ranked in a hierarchy, and that they have a materiality.

What does the **political** look like in the digital realm? If the digital and the organisation are my two innermost Russian dolls, the minute enactments of politics are their big sister. Symptomatically, when I try to identify when I became interested in politics, I end up with a mental image of Dolly Parton. There may be many grand explanations for why I am a political person – growing up with leftist parents who no longer believed in the grand narrative of socialism is one factor that can throw your attention to the small-scale asymmetries of the world. But for me it goes back to the realisation at age seven, when my friend's dad put on his Dolly Parton tape in the car: my parents would never play that music, which had an image of that woman with her huge breasts attached to it. This was in the 1980s, before listening to «Working 9 to 5» became part of the middle-class ironic repertoire of my generation. My parents listened to tapes of James Taylor, The Band and Steely Dan in the car. It was a class thing, which is one reason why my anthropology thesis (Skorpen 2005) was about understanding how «high» and «low» in culture are produced. The fact that this is where I pinpoint the dawning of my political awareness hopefully goes to show that I had a sensibility that was waiting for the tools provided by science and technology studies, and for the field's insistence that politics is enacted; it is made and remade in any number of small actions.

So I was concerned with politics and the digital. To answer some of my questions, I sought out a lobby organisation, the European Wind Energy Association (EWEA), which promotes wind energy. One of the means they employ to do this is the website

ewea.org. I asked to visit their Communications department, thinking that this was where they produced the digital documents which were intended for a more or less general public.

This choice of a Communications department in a lobby organisation was further informed by my work as a web manager at the University of Oslo, which has taught me that many digital texts are, regardless of whether their content is political in a strict sense, objects of office politics. They are often political in a broader sense, too, without being part of what we usually understand by politics. The web texts I create in my job at the University of Oslo Communications department often enact the university's politics, and Norwegian research policy more widely. They co-produce the political reality they are part of.

The EWEA represents the wind energy business, the manufacturers of turbines and other equipment in the European Union, often synecdochically referred to as «Brussels». As mentioned in the prologue, the form of intricacy represented by their stake in business and their investment in the instrumentality of the lobbying process, and on the other hand their alignment with many of the interests of environmentalism and the general Good, was interesting to me. Key to my analysis will therefore be an effort to allow the EWEA to remain **messy** (Law 2004; Law and Singleton 2005). Law's idea of mess allows me to let the flows I observe be windy and idiosyncratic without imposing analytic models to «clean them up».

This thesis is *not* specifically about *energy* politics. I originally chose the energy sector as my field, and the sustainable one at that, because I thought it would be especially interesting in an STS perspective. However, this project was designed with too many interesting «turns» to be studied, and energy policy has not been my focus here. One of the reasons for not being focused on energy politics as such is that I am *not* in the

business of content analysis. This is not to say that I do not think the substance of digital documents produced and circulated by the EWEA are important. It is only to say that I have foregrounded other aspects of the production and flow of digital materials in an effort to apply a classic actor-network theory (ANT) perspective in the first part of my analysis (chapter 3), in the vein of Latour and Woolgar (1979), although this entails even less attention to content than in their seminal work.

One comment on the moral nature of professional communications work: There is, at least in current Norwegian debate, a sense of scepticism about the spin-doctoring and lobbyism communications workers of large communications consultancies.<sup>3</sup> This thesis tries to stay away from such normative discourse, even though it may be justified, at least in part. As a communications worker studying communications workers, I am more concerned with run-of-the-mill communications work, of which there is a lot, than of that which goes into swaying the opinions of politicians. As such, the contribution of this paper hopefully mainly has normative potential insofar as it demystifies the communications profession. Having said that, there is also a distinction between communications workers for transparent companies, such as the EWEA, and what my interlocutor Duncan calls «lobbyists for hire», whom may (or may not) be of the variety that has been much criticised in Norway of late.

The first chapter is an overview of the theoretical contributions that have informed the analysis of the data from my fieldwork at the EWEA offices, followed by a chapter (2), which deals with ethnographic fieldwork as method, along with other methodological considerations that have been made in the course of undertaking this project. Chapter 3 is a «zooming in» on the EWEA offices and the flows of physical and digital documents I encountered there. It is a predominantly empirical chapter. Although this

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<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.nrk.no/valg2013/brukte-1\\_2-mill-pa-lobbyhjelp-1.11216103](http://www.nrk.no/valg2013/brukte-1_2-mill-pa-lobbyhjelp-1.11216103) for one version of this argument. Downloaded 5 September, 2013.

thesis may be viewed as a monograph, chapter 4-6 each take the form of an article arguing a particular point: the fourth chapter is a consideration of the word «public» or «audience» as it is understood in STS theory and in the world of professional communications work, for instance in the EWEA. It argues that perhaps neither academia or communications workers know enough about their audiences. Chapter 5 looks at the concepts of «expertise» and «lobbyism» on the ground in the EWEA, and presents a case about a mess created when contacting the EU Commissioner on Twitter. It argues that such an enactment of digital politics marks both a break with the world of analogue politics the lobby traditionally has operated in. This chapter also raises the question whether there is a slight move in the organisation's own perception of the terms «lobbyist» and «expert», the latter a central concept also to the tradition of science and technology studies. The final chapter, 6, discusses how we best can understand the organisation's repeated insistence that «we have statistics for that». Can it most usefully be understood as what Kristin Asdal (2008) calls a «number technology», or as a form contemporary magic, as anthropologists (Malinowski 1935, Sørhaug 2004) would claim?

Before we move on, I would like to remark that I have aimed for a form of chronology in the writing of this thesis, making everything from my quest for theory to quench my thirst to my week in the field appear as one, linear process. This rendition is of course in many ways faux, but no more than the eternal present tense of the ethnographic godfather Bronislaw Malinowski (1935). Chronology is also a crutch when trying to write up of a Lawian mess, and it has been an aid to my own understanding. And also, it certainly feels like a journey!





## 1: Theorising the ontology and politics of the digital

The art project «Printing out the Internet» (2013) by Kenneth Goldsmith is an antidote to this chapter and its job of theorising the digital. Kenneth Goldsmith asked people to send him paper copies of web pages – any web pages – to the gallery in Mexico City where the installation took place<sup>4</sup> this summer. The project was a memorialisation of Aaron Swartz, a free information activist who committed suicide in January while facing federal charges of computer hacking. As such, it is a political project which endeavours to «materialise» the Internet. The futility is part of its charm.

### The great divide

Goldsmith's project also elegantly skips across the digital-analogue divide that has wrought theory about the digital since the turn of the millennium, when analysts were still dealing with concepts such as «the information superhighway» (coined by Al Gore) and «virtuality», the latter now abandoned because it implies that what happens in the digital is less real. The debate about digital versus real-life is sterile, claims John Postill (1978:178). This is *not* to say that the digital and analogue worlds are merging, answers Tom Boellstorff (2012:52). There is no blurring between the two realms, he says, nor is the digital a state passing into the «realness» of the other.

So let me start here, with the assertion that the digital is not ephemeral, but material. As such, it is as profane as the physical (Boellstorff 2012). My interlocutors at the EWEA conceptualise the digital-analogue divide in tune with this – or rather, they do not. They tell a story of documents flowing both through digital and physical space, but they do not differentiate whether it is «physical» or «digital» (nor do they subdivide the digital into «email attachment» or «HTML document»). One of my interlocutors says

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/aug/20/printing-out-internet-exhibition-mexico>, Downloaded 4 September 2013, see also <http://printingtheinternet.tumblr.com> - <http://printingtheinternet.tumblr.com>

that he thinks of whether he writes for the digital or the analogue only in terms of how many words the article should consist of. Thus the materiality of the digital text is affirmed; it takes the form of a number of words on a page.

I have already quoted two contributions to Heather Horst and Daniel Miller's textbook in digital anthropology, by John Postill and Tom Boellstorff. Horst and Miller's volume gives this project its overarching theoretical delineation. «We define the digital as everything that has been developed by, or can be reduced to, the binary – that is bits consisting of 0s and 1s», write Miller and Horst (2012:5), and this is a starting point for me. Horst and Miller offer six principles that form the key questions in digital anthropology in their opinion. As mentioned in the introduction, they assert that the digital is material. The others include assertions that the digital intensifies the dialectical nature of culture; humanity is not *more* mediated by the rise of the digital, as our practices were always mediated; the digital must be studied holistically; it must be studied relativistically; and finally – that it holds an ambiguity with regards to its simultaneous moves towards increasing openness and increasing closure (Horst and Miller 2012: 3-4).

### **The web as issue networks**

Alongside the digital anthropology school, Noortje Marres' work on issue-networks on the web represents a key point of departure for my take on digital politics, particularly the article about online politics as issue-networks, co-written with Richard Rogers:

«As we began locating and analysing issue-networks on the web [...] our intuition told us that it wasn't quite right to characterize the on-line activity around our issues [...] as 'public debate'». For one thing the web pages that made up the issue-network could not really be said to be engaging in a 'great conversation': The relations among these pages were far too indirect to be able to say that they were 'speaking' with one another. [...] Moreover, instead of talking to one another, the

pages in the network were defining the issue in question in ways that built from and countered issue-definitions presented on other pages in the network. That is also to say that these pages weren't exactly presenting 'points of view' on the matter at hand, as happens in a debate: First and foremost, they presented the issue, what it was about and what should be done about it. Thus, we felt it necessary to acknowledge that we were looking not so much at public debates as at a different set of practices, that of 'issues being done in networks', by a variety of techniques, ranging from the action campaign to the release of policy documents and the like. So maybe it shouldn't have surprised us that when we finally looked up the term 'issue-network' in the scientific literature, it turned out that this notion had been originally developed to describe, not the democratic practice of public debate, but new forms of *lobbying*.» (Marres and Rogers 2005: 922).

In this rich article, the main general points about the digital is that rather than being part of debate, pages presented «the issue» itself. Marres and Rogers utilise a form of trope of neutral information that is at odds with at least a Habermasian understanding of public sphere. In a move almost too fitting for my material, when they after having employed the term «issue-network», look into previous use of the term, they find that it has been used to describe what we usually call lobbies. I went looking for lobbies to begin with, but my material confirms Marres and Rogers' assertion that issue-networks state «facts», rather than express points of view.

Marres and Rogers, Horst and Miller are thus key points of departure. Held together, they can be seen as an articulation of Bruce Braun and Sarah Whatmore's call (2010) for a materialist understanding of digital politics (I add the «digital» prefix on my own accord). Braun and Whatmore claim many STS scholars remain «stubbornly attached to humanist understandings of agency in public life (2010:xi), and I will try to break that attachment in the following. I will also try to stay clear of the «normativity of the new» which often suffuses theorising of the digital. Nigel Thrift is fittingly grumpy about this

form of reasoning: «According to this body of literature, what we are seeing is nothing less than a new dimension coming into existence (1996:1465)».

### **From within the network**

The *network* has been what the anthropologist Victor Turner (1974) would perhaps refer to as a root metaphor of social theory for the last few decades. The general «network» of social theory differs, however, from the «network» of actor-network-theory. Bruno Latour characterizes «network» as a way to try to remove what had until then been «structure» in social theory, to allow us to see what is really going on rather than superimpose a system that becomes reified when it leaves the analyst's head and becomes a model in her text (This is my interpretation of Latour 2005: 130-1, which incidentally is very similar to how Turner (1974: 272-274) described his term «anti-structure» 31 years earlier).

In this thesis, «network» is a Latourian network; an institution through which documents flow. This flow constitutes the production in the chosen institution. Latour's metaphysics is monist, in that he presupposes that there is no «outside» the social as represented by the flow of material documents to and fro actors (with Woolgar 1979, also Latour 2007). My interpretation is also influenced by that of «actor-networked» anthropologist Annelise Riles, who turns the network inside out (2001), claiming the networks we study are highly reflexive and similar to the networks the analyst is part of – we are «inside the Network» (Riles 2001:4). This conflation of networks has methodological implications for the ethnographic method I share with Riles, as I discuss in the next chapter. It also makes the need for Law and Singleton's methodological humility even more urgent.

Realities are messy, and so any model imposing clarity to understand them may miss something important in the objects of the world that they analyse – they may miss the

fact that a certain reality is not so clear and delineated, or the work that goes into stabilising it. This is the upshot of John Law's call to allow mess into method, a call I have tried to heed in the following (Law 2004, also with Singleton 2005). Related to this is Law's insistence that to grasp the objects of the world as they really are, we may have to be prepared to employ an ontological radicalism (Law and Singleton 2005:340): If reality and its objects are enacted, studying these enactments may give us some surprises as to what the world looks like in the nitty-gritty.

Talking about the ontology of the digital also creates the need to clarify what I mean by ontology in this context. Marres (2009) differentiates between a conceptual application of the term, an empirical one, and a «techno-normative» one. The first has to do with taking non-human entities seriously as constitutive components of phenomena. The second is related to seeing the world as changing through history, and understanding societies as dynamic for historical reasons. The final form of the term-in-use she calls the «techno-normative» (2009:126), and its proponents highlight how objects can be equipped with moral and political capacities. Thrift's article about technology that has helped me see the «normativity of the new» that is often embedded in theory on information technology (Thrift 1996). My notion of ontology lies with Marres first version, the conceptual form. This is also where I would place John Law and his «ontological radicalism» (Law and Lien 2013). Marres calls for STS-ers to «empiricize ontology». In such accounts, she says, sociologists of science and technology enact «a turn to ontology in multiple registers» (2009:127). I take that to mean that we then operate at all the three levels she has outlined. The substantive chapters 3-6 of this thesis can be seen as efforts to empiricize ontology in the way Marres calls for.

## **Working with the negatives**

The digital is still a reasonably new form of sociality, yet it has a historicity, and is forming a tradition which, in Pierre Bourdieu's phrase, is «silent, at least about itself as a tradition» (Bourdieu 1977, rediscovered in Boellstorff 2012). This silence can also be seen as enacted, as the actor-network tradition does. Kristin Asdal developed the notion of non-controversy in opposition to much focus on controversy in science and technology studies. She shows how, in the case of the Norwegian Food Portal – another website with political agency – much work goes into the enactment of making food issues appear non-controversial, even in cases where this differs greatly from how they are portrayed elsewhere (Asdal et al 2009). In another paper, Asdal shows how numbers are often used to impose authority on matters of politics and nature (Asdal 2011). I will analyse the Communications director's repeated insistence that the EWEA's web statistics constitutes knowledge about its audience by juxtaposing Asdal's concept of numbers' non-authority and an anthropological perspective of contemporary magic (Sørhaug 2004).

«You have to find something you know is interesting and important before you embark on the project», I was told at one point. Well, how can you *know* a certain aspect of our human sociality is interesting before you learn about it? I had a hunch, but how could I know that the EWEA was «worthy» of study? Law and Singleton's insistence on the worth of looking for «absent presences» (2005:343) came to my rescue while pondering this. They supplied me with the perspective from which to work with what I have thought of as **«the negatives»** of the digital politics in my particular field.

The negatives that have worked as conceptual models for me are non-controversy, non-authority, non-audience and non-place. Out of these four, non-place and non-controversy, although highly relevant for this empirical case, are the ones I spend the

least time on in the following. The enactment of non-controversy is at play when the Communications director remarks that one of the ways in which his department «does politics» is by writing «the kind of general, positive stories about wind energy that creates a framework for understanding for decision-makers». The concept of non-place relates to the question of ontology: How do we conceptualise the digital space? In much theory on the digital, the root metaphors are «space» or «network», causing the social science community to struggle with the global scale of things. In our empirical field, the specific website ewea.org is instead conceptualised as a library, giving it, amongst other things, the historicity Marc Augé worried that is lacking in the non-places (1995) our contemporaneity tend to spawn.

Central to the analysis are the concepts of non-authority (Asdal 2011) and non-audience. I use non-authority in relation to the organisation's use of statistics, which I claim do not to the work they promise to do. Asdal uses it on her article on the work numbers do *not* manage to do (Asdal 2011). «Non-audience» is empirically derived, and has to do with my contention that many Communications departments create output for which there is no «natural» audience.

To return to the professor who thought I should try to make it interesting. When you want to show what is *not* there, and do that in a messy way rather than with a «good» design, how can I be sure it will be smashingly interesting? Well, I can't. This is what Latour calls a risky account (2005:121), but I will do my best.





## 2: Methodology

As became evident in the prologue, this ethnographic account is also a story of failure in fieldwork. I am sure that under different conditions and with more time, I could have done better. It is a comfort of sorts, then, when Riles states when that studying reflexive knowledge networks by way of ethnographic methods, «'failure' is endemic» (Riles 2001:6). Her reasoning is that the outside view ethnography has as its epistemological claim, is not possible when we are studying networks that are like the networks we live in.

Still, this is an ethnographic account. I think of ethnography as writing the experience of being at a particular fieldsite, but the experience of being there is laden with the theory you carry with you from the academy, and what you see interact with your theoretical preconceptions, amend them and *create* your data. It is in other words a hermeneutic circle that ideally should be so tight it becomes a waltz. The written result is, hopefully, what Clifford Geertz (1973) would have called a thick description of the place you visit.

### **The ethnographic place**

But what sort of a place is it? And is the office floor and the website of the EWEA *one* place, or is the EWEA offline site and the ewea.org what George Marcus would call a «multi-sited field» (Marcus 2005)? I have in this account honed in on the office and the production that happens there. My data are interviews and observational data from my participant observation in the office, and as such the emphasis is firmly on the *production* of digital documents and their flow. Akrich (1992: 208) argues that content analysis applied to texts «adopts an individual and psychological approach [...] it ignores the wide range of uses to which objects may be put.» In tune with this line of object-oriented thinking in STS, this paper is *not* a content analysis of the texts on the website, although I have also referred to textual data from the website, and the EWEA's

own statistics about the content and readership of the website. This is not to say that I only base my analysis on talk about the digital. As I showed in the previous chapter, digital documents are objects and I presuppose that I can know something about them by studying both the website and the people making it. The discussion of whether my fieldwork was multi-sited also opens up the discussion about whether the digital is a place. Space and place are both root metaphors of theory on the digital, but I would prefer to view the digital not as place, but as matter that is produced, or – in even more jargon-y STS-ish – a series of enactments resulting in objective matter.

### **Modes of construction**

Am I really following the objects in this account, the way the apprentices of science and technology studies are taught to do? Not entirely. It can easily be argued in hindsight that my mode of construction (Marcus 2005: 105-8) vary between *following the object*, *following the people*, *following the metaphor* and *following the conflict*. However, the *design* of my project, informing my questions and my interaction with the people were created with the intention of following objects. As it happened, I had to talk to people to understand the flow of objects, and in these conversations metaphors and conflict both popped up.

Why ethnography? Marres and Rogers (2005) describe how they trace their issue-networks online, manually and with the software tool Issue Crawler. Initially I thought this thesis would apply this method, too. That I ended up not doing this was a result of my emphasis on the production of digital documents. Given my theoretical outlook, to grasp the minute enactments I needed to observe human actors acting, rather than relate to their actions after the fact, when translated and inscribed as text on websites. It would perhaps also prove too large an undertaking within the scope of a master thesis. I did also have methodological doubts as to the replicability of Marres' and

Rogers' approach. They describe how they trace the networks through links lists on the respective websites. Digital content and formats age fast, and in 2013, arguably only outmoded websites tend to carry such lists, or at least they are less prominently placed on the website. Today, that form of method would risk biasing the analysis, as perhaps small NGOs with little communications resources, that had not been able to keep up with the current development in the web communications field, would be the only ones to carry them.

### **Ethnography's rigorous standards**

Having conducted fieldwork for my anthropology thesis (Skorpen 2005), I knew of its strengths; the ability to yield strong data about the minute workings of the world, data on a scale that are potentially very well suited to an STS enquiry. I did not have much time, but I managed to stay a week at the EWEA. Seasoned anthropologists frown at this time frame, and perhaps this particular fieldwork was a failure from the outset. I certainly felt it was too short, and I only did get to dip my toes, as it were. I did secure what I think are good and interesting data. The problem was that I had too little time to check them with other types of data in the form of triangulation (Stewart 1998). I did my best to check observations in interviews, and I make this technique explicit in the empirical chapters (and I asked him ...). I also checked data from interview with my next interviewee.

Ethnography is often viewed as a «soft» method, and its practitioners can easily be accused of «just talking» to people, as opposed to doing science. I adhere to Stewart's claim (1998:16-18) that ethnographers are bound by the same rigorous scientific demands as other social scientists. Stewart does however amend the three values to validity, generalizability and reliability in science. He replaces the value of validity with that of **veracity**: The researcher must have observed what she claims to have

observed. Generalizability he replaces with **perspicacity**: you must be able to transfer findings out of the site in which they are observed. And finally, he replaces the value of objectivity with that of **reliability**: the study must transcend the perspectives of the researcher and the interlocutor. I have worked towards achieving all of these.

I commented in the theoretical introduction that I have been weary of the form of «normativity of the new» that theory of the digital often has been infused with. But of course I have my own normative positions. I try not to be prescriptive, but my normative conceptions become visible in chapter 4, when I argue that the understanding of public sphere is lacking within the academy.

I have argued elsewhere (Skorpen 2012) that theorists must start using the digital tools – devices and software – of their interlocutors or «study objects». If the digital is a form of sociality, we must enter into it to understand it – we must grab the joystick, if you like, rather than just interview the player. In my opinion, this methodological stance follows from what has been called the ontological turn in social theory. The findings in chapter 4 underscore this position, as I would not have been able to find what I do had it not been for my professional background and my (admittedly limited) knowledge of web statistics.

To enable them to speak freely. I have in the following anonymized all my interviewees. I have also, when possible, separated their «code names» from their position in the organisation, to make them even less recognizable. I have, however, named the organisation itself, as an effort to hide the identity of the organisation would most likely be futile, should I be allowed to mention its characteristics.

### **3: The organisation and its document**

What does the lobby organisation look like, and how does it work? This chapter is dedicated to an ethnographic description of the physical layout of the EWEA offices, and a description of the physical and digital flows of documents within and beyond the European Wind Power associations (EWEA). It starts with the first impressions upon arrival, and ends up with the accumulated knowledge of the flow of documents that I had by the end of the week. I move from the literature on lobbies and environmental organisations, to a description of the physical surroundings to one of the flow of digital documents as it is described by key members of the communications staff.

My prologue to this thesis is about a lesson about how the «hard-core» materiality of documents, the “paradigmatic artefacts of modern knowledge practices” (Riles 2006:2), co-exists with the materiality of the digital, a point I shall return to at the end of this chapter.

#### **The lobby**

What do we understand by a «lobby organisation»? One of the things that drew me to the EWEA was the ontological mess (Law 2004) they represent: They are a trade association advocating the business industry of a new technology, namely that of wind turbine production. But in their promotion of their industry, they can and do align with the moral paradigm of environmentalism. In charting the history of the lobby, Marres and Rogers (2005) make the point that from the outset in the 1960s, the term «lobby» was tinged with connotations of moral deficiency. They argue that lobbies rather should be seen as citizens getting together to influence politics, and that this is not morally dubious. Their argument pinpoints that the ambiguity of the lobby has been there from the outset. The commercial aspect of the EWEA challenges Marres’ and Rogers’ logic, however. The EWEA generates profits, mainly from its many events – the annual

EWEA event is a large industry exhibition slash conference with in the region of 8500 participants and more than 400 exhibitors, all paying their way. Since 2011, the organisation has also organized a biannual event dedicated to offshore wind energy with a similar number of participants and exhibitors.

In his account of environmentalist cultures, Steven Yearley (2005) sets out to describe the different analytical tacks to analysing environmentalism. He distinguishes between a British and US tradition in analysing environmentalist movements. In the US tradition, he writes, «social movements are instances of collective behaviour which are more organized than protesting crowds or mobs, less formalized than political parties» (2005:12). The drawback with the organisational focus of the US-style approach, he goes on to say, is that «it seems unable to distinguish between effective lobbyists or pressure groups and broader social movements» (2005:13).

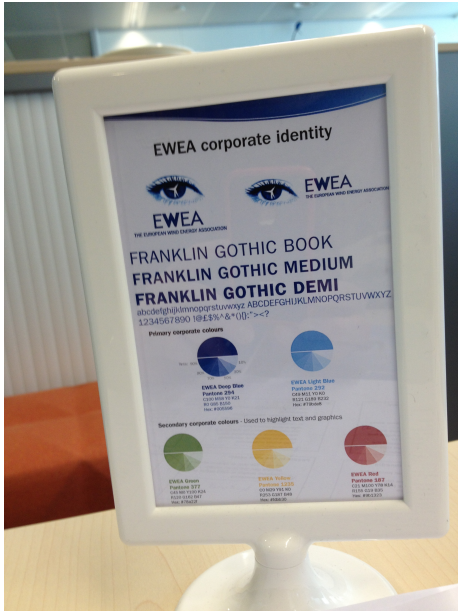
Yearley's and Marres' and Rogers' understandings both operate along an axis from citizen-driven, legitimate social movements to corporate movers, peddling their own interest. This is arguably the traditional, Habermasian way of understanding politics (Mouffe 2005). But the EWEA defies this logic, as it is a corporate organisation working for, many would claim, a common good in the form of renewable energy and a pan-European electricity grid to better spread this energy. Of course, the EWEA itself is conscious of not having the moral reign. In my conversations with EWEA staff, the position that wind power is too costly and too heavily subsidised is brought up repeatedly. Often such positions are placed with the anti-wind power newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* in the United Kingdom (the staff I talk with mainly have their background in the Anglosphere).

It is time to hone in on the physical landscape of this particular lobby. On the corner of Rue d'Arlon in Brussels' EU district is a building of massive grey stone, which gives the same important, but uninviting impression as many of the buildings in that area. Few of them have shop fronts on the ground floor, some have a reception, many have informational banners indicating they are in the business of some section of EU politics. 80 Rue d'Arlon (the EWEA uses the French denomination rather than Flemish Aarlenstraat) has only a room set in stone with a line of elevators on the ground floor. You use the calling to identify yourself as a guest and get the lift up. When you enter the EWEA offices on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor, you are greeted by the receptionist Karim in French,



or in my case English. To the left of the reception area (image left) – the lobby of the lobby – is the Communications department, to its right is the Policy department and kitchen area. Downstairs on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor are the Membership and Events departments. The

Membership department deals with the affairs of the national European wind energy associations that make up the EWEA members – it is really an association of associations. The Events department organises the important annual EWEA event, where national associations, industry people and politicians gather for a few days in a European city. Lately, the EWEA has also organised a biannual offshore event, catering to those involved in offshore wind farming.



*It looks like an office*, is my first thought when trying to look back in order to describe it. And yes, well, it does. What is striking about it in hindsight is to the extent the graphic profile of the organisation is integrated throughout the office space. The frosted glass in the glass doors bears the logo of the company. On every desk there is a little IKEA frame with the corporate graphic identity (image left).

It is not until towards the end of the week I identify the feeling I get when walking down the Rue d'Arlon or in the streets surrounding it. In the heart of the European political establishment, the architecture itself exudes authority. I am in fact slightly giddy from being in the centre of European politics, or from the proximity of power. For someone who spent my twenties thinking European politics was utterly boring, I now understand why so many students and young professionals, some of which I meet during my stay, flock to Brussels for a slice of this. Being close to decision-making can cause a light-headedness that is, to be honest, rather comfortable.

### **The flow on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> floors**

How do documents, digital or analogue, flow between people in the EWEA offices? In this section, I will go back to a basic actor-network methodology as established by Latour and Woolgar in their seminal *Laboratory Life* ([1979] 1986), namely that of following the paper trail, or the flow of documents through the landscape. Their field was a scientific laboratory, in my case; it is the open plan offices of a lobby organisation. The assumption is of course, that this tack tells us something about the empirical landscape we are in.





The web editor deals, naturally, primarily with digital documents, usually known as «content» for the website. This is how he describes the flow between departments:

«I am in contact with the Policy assistant. Up until we relaunched the website it was a bit of a mess. Anyone in policy would email me with a request to upload something. And they would upload stuff themselves. But she knows how to use [the web content management system] Typo 3 to an extent [...] She will upload things to the right section on the members' area, for instance. But any writing task will be done by me or by anything slightly more complicated in Typo 3. It's a good system at the moment. So anytime anyone in policy sends her a request she emails me: I am uploading this. So it is working fine. I have just one point of contact with the policy department. I try to do the same with the events department, the Events assistant. That hasn't worked so well – there are more people down there, and there are more requests, but it is more controlled than in the past. Membership – [...] that has worked quite well as well. Policy and membership we have now two points of contact. Events is still very broad and with loads of demands, especially coming up to an event.»

So, interestingly, the flow is not tidy, it is at times difficult to control, and *overflows* are created (Czarnikawska 2011). In the past, this was so with all departments, now it is

mainly the case with Events. It is the introduction of new *design* on the website that has led to a tidying up of the flow of documents. The actual technology software, their content management system Typo3, remains the same, but the on-screen layout has been changed. At one point the Communications director refers to the web revamp as a process of «decluttering». The new design thus appears to have cleaned up both the digital site and, to an extent, the offline workflow.

While the web editor lists co-workers in the offices of his interlocutors, Sam lists also freelance journalists outside the building, external designers, as well as the Policy department. However, Sam's focus is on stoppers, not overflows:

«There is a ridiculous process of sign-off between policy people before it can go out – this must go in and this can't be in ... And they don't see the people it goes out to, they just see the end person, the Commissioner who might read the *European Voice* [newspaper on EU affairs] article. They don't see the journalist in between, who might get a really lengthy press release full of quotes, thinking «God, I don't have the time to read this», compared to if we had an influence».

In the Communications department itself, there is a flow of digital documents. At the farther end of the open-plan offices is the individual office of the Communications director. The staff in the department is sub-divided into the Communications unit and the Creative unit, and the web editor is, although he works with the journalistic content on the site, placed on Creative's side of the partition wall. This is also where I have a desk in the week that I am there. In that week, the blog editor and the web editor appear to be the two people that talk the most across the partition wall, although the campaigns manager, also placed on the Communications side of the wall, also talks to the web editor. The campaign officer's concern is social media, which is also managed by the web editor. The Communications director also talks to the head of the Creative

unit in the course of my few days there, and the press officer and the communications director has a document that goes back and forth between them. What are they working on: The director lets me know:

«I have been working with Tim about responding to the publication of the Commission's green paper for policy options for after 2020. That is a very important issue for us. Therefore I have been talking to Tim about the press release, negotiating a little bit with the director of policy on the wording of that, making sure that the CEO signed it off. [...] I have also discussed with him a report that has come in [...] about the costs of different sources of energy in Germany, which is a big debate in Germany at the moment where renewables are portrayed as being very expensive. But this report showed otherwise. It was actually launched last year, but we just got the English version in. So I discussed with Tim and indeed with Sam, how we can deal with that and circulate it, when it is an important report for our industry, but it is not our report. I made some proposals, but I wanted to discuss with him.»

### **The flow beyond the office**

The Communications department staff refer to those who work in the policy department as «the lobbyists». They follow the discussion about pieces of legislation that matter to the EWEA:

First we identify the legislation or any other decision-making processes (guidelines, regulations ...) that matter to our industry, and that is contained in our strategy. We are constantly monitoring the landscape for political decision-making and decide which areas to follow. We then try to follow every step of the process. We will try and talk to the European Commission, provide them with data or ideas that will shape their thinking on the issue, as they are the people who will make the legislative proposal. It goes through a number of stages – consultation – draft

legislation – to parliament/council, there we'll talk to the MEPs [Members of European Parliament], make recommendations about changes, what is most useful for our industry ... follow the document right through the process, back that with some reports, some press work, social media, website, do a certain amount of campaigning for certain issues.

While I am trying to follow the flow of the digital document, the lobbyists are trying to follow the document through the legislative process, from chamber to chamber. For them, too, it is about being there physically. They are backed by other pieces of paper than legislation, their own pieces of paper. And it is important that it is *paper*, like the little pocket leaflet that the Creative unit has produced for the lobbyists to give away to politicians, and which is designed to fold snugly into a suit pocket.

### **The digital flow**

To the Communications department, the key digital document genres are the press release, the blog entries, reports, and to a certain extent, events material (see glossary p. 5). The web editor deals with content from both Events and Membership, but these documents make up a smaller proportion of the flow. Press releases are sent out as e-mails by the press officers, but are also sent to the web editor and go up on the website immediately. Reports are arguably primarily a paper form, but are published in PDF format on the website and have a prominent placement on the main page. There, a selection of reports are featured in a frame where the featured report «slides» and is replaced with another every few seconds. Other important formats of content on the website are infographics and statistics. Whereas press releases are legitimised by their contribution in the political process, this content gets its legitimacy from the fact that the organisation's internal web statistics show that they are accessed a great deal. Statistics about wind energy and simple info graphics – the graphic representation of «how a wind turbine works» is a case in point – are both among the most visited

content on the site. *Wind Directions*, the EWEA paper magazine which is also published as an e-magazine, is also featured, in its e-mag form, on the website, but is less prominently placed than press releases, reports, and even blogs. There is consensus in the Communications department that the e-mag format is past its sell-by date. The magazine's content will be integrated in the other sections of the website in the future, the director says. The e-mag format, often a PDF which simulates turning over pages, has been a way of keeping the «papery» qualities of a magazine when introduced in digital format, but it has great challenges in terms of usability. As the magazine was introduced in electronic form only in 2010, it serves also to show how fast technical development renders a certain technology outmoded or even obsolete. The staff are also candid as to what sort of principle guided the introduction of the *Wind Directions* e-mag edition: «At the time, we thought it was cool,» one of them says.

The web editor tells of a flow of documents between organisational departments – conversations with the policy, events and membership departments are all parts of the job. The blog editor tells of a more digitized flow of documents. Articles are commissioned from external writers via e-mail. They then flow to external designers and back. And they may also be passed on to other departments. Research for the blog may come from the Internet, from internally produced reports – in digital or paper form – or from a press release from the European Commission. The website ewea.org has a graded, blue background colour that is picked up in other elements on the page. The logo of the association, a representation of the eye of a woman in which a wind turbine is reflected, figures prominently in the top left corner. The main page on the website has a main content frame which is referred to as «the banner» (where the «content» is about wind energy in Poland, see illustration on p. 41). In the emergent professional field of web usability, an important term over the last few years has been «banner blindness». Tools tracking the eye movements of readers of a web page show

that the reader does not pause to read text that is combined with graphics, the way a banner has. Although the EWEA staff work on the basis of this usability principle, and one of the aims of their 2012 relaunch of the web site was to make the main content frame more lively as very few read its content, they still refer to the content in the main content frame as «the main banner».

The front page has the following tabs for navigation further «into» the website, from left to right: Home, Our activities, Press room, Library, About us, Events, Membership.

Each of the seven tabs has a drop-down menu with rounded corners, also in the signature blue colour of the association. As is usual, the main page tab («home») is the furthest to the left, and the different forms of content is listed in a descending order of importance: Telling of the organisation's activities and its press releases is thus deemed of greater importance than content about events or membership.

But how do the digital documents flow before they are «shelved<sup>5</sup>» on the website? The external report about the cost of renewables in Germany can serve as an example.

Because the report is external, it cannot be conveyed in the form of a press release, as that would imply that the EWEA «owned» it. Instead, Duncan says:

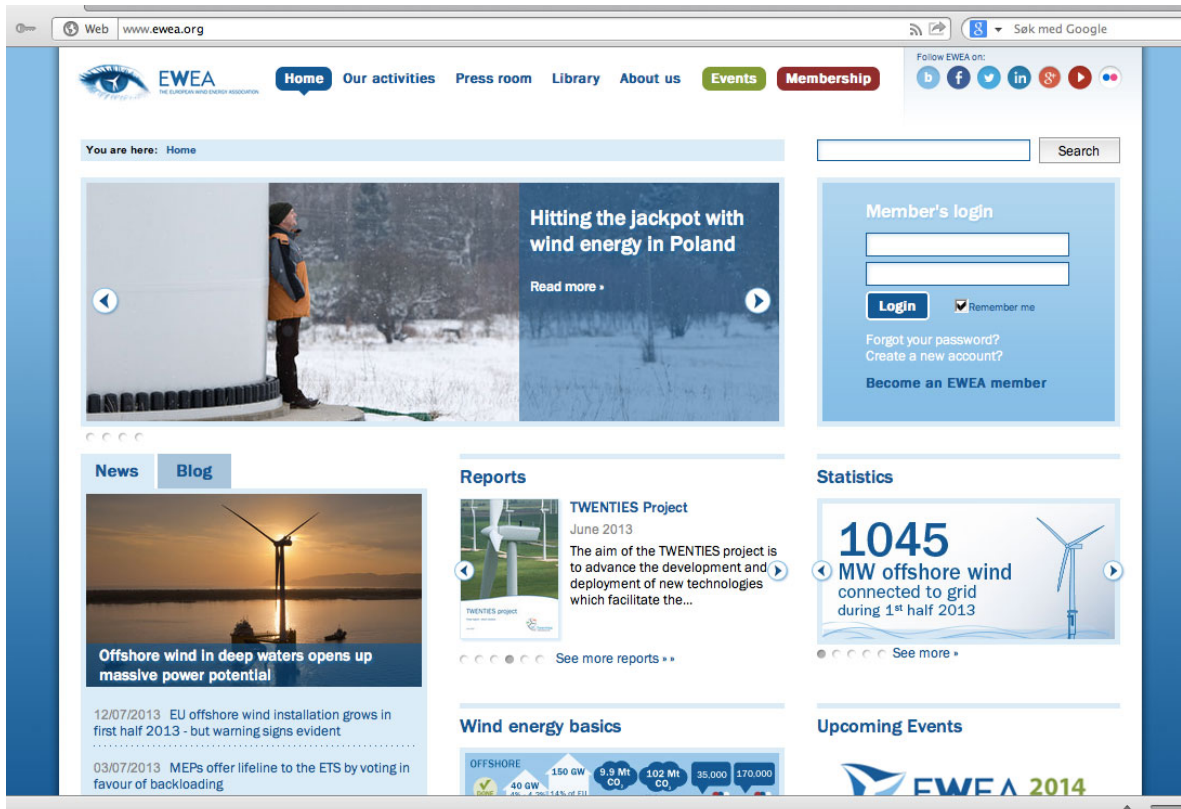
« ... we put it on the blog, on the communications network, a social platform used by some of our member organisations, but also some members of global wind energy council – a platform for sharing information, basically. We agreed we'd forward it to some journalists, and that we'd put it in our members area on the website and put it in the newsletter that goes out to members. It is a bit more difficult to press release something that isn't ours. They are good and reputable and I am sure it is accurate, but we cannot vouch for it. We don't have the time to check,

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<sup>5</sup>One of my interviewees uses the metaphor «shelf life», but then to refer to the magazine *Wind Directions*, that although it exists in a digital e-mag format is perhaps the «most papery» of the digital documents, as it is printed also as a magazine on paper although the association is in the process of discontinuing sending the paper magazine to subscribers.

so we can't endorse it, just say these people have done this. Which is why we can't press release it, really.»

So one form of flow is when actors search for the right platform for a document. This differs from the flow of production, which I have described so far, and which has a slightly different logic. The everyday flow of production is about securing that the



*Ewea.org on 24 August, 2013. Content featured «above the fold».*

workflow is even, this logic of placement is even more document-centred.

### **The hierarchy of content**

My interlocutors paint a picture of texts being passed back and forth between people, departments and the different floors of the organisation. The digital document, in their description, may just as well take the lift as be sent as an e-mail attachment, as it were, in the negotiation that takes place before it is published on the website. In this flow, they describe both overflows (Czarniawska 2011) that are managed by imposing new guidelines as to from whom to whom the flow is supposed to go: the web editor says it

now works well, as he has one appointed person to deal with in each department. Several of the interlocutors also describe how there are other stoppers in the flow, as when it is difficult to pass documents from one person to the next in the sign-off process, hindering the flow. Also, they describe how they themselves work as stoppers. After the 2012 relaunch, it has become easier for the web manager to decline to publish things on the main banner, because it has in the organisational process preceding the relaunch been established that the banner should be occupied by *content*. So the Membership department cannot ask to have a link directly to a membership page, and Events cannot ask to link directly to an event.

All this makes me ask: Is there a battle of the departments? Sam says:

Yes, that is a constant thing. With the old website, they always wanted their banner up there. So when we revamped the website, we had to justify the reasons for placing the main banner there and argue as to why it had to be content, have a good headline and a good image, and couldn't be advertising.

All my interlocutors confirm that press releases are at the top of the hierarchy of content. The press release is of a high order as it somehow manages to be pure politics and pure journalism. «Press releases are the main way that we reach policy makers, especially if it is then picked up by European Voice [newspaper carrying EU news] or something, that is read by policy makers,» Sam says. Although a long and winding river, as the press release depends on being picked up by a newspaper, if it *is* picked up, it is the most direct route for the association to reach policy makers.

Who gets their material on the main banner of the website? That is one instance that shows the hierarchy of content: «The Membership department want their content there. The Policy department ... they don't really have to demand it, because the press releases for instance are usually about policy, so we are a little bit closer to them,»



says the web editor. Some fight to get that space, and others are asked – the web editor describes how he every week asks the press officer when the different press releases will go up. Blogs are, alongside events and membership content, further down the food chain. Or as the web editor says about the main banner: «If it is a quiet week we might use a blog.»

The reports written or commissioned by the Policy department are usually press released, and therefore are publicized on the web site both as report and press release. This type of content is followed in status by other journalistic content, such of that produced by the blog, info graphics or statistics specifically tailored to the web medium. Finally is the stuff the Events and Membership want to promote. Social media content holds a position of ambivalence in relation to the web content hierarchy, as I shall say more about in chapter 5, which presents the case of how to contact the EU commissioner on Twitter.

What defines the position of the content in this hierarchy? In the case of the press release, one might argue that it has to do with *effect*, its perceived proximity to the political process. But the degree of manufacture – how well written and edited it is, is another variable. To deserve space on the website, all documents must become editorial content, although often such content is more «advertorial», says John, than editorial. This is what works against the Events assistant and others when they want to «just link to» an information page about, say, the next offshore event.

### **Several flows, one hierarchy**

We have seen that documents flow within and beyond the organisation in different ways. Some documents flow mainly between departments. Others flow via e-mail to external freelancers. And there is also the flow of paper documents from EWEA to

politicians, and the effort on the part of the EWEA lobbyists to connect with the EU legislative flow. There is however arguably only one hierarchy.

Science and technology studies has been criticised for not dedicating enough attention to issues of asymmetry and hierarchy in the relations embedded in the networks we study. Sheila Jasanoff (2004) is one of the internal critics. On the other hand, the case presented here of the flow of digital documents shows that the core of the actor-network theory as developed by Bruno Latour is easily attuned to the reality of hierarchies, at least in cases where hierarchy can be understood as a networked system with flow, overflow – and *stoppers*. Also, it is not true that the tradition has not taken power differences into account. Susan Leigh Star (2005) writes poignantly on the subject of how standardised networks, such as the digital network that is the Internet, creates externalities. Some of these externalities consist of marginalised groups left on the outside – Star's example is the relatively small group of people that are allergic to onions. They are too few to get special attention, the way for instance the gluten intolerant now do in many restaurants. The concept of externality to the network may also usefully be applied to understand the access to the flow as a regulation of power in a modern knowledge organisation, such as the European Wind Energy Association. The access is not evenly distributed, it has its guardians, and its outside is similar to Star's.

### **The im/materiality of the digital text**

In *Laboratory Life* Latour and Woolgar describe how the scientists and PhDs and technicians walk around with papers and discuss what is represented on them (1979:69). In the office of an organisation such as the EWEA, 34 years later on, the documents are not in the hands of the people discussing them. On their desks, people have notepads for meetings, yellow post-it pads for messages, or stray papers,

handouts from meetings or the like. Around the office, the organisation reports and other produce from the Creative unit have a «shelf life»: I use that intransitively to say that shelves is the sort of place they occupy. They also lie about on tables and have their own stand by the entrance of the 6th floor. In the room shared by the Communications and Creative units, documents exist in oral communications primarily: «Did you get it»? «Yes I did, I am going to put xx in and get it back to you» is a typical repartee. Before documents are written in HTML code and made into web text, or before reports are uploaded in the PDF format, they live in conversations and as e-mail attachments, so they are not visible in the office.

The fact that documents do not have a physical existence as paper, does however *not* mean that they do not have a materiality. Much normative literature on the digital from around the turn of the millennium invoked an image of networked forms of digital sociality as more fleeting, faster, less tied to the drudgery of our physical lives. According to Blanchette (2011), this line of reasoning employs a «trope of immateriality». Our interlocutors do not subscribe to this view.

The EWEA staffers do not distinguish clearly between texts in the digital realm and the analogue or «paper» realm. When asked about whether he thinks about if he writes for digital or analogue media, one of the staff members who writes for both explains that this enters into the picture only in terms of word length: Blogs are short, up to 600 words, *Wind Directions* articles are long, up to 4500 words. This is reminiscent of a journalist in my previous field, a Norwegian newspaper, who told me about the importance of knowing «how many words fit on a page» (Skorpen 2005). He held those colleagues who just wrote and wrote because their writing was so important in disregard. *How many words* – the size of the journalistic output – is the format of its matter. This is what separates the digital from the analogue text for my EWEA interlocutor. Digital documents *have* a materiality to our communications workers

(Horst and Miller 2012:24). Digital texts are material, and the evidence lies in that their matter is comparable to the matter of the analogue text.

We started out in this chapter situating the term «lobby» in theory, moving on to the flows of *our* lobby. I hope to have demonstrated that there are several flows of document that make up part of the life of the EWEA – one on the office floor, one digital between internal and external collaborators, and one «out of the building» to the politicians. I have also argued that the documents are ranked in a hierarchy, and that this is reconcilable with a Latourian view of flows in networks. Finally, I conclude that the digital is material also in the emic view of my communications workers. This is one instance of what Noortje Marres calls «empiricizing ontology» (2009:126), in that it rather than leaving ontology to theorists, shows the ontological frame of mind of our communications workers in what is indeed a historically contingent context, a digitized, politicized Brussels workplace in 2013.

## 4: Talking about the public

A lot has been written in the field of science and technology studies (STS) about the ability of science and technology to engage publics (Marres 2009:118). In this chapter, I look at the EWEA's idea of what its public is, but I also discuss the statistics-based knowledge about the organisation's audience.<sup>6</sup> I finally raise the issue of the non-public – the issues that do *not* find their public (Marres 2005). I try to let the theoretical positions of STS converse with the practices in my empirical case, in order to get at the larger question, which I take to be, in a paraphrase of fiction writer Raymond Carver: What do we talk about when we talk about publics?

### The public in science and technology studies

The «deficit model» of science communication (e.g. Irwin and Wynne 1996) is a term that was coined in the 1980s to signify the belief underlying much public communication about science and technology, that the public is lacking in knowledge and must be enlightened by authorities and scientists. A powerful rebuttal of the model was written by Brian Wynne in 1992 and published in the journal *Public understanding of science* – a name itself not entirely free of the deficit perspective – in its inaugural year.

In the last decade or so, the perspective within science and technology studies has shifted from seeing science as something that must be related to the public to something that the public engages with. We have seen a turn from the public understanding view to perspective focusing on the public *engagement* with science. In this period, «programmatically and normative documents in many countries highlight the need to *discuss* science with the general public» (Schäfer 2008, my italics). Alongside

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<sup>6</sup> While STS uses «public», at the EWEA they use «audience». This reflects that the theoretical field and the practice field draw on distinctive bodies of theory – «but they do not refer to wholly separate realities» (Livingstone 2005:17).

other important contributions in this vein such as Callon and Rabeharisoa's work on publics as «concerned groups» (2008), Marres' 2009 article about green living experiments describes how in such experiments, for instance using «smart» electricity meters, the public and the public display of the experiment are both enacted in the intimacy of the home. She calls such experiments «devices of engagement» (Marres 2009:118). From Marres' point of view Callon and Rabeharisoa's work makes perhaps too strong a distinction between modes of engagement and what they call 'entanglement' between science, technology, and other social forms. Her empirical case of green living experiments complicate this opposition between practices of entanglement and forms of public involvement, as they challenge that entanglements take place outside the limelight (2009:124). The green living experiment, often documented on blogs or in newspaper articles, constitutes a reconfiguration of socio-material relations and simultaneously publicize the process of reconfiguration (2009:127).

This chapter, which deals with the lobby organisation's own understanding of its audience, seeks to comment on the same literature from a different angle. While Marres brings the public into the confines of the home, as it were, this chapter views the public from afar. It discusses the tools for knowing about publics that are available to professional communications workers. One such tool is statistics, and this is the predominant method in use by the EWEA.<sup>7</sup> It is implicit in this tool that it views the public from a bird's eye view. The communications workers' perspective of its audience is similar to what in STS has been called the view of the «imagined layperson». Maranta et al (2003) view the projection of the lay person as a useful exercise for the scientists of their cases.

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<sup>7</sup> They also used questionnaires and advice from a web consultancy to gain knowledge of the audience before their 2012 relaunch.

Arguably, in the decade since Maranta and al wrote this, the public engagement wing of STS has had its head turned toward the *encounter* or the entanglements between science and the public, rather than look at the public itself. Callon and Rabeharisoa (2008) are a case in point. I ask whether the EWEA's efforts to learn about its publics also can inform current theory, at the crossroads of the ontological turn, and whether a re-examination of the public might be in order in STS.

### **Humanist understandings of the public**

Despite Wynne's and other STS-ers serious campaigning efforts to make decision-makers take the public of science seriously, it can still be argued that the understanding of what a public is and how it *works* is still underdeveloped, both in the policy field consisting of decision-makers and consultants, and in the field of theory.<sup>8</sup> Braun and Whatmore claim many STS scholars remain «stubbornly attached to humanist understandings of agency in public life» (2010:xi). Wynne's critique of expert regimes has «... not led to [...] sustained exploration of political theories needed to help unshackle the notion and practice of public engagement from the dominant Habermasian model of deliberative democracy», they claim (2010:xi). Chantal Mouffe (2005) has a similarly critical view of the deliberative ideas of public life that permeate the liberal consensus within which academic texts also operate. Braun and Whatmore's agenda is that humanist accounts do not attend to political matter: They insist on a materialist understanding of politics, where the emphasis is on the stuff, object or material of politics, rather than solely on its ideas. Mouffe's critique is that Habermasian models underestimate the strife and conflict implicit in political matters. I concur with both. What can we learn, then, from the empirical field of lobby communication, when trying to approach their public from a more materialist perspective?

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<sup>8</sup> In messy reality, these two are not as easily divided as I just did here, but I will leave it like this for analytical clarity.

## **Targeting different audiences**

The EWEA targets their different output on the ewea.org to a number of different audiences. This is confirmed by all the people I talk to in-depth during my fieldwork. They do however take the segmentation of the website with a pinch of salt. The Communications director puts it this way:

We are conscious that the wind energy basics aren't necessarily interesting to the same people as some of our more detailed policy stuff. But at the same time, it is important not to get too carried away with that. It may be that the same person wants very different types of information at different times, wearing different hats. You can have someone in the European Parliament who one day needs something very detailed, and the next day has a question from a constituent, and needs something of a much more generic nature. It is important to bear that in mind, not getting too carried away trying to segment for different audiences.

Behind the segmentation lies a supposition that different audiences differ in their knowledgeability on the subject-matter dealt with on the website; wind energy, wind energy policy and related political issues:

I think there is a difference between Commission, Council and the Parliament, in that in the Commission there are more knowledgeable, technical people than ... Parliament, MEPs [Members of the European Parliament] are not so down to the details necessarily, so they might read a blog. Maybe the same goes for the Council as well, I am not sure.

It could be them reading the «wind energy basics»?

Yes exactly, because they don't spend as much time in the dossiers, they cover broader ... I don't know, we're told they are not quite as clever as the Commission people!



This folk model of the clever Commission people, the adept Council people and the somewhat slower parliamentarians is repeated in conversations throughout the week.

While press releases are primarily directed at journalists, the targets of the other content categories on the website are more ambiguous. Reports are to a large extent seen as lobbying tools, directed at the political community of Brussels. The position papers stating the EWEA opinion on a particular subject-matter are similarly targeted, and are even more specific as to which politicians they should reach. Blogs are directed at industry people and other people knowledgeable about renewable energy, says the blog editor.

### **Knowing the audience**

On the Monday afternoon of my visit, I sit down with John and he shows me the Google analytics for the website. He also shows me a recent web report about the EWEA web audience. The EWEA website has 20,000 unique visits per month, and its visitors come mainly from the European countries. The UK has the largest proportion of visitors, followed by countries in the Eurozone: Belgium, the US, Spain, France, Denmark, Estonia, Italy and the Netherlands, in that order. We return to these statistics on several occasions. After my departure, EWEA staff also share screenshots of relevant pages in Google Analytics with me.

According to the web report, many of the Belgian visitors come from the European Commission and SETIS, an agency of the Commission. I stop at this. Just a week or two before I have done a course in web statistics, based on the software we have at my place of work – Google Urchin, which has much the same characteristics as Google Analytics. I learned that most web statistics programmes chart which *website* visitors come from, not where their computer is. Back in Norway, I look into the functionality of Google Analytics on this point. The application does not

allow you to see visitors' IP-addresses, only the website they come from, for reasons of privacy, my Google search reveals.

This is of significance for the EWEA analysis of its audience. Even if people come from the EU website, they are not necessarily working for the European Commission (although, of course, they might – we just do not know). The claim that we know who visitors are because we know where they come from is not valid. John and I discuss it, and agree that when getting results about which website visitors come from, we usually infer that that website is their own, in other words, that it tells us who they are.

This is *not* to say that web statistics are not useful for the EWEA, or in web communication in general. For a pan-European organisation like the EWEA, much information can be gleaned from the statistics about which country the visitors come from, for instance. This could be because EU communications workers link the site to the EWEA site, and so tells us something about links in an issue-network (Marres and Rogers 2005). But the linkage is not as direct as the statistics lead us to believe.

So in this particular case, the EWEA's impression of who its audience is, is flawed. This is not to say that this is the only understanding of the statistics that exist in the organisation. Another member of staff argues about one of the sub-sites: «I think the audience is mainly industry people. But I don't know, *the stats don't show me that*».

The limits of the knowledge of the audience does not take away from the fact that the EWEA in general has a considered opinion of who their audience is. They have segmented their audience into politicians and policy people, industry people, press and «general public», and cater to the needs of these groups, as they see these needs. Still, their analysis work before the 2012 relaunch is based on internal questionnaires and the opinion of a web consultancy, rather than asking the real visitors to the site. Such investigations are expensive, says the Communications director. In the EWEA case,

there is also the problem of getting the Commissioner to partake in a focus group to improve your website – they may just have other things going on.

All in all, the segmentation of the ewea.org points towards a more detailed understanding of public than «general public» or «public sphere», the placeholders often used in theory. This field in web communication is also undergoing a rapid process of professionalization, in which statistics is an important tool. But statistics is a tool that sees publics from afar. When we do not back up with talking to publics, we know less than we think (and here I am part of the «we» as I am also a web professional). This may lead to a view of publics almost as imaginary as the «imagined laypersons» of theory (Maranta et al 2003).

### **The non-audience: The blog comments**

The EWEA blog has, based on numbers from two months in 2013, between 5000 and 7000 visits per month. This is not in isolation very few. But it puzzled me that the blog posts – written by EWEA staff and a string of regular freelancers – have so few comments. The EWEA's last 30 blog posts, counted backwards on 20 September 2013, had only 14 comments. Out of these, three are from other blogs, saying that they have reused the content of the blog posts. Four are from a regular reader in India, a comment field regular of the EWEA who leaves positive, but not too substantial comments on a steady basis. One is a reply to one of the comments by an EWEA member of staff, meaning in these few months over the summer and autumn of 2013, the blog has only received seven comments from active readers. There is, in other words, not a great deal of interaction with the blog.

Objects of politics need publics, according to Marres (2005:212): «[...] It is [...] the failure of existing social groupings and institutions to settle an issue that sparks public involvement in politics. It is the *absence* of a community or institution to deal with the

issue that makes public involvement in politics a necessity. Because if the public doesn't adopt the issue, no one will.»

What, in this context, is a blog with few readers, who only add positive comments? If an issue «sparks a public into being», as Noortje Marres puts it (2005), what about output that does not engage a (sizeable) public? Following Marres' lead, one might be tempted to say that without a public, issues cease to exist. But of course, energy policy in general, and politics to do with wind power specifically, do not cease to exist even if the EWEA blog has few interlocutors.<sup>9</sup> Instead, I view such output as an overflow (Czarniawska 2011) – as an excess of «information objects» (Maranta et al 2009). The literature on overflows in economic theory has always had normative underpinnings, states Czarniawska (2011). But combined with the methodology of early actor-network theory (Latour and Woolgar 1979), as employed in chapter three, overflows becomes something that simply has nowhere to flow, and therefore floods, pools or creates new riverbeds. The EWEA blog may change its course eventually, but for now it overflows in a fashion that is not quite politics, if politics is understood as contested issues. There are many open issues in the realm of wind energy policy – but they are elsewhere. This can be perceived as a problem for the blog, although it is not conceptualised as such by my interlocutors.

With the emergence of more dialogue-oriented social media, the normative presumption – both lay and learned – was that rather than the one-way communication platforms that traditional media were, social media were to constitute a more dialogical public sphere. Marres and Rogers' findings (2005) and mine both indicate that new media do not always succeed in realising this agenda. When they do not find their public, they remain monological. This is an area where further enquiries would be interesting. Are there many other such spheres, consisting of output plus non-audience?

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<sup>9</sup> It is the number of exchanges that is low, not the readership in a strict sense.

Is it a function of today's call for dialogical media that non-spheres, consisting of output and a non-audience, are created? With an STS-informed perspective this comes into view in a different way than would be possible with a content-oriented media studies tack.

If we are to have an adequate view of what constitutes and creates public understanding of science and technology, we must know something about publics. This knowledge is emergent, and arguably, theory can learn from the practice field. As this chapter demonstrates, the practice field of web communications is already slightly more sophisticated in its knowledge of audiences than is the Habermasian, humanist understanding of a «general audience». Statistics allow the EWEA to account for itself in ways that increases its knowledge about itself and its audience to a greater extent than does the academic placeholder of «general public». This remains, even though we have also seen that sometimes the claims made by auditing technology such as web statistics are grander than they have coverage for. There are things about publics that statistical tools and the ways they are employed simply do not reveal, but there are other social science methods that are also available to – and to an increasing extent are also being used – in the practice field of communications.<sup>10</sup>

Why do I transpose theory and the practice field? Is it a useful exercise? What I claim is an on-going professionalization in the practice field of web communication is most often thought of as being limited of the methods with which it elicits knowledge about its interlocutors. It can instead be viewed as the ontological turn of this particular practice. An ontological turn in theory must similarly entail knowing *who they are*, this public of ours. And here it is my claim that the theoretical field has something to learn from the practice field of political communication.

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<sup>10</sup> I refer throughout to the practice field of communications, but there may be other professional fields that are undergoing a similar process of gaining knowledge about their interlocutors. This will be an interesting venue for further research.



## 5: The expert and the lobbyist

Much STS theory about the public-science encounter deals with the empirical cases of large-scale matters of civic interest, such as «nuclear energy» or «biotechnology». This is the sometimes explicit and at other times implicit backdrop of the debate between Collins and Evans (2002, 2007) on the one hand, and Brian Wynne (2003) and others on the other. Wynne criticises Collins and Evans for having a propositional understanding of knowledge. They hold on to knowing the core meaning of a particular knowledge set «as if this were objective and given» (Wynne 2003: 405). In this, Collins and Evans are all too similar to scientific actors whose attitude to complicated scientific issues is that they know more. This is the position that creates asymmetrical encounters between scientists and the public in the first place, Wynne argues. Despite their differences, both Wynne and Collins and Evans' STS texts from this period depict science: public encounters as expert deliberations and decisions the public is or is not made part of.

In order to continue the deconstruction of the public I started on in chapter 4, in this chapter I look at how the expert and the lobbyist are enacted in the EWEA. It is an effort to side-step the dichotomization of the format the science:public encounter often has in science and technology studies. I draw again on theoretical resources from Marres, namely her 2009 article on green living experiments and her concept of «empiricizing ontology» (Marres 2009:127). This I take to mean that what exists in the world have empirical, historically variable answers, of which my empirical data from the EWEA is one.

Even though the EWEA may be some way away from the monolith that is «science», they are part of a techno-politico complex that has authority and exert power in the form of the knowledge they spread. Therefore, much that has been written on the public

engagement of science can usefully be applied to them. I will discuss three empirical instances from the EWEA. These instances can be understood as an effort on my part to «ontologize» the empirical in the vein of Marres (2009). In an effort to get away from the dichotomy between science and laymen and into the messy empirics, I look at the organisation's understanding of itself as a lobbyist and as an expert organisation. Let's start with the way the web output the EWEA publishes as «basics», which I think of in terms of «the trope of neutral information».

### «Neutral information»

Marres and Rogers (2005) describe how issue-networks do not argue points of view, but rather *present the issue* (2005:922). The EWEA does this, amongst other things, by way of a computer graphic showing how a wind turbine works<sup>11</sup>. The EWEA

Communications director says:

«It is mistake to think there isn't need for basic information. Wind energy is a new technology, a very fringe thing in the 1980s, even 1990s, and it has been viewed as an alternative form of energy. It has only become mainstream in recent years. [...] When you talk to MEPs, people who make decisions about energy policy, there are major misconceptions and misunderstandings about wind energy.»

As basic as it is, the basics are interestingly *not* intended for «the general public», but for the political establishment:

«It is important to provide basic information not just for the public, but also for the people that we are dealing with. And certainly we are not aiming to deal with the general public with this, that has to be done by national associations. So it is *not* for Joe Public. It is also for our members, so that they can take that information and reuse it in ways that are appropriate for their national needs. [These materials have]

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ewea.org/wind-energy-basics/how-a-wind-turbine-works/>



two functions: To address EU decision-makers and the movers and shakers around them, and the second, is to provide information to members. Recently the factsheets that we produced are being brought out in Ireland.»

So the graphics are not intended for the public directly, only if they are picked up and used by the national associations. Once they are, they will reach a national audience (consisting of Joe Publics, presumably). The authority to define the need for this information in the quarters of the policy-makers lies with the EWEA in that they do make this definition. Herein lies perhaps their strongest case of being an expert.

The point here is that «neutral information» is a format available by experts, or laying the ground for expertise. I would argue that employing the trope of neutral information is a way of exerting authority – the authority of expertise. At other times, the view of themselves as expertise rather than as political actors is even more evident. «People think of us knowing a lot about wind energy, and we do, we have loads of experts here,» John says simply.

### **Can lobbyists in the offline become experts online?**

In social theory, the power the lobby organisation is usually seen to exert is political and direct. They sway politicians' opinions primarily by talking to them, in face-to-face interactions. This differs from power of the Foucaultian kind (Foucault 2004; quoted in Asdal 2008), which can be indirect: based on the intermediary of expertise, or mediated via digital or other media. In the view presented by the Communications director, the website and what is presented there appears to form a kind of backdrop to the offline lobbying job done by the policy department:

One of the key roles of communication – what policy does, and they do it extremely well, is to talk to policy makers individually about very specific recommendations or whatever. That is not enough. In Brussels you have to be seen to take part in the

debate, take part in public discourse. This is where Communications are important. Like having a physical presence in the city! Like having an exhibition outside the European Parliament. So that when a lobbyist go in to talk about x, they think oh yeah! That was those people doing x. It is important to be seen in the corridors, and outside ... to have a real presence.»

Thus the indirect forms of persuasion of the website and the expertise it enacts support the more overt forms of persuasion of the offline lobbying. Can a lobby organisation like the EWEA be a lobbyist in the offline world, in the streets of Brussels, and an expert online? The way the «basics» or neutral information is used points towards the possibility that it is easier to be an expert in the digital, and that the role in the offline is more overtly political.

### **Not doing politics**

Are my interlocutors doing politics? I asked all my interviewees, and they had very different answers. The director definitely thought they were «in politics»:

Communications are part of the political process, very much so. The division is that the direct relationships with policy makers are managed by policy. We put out information that they can use. But we have also have deliberately targeted a wider range of movers and shakers in order to raise our profile and secure the penetration of our arguments that in turn influences decision-makers [...]. So I see Communications very much as a part of the political process, but playing a different role than policy.»

His staff was more in doubt. When asked whether he is «in politics», John answers:

Not really. I have never met a politician. I don't lobby. I don't even think of myself as a lobbyist, there is me, and then there is the lobbyists. Everyone refers to the people down there as the lobbyists [pointing towards the other end of the floor, past

reception, where the Policy department is]. We support the lobbyists. I don't think of myself as lobbying, which is probably not entirely correct, seeing as we spread the lobbyist messages. I don't have any interaction with politicians, I don't go down to the parliament, I don't wear a suit.

So John draws up a distinction between a lobbyist and a professional with little political agenda, and to show his point he takes it down to its material basis: *I don't wear a suit*. Sam, interestingly, connects the issue of whether they are doing politics directly with the issue of whether they have influence: «Our influence would be to put [written output such as reports] in a nice clear way ... I actually think our influence is minimal, and that we should have a stronger influence.» So the fact that they have little influence is in her argument the proof that they are not doing politics, rather than evidence that they are poor politicians.

### **Contacting the Commissioner on Twitter**

So we have seen in this chapter that the organisation works to promote «neutral information», and this is the mode where it takes on more of a role as expertise than when it lobbies in the offline, well, lobbies of Brussels. We shall now turn to an example of how these two modes of production can be messy, as they are when John wants to contact the EU Commissioner for climate change, Connie Hedegaard, on Twitter:

People are quite .... [pause indicating he is choosing his words carefully] nervous about contacting people directly. [...] Yesterday Connie Hedegaard, the EU Commissioner for climate change, was on Twitter. She said that between 4.30 and 5.30 she would be answering questions about the 2030 emissions targets. So this is an issue we are quite concerned about. We have had endless special issues about it. She has like 17,000 followers on Twitter and is important in the EU and our sector.

I wanted to ask her a question, an easy question, and so our opinion would be broadcast to all her followers. I talked to Duncan, and because we already have a relationship with her he didn't want to ask a *question*. Because he didn't want to bother her. So he said he wanted to do a statement.

The understanding of public sphere differs between different actors within the EWEA. It is possible to have local understandings of how to conduct politics in the digital, and such understandings can vary even within the same organisation as they do here in the EWEA – they form a messy reality where divergent ontologies are represented simultaneously.

From these three empirical instances, we can draw that in the EWEA, there is a movement between politics and expertise that is somehow related to the movement between offline and digital forms. It appears that expertise more often takes place in the digital, while the offline is still the scene of overt forms of persuasion. The trope of neutral information is one digital format available to my interlocutors. This digital production of expertise supports more overtly political work conducted in the offline, but is also separate from this work. Where does being a professional stop and politics start? As the section about not being in politics shows, this is enacted in different ways by different actors. In the final example of doing politics on Twitter, we see how different understandings of online politics exist and are negotiated within the organisation.

## 6: Statistics: The magic of a promised number technology

This chapter will take the form of a discussion about how to best understand the Communications director's use of the word «statistics». He uses it when faced with my questions about the audiences for the website, and the relative size of these for the different segments of the website. «We have statistics for that», he says on one of the occasions. It is not surprising that statistics is a key tool for the organisation to learn about its audience. But he repeats it in three different conversations, which amounts to most of the interaction I have with him in the course of my one-week stay.

Can it most usefully be understood as the employment of a number technology (Asdal 2008), although the signifier «statistics» is only a placeholder for actual numbers? Or is the fact that he repeats words an indication that there is what anthropologists would call magic at play? Which perspective tells us the most about what «statistics» enacts? There is finality to the way he says it that makes me wonder what it actually *means*, what sort of speech act it is.

Asdal developed the notion of number technologies in an effort to understand how nature is done or enacted within politics. She takes actor-network theory as her starting point, the ways both «materialities and practices of science and politics produce the relevant entities and objects which [...] take part in public and political life» (Asdal 2008:124). What she calls *the technologies of politics* is an «imbroglio of science, technology and politics», and I understand numbers to be one such technology. Asdal's empirical case is that of the setting of emission standards for fluorine pollution in the 1950s in Norway. However, the concept can be applied also to the forms of governance in the lobby organisation. A «governable, abstract space» is opened up by the application of number technologies, Asdal says (all quotes 2008:124). In the case of the lobby, this space is filled with the Google Analytics interface, showing columns

and rows of numbers. The numbers are broken down into rows with numbers of visitors, unique visits, page views, which website the visitors entered from, and which region of the world they are based in. They can be broken down into days, months, or whole years. In different ways, the statistics thus break down the otherwise ephemeral and intangible «audience». And of course, in the audience lies the justification for the website.

Or *is* this what the word «statistics» points towards? Could it be that it rather is without object, intransitive? Such an interpretation would make it more of a magic move. The formula of magic lies in the repetition of certain words, according to the rich anthropological literature on the subject. The repeated words are thought to «produce the reality stated» (Malinowski 1935:238). This is not to say that people in the contemporary *believe* in magic. But magical speech acts contribute to authority in modern knowledge organisations, Sørhaug (2004) has argued. In other words, the magic of repetition is one of the tools available to contemporary leaders to underscore their authority. Does aspects of technology in organisation lend themselves particularly well to the use of magic? «Magic haunts technical activity like a shadow», according to art anthropologist Alfred Gell (1996:181, quoted in Hagen 2013). One way of interpreting this, is that the unknowns of the technology – most of us deal with technologies we do not understand all the ins and outs of, *technically* – opens a similarly «open, abstract space» to that Asdal speaks of, one that can be filled with magic. And if this is what happens at the EWEA, what is the state of reality the repetitive speech act induces?

In *Audit Cultures* (2000) Marilyn Strathern questions the transposition of auditing practices from accounting to other realms of society. And perhaps is this what lies in the magical repetition of «statistics»: The placeholder for numbered technologies

promises to organise the organisation's effort towards its intangible audience – an audience which is in the office only appears in its virtual form – and account for it.

If so, the sheer mention of «statistics» is enough to make the organisation accountable, in that it is accounting. Rather than choose between the two approaches, such an interpretation allows us to «pack» the concept of number technologies in an understanding of magic.

### **When the stats work and when they don't work**

There are also instances where it is clearer that numbers are technologies. John tells me that before they revamped the website in 2012, they argued that the main banner on the website, where all the departments argued to get their content, had to be removed or significantly altered. When I ask him how they argued that case, he says: «We showed them that no one ever clicks on banners». When an audience is what justifies your existence, the number '0' works as an effective technology.

There are however also cases when numbers do *not* appear to work. This is what Asdal refers to as the non-authority of numbers (2011). One such case is social media. One of the staffers talks about how the organisation can utilise social media to a larger extent:

«Social media ... They are important, but people think they are frivolous. It is difficult to make people understand how important they are. Even when I show them numbers, they still don't believe it.»

This challenge is shared by many organisations in the contemporary, when trying to deal with how to use the «big data», large and complex data sets, generated by social media.

This chapter has tried to demonstrate that in the EWEA, as perhaps elsewhere in

modern knowledge organisations, numbers are workhorses of (office) politics.

Performed by the director, however, «statistics» is also a magic formula. Statistics, or the magic promise of statistics, can simultaneously be a number technology. It can therefore be argued that in this case, magic and numbers are two workhorses stabled together.



## Concluding remarks

I asked at the outset how politics are enacted in the digital documents and flows of a lobby organisation. I have endeavoured to show how both paper and digital documents flow within the organisation and out to politicians and to EWEA's other audiences in a series of political enactments. I also asked how we could understand the materiality of the digital. My main finding in this regard is that I found that my interlocutors think of the digital as having matter. Thus the «materiality of the digital» as described by Horst and Miller (2012:2) is not only a phenomenon that exists in theory.

The organisation has a segmented idea of their audience that is backed by statistical knowledge. This knowledge is sometimes flawed, but it still forms a more segmented idea of an audience or public than is sometimes present in humanist theory on publics, where a Habermasian idea of «public sphere» leaves what and who the public is largely uninvestigated. The enactments of politics that take place in the digital play a supporting role to the overt persuasion in the analogue relationships the organisation has with politicians. Sometimes, as we saw in the case where one member of staff wants to contact the EU Commissioner on Twitter, the enactments in the digital clash with the enactments in the analogue, creating what we can perhaps call a «messy mess», as opposed to the ordinary messiness of reality.

I have tried to demonstrate how statistics can work both as a number technology (Asdal 2008) and as a magical move employed in contemporary management practices. In this lies also the realisation that classic anthropological theory and more recent STS approaches usefully can be applied together.

Methodologically, I have worked with a set of negatives: Non-controversy, non-authority and non-audience. Particularly the last two have proved useful in application on my

empirical material. Like numbers, statistics can be non-authoritative. And the concept of the «non-audience» opens up a new line of questioning of the usefulness and sustainability of the dialogical paradigm in communications work. The negatives have also helped me identify «gaps» such as those opened by the blog with few comments. There I find issues – or at least output – that do not find a natural public. The approach of looking for negatives has also proved a useful supplement to the approach viewing the social as mess. The analytical tack of looking for negatives allows me to bring back into the picture elements that a more «tidy» analytical approach would have cleared away. They thus contribute to a truer mess, and hopefully, a truer rendition of this corner of social reality.

Importantly, I observed a movement from overt forms of political persuasion to the use of the application of expertise in the digital. There is evidence that in the digital, the enactments of politics take the form of exerting the authority of expertise, an indirect form of persuasion. The digital-analogue divide as practiced by the subjects in our study thus serves to reconceptualise the boundary between politics and expertise in forms of digital politics.

## Epilogue

The EWEA as it is known in this thesis is no longer there. I receive an email when I try to contact one of my key interviewees, letting me know he no longer works there.

Two out of my four key informants have left. The remaining ones are, in the words of one of them, sharing the workload. Once the reshuffling of the organisation is finalised, the EWEA will have no separate Communications department, they tell me.

The EWEA resembles the Manchester school's rapidly changing African settlements (A.L. Epstein, in Postill 2012) in that it does no longer exist in the way it is described in the moment the words of this description are printed on the page.

This does perhaps show that the ephemerality that we in the everyday often attribute to the digital, as often exist in the offline social world. As it is, the website ewea.org remains the same. There, the large changes the Communications department has undergone can hardly be seen. So in this empirical case, at this particular time, the digital is the mainstay, and the offline is transient.



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