

**Short Report on  
Multiplication Phase  
“Silverknowledge” (Silberwissen)**

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## **Multiplication Phase 'Silverknowledge' (Silberwissen)**

The project is managed by Wikimedia Deutschland and ZAWiW and Center for General Scientific Continuing Education at the University of Ulm and provides scholarly support to and consults Wikimedia in overall project coordination as a part of the TAO AAL project by offering action research.

### **Objective**

Wikimedia Germany developed the "Silver Knowledge" activities for the purpose of increasing contributions from older adults and as a means to integrate more older adults into Wikipedia as authors. "Silver Knowledge" is integrated into educational programs offered by Wikimedia Germany, which were created to facilitate access to freely available knowledge for every generation.

### **Process and strategies in the multiplication phase**

The activities geared towards multiplying Silver Knowledge have been quite successful: we were able to almost double the number of active locations in the first six months of 2012. There were 26 events at 13 locations during this period, some of which were also offered as compact events over a period of several days. These 13 locations belong to following types of institution: Three thematic groups/associations (local historians, research societies), three organizations of seniors (online senior initiatives, senior academies), five adult education centers and two senior universities. In total, there were more than 150 seniors who participated in the activities during the first six months of 2012, of which about two thirds were men and one third were women.

Sustainably anchoring collaboration with cooperation partners at locations that are already operating successfully and attracting new cooperation partners at other locations (multiplying) with the objective of forming long-term partnerships. In part, the cooperation partners have very different goals in terms of their content and they are geared towards drawing in an array of different target groups. There are plans to organize an exchange between the locations to be held in November 2012. In the meantime, because of the results of the accompanying research, a decision was made to modify the concept by offering an introductory event in workshop form. In doing so, the focus was placed more clearly on encouraging and activating participants to collaborate with Wikipedia as older adult authors. So now, the events for Silver Knowledge consist of a series of at least three workshops, in which the subject of editing is firmly integrated as early as in the very first workshop.

The intention is not only to provide the participants with basic instruction on becoming Wikipedia authors, teaching them how to write their own articles and in doing so diversifying the various roles based on tasks and activities, but to also integrate Wikipedia sister projects, Wikimedia Commons in particular. This also supports establishing a heterogeneous bond within the target group.

The independent programs "Wikipedia macht Schule" (aimed at teachers), which was offered until 2011, the "University Program" (aimed at professors and educators) and the

"Silver Knowledge" program (aimed at seniors) were introduced as an independently organized field of work in the "Education and Knowledge" department at Wikimedia Germany and were used to educate a common network of freelance Wikipedia contributors. As such, the programs benefited each other: participants are able to exchange experiences, things that worked well on a practical level are passed along, the contributors receive training and their services are used in various programs and the work of the "Education and Knowledge" team benefits from creating synergies. In addition, on a personnel level the team receives the support of a project assistant.

Attracting and qualifying Wikimedia contributors goes hand-in-hand with developing quality standards for the events. The Contributor Camps (the last one was held March 2 - 4, 2012 in Hofgeismar) allow contributors to exchange ideas and experiences amongst each other. In sessions during which participants mutually reflect on their experiences, contributors become sensitized to the special needs of the target groups and work together to think of ways to overcome inhibitions and what necessary support options can be provided. In the process, of key importance are the clarification of conceptual issues, the finding of ways to mutually develop materials and the preparation of methodological and educational tools. The next Contributor Camp will be held in September 2012.

Strong focus is being placed on introducing the Silver Knowledge project to the Wikipedia Community as well as on developing accompanying community activities. This should help to facilitate its introductory phase and additional collaboration efforts at Wikipedia and to create an access point to community-oriented support structures. By working closely with local cooperation partners, local network structures are being developed which will improve linking older adults' resources and will allow older adults to help each other (e.g. in peer groups). Initiating round table groups, organizing meetings to mutually prepare texts and edit content and participating in Wiki Loves Monuments not only generates support structures of this kind, but also plays a role in building strong social communities. Currently in the works is also the so-called "Zeitzeugen-Wiki" (contemporary witnesses Wiki), in which older adults are given the opportunity to add their own personal accounts as contemporary witnesses of historic events, which otherwise would not be honored on Wikipedia due to a lack of written documentation.

In the context of plans to possibly internationalize TAO, Wikimedia Germany strives to disseminate the results of Silver Knowledge. To do so, the experiences and results will be edited accordingly and communicated at various conferences and seminars.

### **Concomitant research**

ZAWiW consults the Silver Knowledge team in further developing strategies, provides support when conducting Contributor Camps and in the exchange of ideas and experiences between the various locations, plays a role in developing materials and assists in developing new community activities.

At this time, ZAWiW is documenting the locations they consider to serve especially well as examples of 'Good Practice' models for the TAO handbook and in conjunction with

the Silver Knowledge team is developing general instructions and recommendations on multiplying the success and transferring results.

During the course evaluation phase, participants were given the opportunity to rate the Silver Knowledge activities in a standard questionnaire. In total, the evaluation takes into account 177 questionnaires that were collected from eleven locations during the period between October 2010 and June 2012. In it, the participants have given an overall positive evaluation of the events (presentations and workshops), irrespective of the location's focus. There was some minor criticism with regard to the structure (typically one presentation and two workshops), the contributors (instructs too quickly, did not sufficiently answer questions), the specific process (not enough time for practicing) or the general framework (space where the event was held, technology).

### **Recommendations**

A master thesis was prepared in which the Silver Knowledge activities were analyzed in terms of their methodological and educational orientation (empowerment didactics), with a closer look at how effective they are in attracting older adults to become actively involved as Wikipedia contributors. Below in summarized form are the most important results formulated as recommendations:

- Methods that encourage active involvement and cooperative work forms can make it easier for older adults to become active as authors for Wikipedia.
- Taking initial steps early in Wikipedia, e.g. at the playground eliminates fears among older adults and makes it easier for them to begin contributing as authors long-term.
- In addition, linking to specific interests and setting the main points of focus towards a certain activity at an early stage makes an introduction to Wikipedia easier.
- If participants are already bound to an institution, this makes it easier to recruit participants and provides an indication of the various areas of interests among the participants in advance.
- If a common area of interest already exists and with it a sense of belonging, this will improve the cooperative working experience. This applies especially to groups of participants focused on a specific subject.
- A positive learning environment can increase the effectiveness of measures, especially if there are already existing relationships among the participants or if contributors are positively attentive to the participants needs, this will also further improve the learning environment.
- Tasks and exercises that participants voluntarily work on between the separate events will strengthen the learning effect.
- For those participants who are really interested in being actively involved in Wikipedia, the program format that has been in place up until now is often not sufficient. Many important topics cannot be discussed because of time restraints. In that case, there must be additional measures that include the support from experienced Wikipedia contributors.

## Contributing Partners:



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