

Involvement of the Wikimedia Community in the TAO-Project

Ideas for Activities at the Community-Level

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Background

In spring 2009, the Swiss and the German Wikimedia chapters, along with eight other partner organizations under the lead of the Bern University of Applied Science, submitted a project within the European “Ambient Assisted Living (AAL)“-Programme in order to promote the participation of seniors in their online communities (see project overview for more details).

In fall 2009, the project was accepted for funding by the AAL association and entered the clarification and negotiation phase during which the project partners’ funding situation and contributions to the project are further being clarified. At the end of this phase, funding agreements between project partners and funding bodies in all participant countries will be concluded and the consortium agreement will have to be signed by all project partners.

At present, the clarification and negotiation phase is scheduled to be concluded around July/August 2010, so that the project can start on 1st September 2010.

Role of the Wikimedia Community

During the clarification and negotiation phase Wikimedia Germany and Wikimedia Switzerland will have to agree with other project partners on the type of activities to be carried out in common and to commit itself to a certain amount of project work to be carried out either by paid staff (to be hired or mandated) or by Wikimedia volunteers.

As community participation is prerequisite for the project’s success, it is crucial that these decisions be taken in accordance with the interests and preferences of the community members. In order to get a better idea of the type of community involvement to be expected, it may be useful to present a few concrete ideas for project activities, which can serve as a first basis for discussion with community members and potential partners. These ideas can then be complemented and further elaborated through a dialogue with community members interested in taking an active part in the project.

According to the TAO project proposal, the project activities of Wikimedia Germany and Wikimedia Switzerland will focus on two areas:

- Development and deployment of concrete measures to promote the active participation of seniors in Wikimedia communities (measures for activation, motivation, and integration).
- Public Relations and Community Relations with regard to the abovementioned measures

Some Ideas for Activities within the TAO-Project

Idea	Comments
<p>Maintain a training area for new Wikipedia authors within Wikiversity. Provide them with assistance and guidance during their first steps as active Wikimedians.</p>	<p><i>This is part of the Wikimedia DE project proposal. Swiss Wikimedians could participate. A similar approach could be chosen in other language versions of Wikipedia.</i></p>
<p>Sensitize Wikipedia mentors for the typical needs and expectations of senior contributors.</p>	<p><i>This is part of the Wikimedia DE project proposal. Swiss Wikimedians could participate. A similar approach could be chosen in other language versions of Wikipedia.</i></p>
<p>Organize introductory courses for new Wikipedia authors at senior-universities, senior computer clubs, and the like.</p> <p><i>Possible course format: three workshops of 4-6 hours, completed by individual online practice</i></p>	<p><i>This is part of the Wikimedia DE project proposal. Similar courses could be organized in Switzerland.</i></p>
<p>Organize introductory courses for seniors, focusing on the use of Wikipedia and its sister projects: media competence for readers, explanation of the way the online resource is co-produced by many community members, demonstration of possibilities to actively contribute</p> <p><i>Possible course format: courses of ca. 2 hrs</i></p>	<p><i>Computer course providers, such as Swisscom, would be possible project partners (cf. Swisscom HelpPoint courses).</i></p> <p><i>Seniorweb CH would be a possible partner for Wikimedia CH to carry out such activities. Similarly, Seniorweb NL would be ready to join up with Wikimedia NL in a similar approach.</i></p> <p><i>These courses could be used to point potentially active users to introductory courses for new authors or to Wikimedians' offline meetings (Stammtische).</i></p>
<p>Contribute to the elaboration of courses for seniors, focusing on how to make the best use of online communities and online social networks.</p> <p><i>Possible course format: courses of ca. 2 hrs</i></p>	<p><i>Computer course providers, such as Swisscom, would be possible project partners (cf. Swisscom HelpPoint courses).</i></p> <p><i>Seniorweb CH would be a possible partner for Wikimedia CH to carry out such activities. Similarly, Seniorweb NL would be ready to join up with Wikimedia NL in a similar approach.</i></p> <p><i>These courses could be used to point potentially active users to introductory courses for new authors or to Wikimedians' offline meetings (Stammtische).</i></p>

<p>Organize “Wikimedia Jams”: Wikimedians meet in regular intervals at library premises or Computerias in order to do work on the Wikipedia and its sister projects. Offer possibilities for RL exchanges for newcomers.</p>	<p><i>If the goal is to attract more seniors, it would be good to choose locations where it is not uncommon for seniors to meet. Adequate project partners need to be found. Introductory courses for new authors could also be proposed at the same premises.</i></p> <p><i>The participants of the Freiburg (i.Br.) Stammtisch already use their gatherings to work together on articles.</i></p>
<p>Promote Wikimedians’ offline meetings (Stammtische) more actively as occasions where community members of various generations meet and where newcomers can get a feel of the community.</p>	<p><i>The collaboration sessions at the Freiburg (i.Br.) Stammtisch have already been used as an occasion to call on particularly knowledgeable people in a given field (doctorate candidates) to join the Wikipedians’ efforts.</i></p>
<p>Appoint “Wikimedia Generation Ambassadors” whose function is to organize offline events which are also specifically targeted at seniors, to get existing community members in touch with seniors willing to join the community, to foster the mutual understanding between the different generations as well as to act as mediators in conflicts.</p>	<p><i>From the community point of view, the “Wikimedia Generation Ambassadors” could serve as a means to leverage the large number of seniors who would potentially get involved with community projects if they were actively drawn into them.</i></p>
<p>Assist in the creation of a Wikipedia user group at seniorweb.ch</p>	<p><i>Some members of the seniorweb.ch-community may be interested in getting actively engaged with Wikimedia projects. One approach to get in touch with them would be to meet them in their familiar environment (online and offline) and to encourage them to exchange experiences and to mutually assist each other.</i></p>

These are just a few ideas to launch the debate. There are certainly more ideas out there in the community which are worth considering. A good way to approach the topic would be to ask how existing community initiatives could be advanced by integrating more senior volunteers.

Special attention should also be paid to the various roles community members may play in the project. Thus, in addition to developing and implementing some of the measures suggested above, Wikimedians may take an active part in project management, public relations, internal communication, and in the coordination of the different communities (exchange among the different language communities and co-ordination with the Foundation’s Outreach Programme). In order to bring the project to success, the various competencies present within the community need to be leveraged. Empowerment of the community and its active involvement in the decision processes relative to the project therefore seem to be a necessary pre-condition for Wikimedia Switzerland’s successful participation in the TAO project.