



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree programme in
Language Sciences – Language Teaching

Final Thesis

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WIKIPEDIA IN TEACHING^[edit]

IMPROVING AUTONOMY IN RESEARCH, CRITICAL SENSE,
AND COLLABORATIVE ABILITIES IN STUDENTS, MAKING
THEM CONTRIBUTE TO THE FREE ENCYCLOPEDIA

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Academic Year

2014/2015

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Abstract

Wikipedia works and we do not understand how it is possible. If it does, it is thanks to the ants' nest-like “functional anarchy” of the users who daily correct, contribute, and check its articles. This work focuses on the possible interactions of the triangle student–teacher–Wikipedia, considering that until now the academic world has had mixed feelings towards Wikipedia.

From a theoretical point of view, a list of possible means of contribution to Wikipedia by university-level students with real-life examples is given. These include -and are not limited to- writing new articles, proof-reading existing ones, translating from one language version to another, creating audio-visual content, and drawing info-graphics.

For a more empirical approach, a project was carried out at Ca' Foscari University (Venice, Italy), with two cohorts of students who were given the possibility of choosing to contribute to Wikipedia as part of one of their exams.

To offer a complete overview, this work deals both with the problems encountered during the preparation and the execution of the activity, as well as the general results.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	6
Introduction	7
I Theoretical frame	10
1 Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia	11
1.1 Criticism	13
1.2 Students and Wikipedia	14
1.3 Academia and Wikipedia	17
2 The student - teacher - Wikipedia triangle	21
2.1 Students	22
2.2 Teacher	25
2.3 Wikipedia	26
3 Possible activities	29
3.1 Writing new articles	29
3.1.1 Expanding stubs	30
3.1.2 Translating articles	30
3.2 Enhancing existing articles	31
3.2.1 Sources (“Citation needed”)	32
3.2.2 External links and wikilinks	32
3.2.3 Images, videos and more	32
3.2.4 Audio	33

3.3	Working on sister projects	33
4	Encouraging and discouraging factors for contribution	35
4.1	Becoming contributors	41
4.2	Leaving Wikipedia	43
5	Overview of the difficulties	45
5.1	The editor	45
5.2	Other users/admins	46
5.3	The rules	47
5.4	Collaboration requests	48
5.5	Overload	48
5.6	Evaluation	49
II	Research project	50
6	Objectives	51
7	Participants	53
7.1	Group A	54
7.2	Group B	58
8	Activity	64
8.1	Group A	64
8.2	Group B	65
9	Schedule	67
9.1	Group A	67
9.2	Group B	70
10	Results	73
10.1	Group A	73
10.2	Group B	75

11 Comparison	77
11.1 Follow-up questionnaire	79
Conclusion	87
Appendix	96
A Group A questionnaire	97
B Group A results	102
C Group A self-report excerpts	111
D Group B questionnaire	114
E Group B results	119
F Follow-up questionnaire	128
G Follow-up results	132

List of Figures

1.1	<i>Students' access to Wikipedia by date (Trotman et al. 2009)</i>	16
2.1	<i>The triangle.</i>	22
2.2	<i>Passer-by contributors are over-represented in the controversial articles.</i>	27
2.3	<i>Average number of characters per insertion for each class of contributors.</i>	28
7.1	<i>Are you...?</i>	54
7.2	<i>What is your degree?</i>	55
7.3	<i>How often do you consult Wikipedia?</i>	55
7.4	<i>For what reasons?</i>	56
7.5	<i>On a scale from 1 to 5, how reliable do you think Wikipedia is?</i>	56
7.6	<i>On a scale from 1 to 5, what is the average quality of the articles?</i>	57
7.7	<i>Did you ever find obvious mistakes?</i>	57
7.8	<i>Did you ever correct something?</i>	58
7.9	<i>Why did you never correct anything?</i>	58
7.10	<i>Are you...?</i>	59
7.11	<i>What is your degree?</i>	59
7.12	<i>How often do you consult Wikipedia?</i>	60
7.13	<i>For what reasons?</i>	60
7.14	<i>On a scale from 1 to 5, how reliable do you think Wikipedia is?</i>	61
7.15	<i>On a scale from 1 to 5, what is the average quality of the articles?</i>	61
7.16	<i>Did you ever find obvious mistakes?</i>	62
7.17	<i>Did you ever correct something?</i>	62
7.18	<i>Why did you never correct anything?</i>	63

10.1	<i>“Second Thoughts are Best” total hits during November 2015 . . .</i>	74
10.2	<i>“Second Thoughts are Best” in the DYK section on 19-11-2015 . . .</i>	76
11.1	<i>Did any one of your teachers ever suggest using it? (Group A) . . .</i>	78
11.2	<i>Did any one of your teachers ever suggested to use it? (Group B) . . .</i>	79
11.3	<i>Are you going to keep contributing in the future?</i>	80
11.4	<i>How will you keep contributing?</i>	80
11.5	<i>Knowing how a Wikipedia article is created.</i>	81
11.6	<i>On a scale from 1 to 5, what do you think now is the average quality of the articles?</i>	82
11.7	<i>On a scale from 1 to 5, how reliable do you think Wikipedia is now?</i>	82
11.8	<i>Would you like other courses to integrate Wikipedia editing in their syllabus?</i>	82

Acknowledgements

Thanks to prof. Jeanne Frances Clegg and prof. Dorit Raines for believing in this project and accepting to take part in it with their students, devoting time and energy to the activity. Thanks to prof. Carmel Mary Coonan for supporting my work and accepting it as a thesis project. Thanks to Ginevra Sanvitale from the Wikimedia Italia board, for her important suggestions on how to structure the activities and for putting me in contact with Marco Chemello, who was an invaluable teacher for the students, giving them the basics of Wikipedia rules and editing. Thanks to Maria Loretta Manzato, contact person for the BALI (*Biblioteca di Area Linguistica*). She has proved to be truly interested in how the project developed and now the library offers a course on bibliographic sources, which encompasses editing work on Wikipedia. She also organized a meeting held at Ca' Foscari University for the 15th birthday of the Free Encyclopedia, during which some partial results of the present study were presented.

Introduction

Wikipedia works and we have no idea how it is possible. Using the words of Rafaeli and Ariel “Wikipedia only works in practice. In theory, it can never work.”¹ Not only it resists trolls,² self-promotions, edit wars among users, recurring critics from the academic world, lawsuits from politicians, and the rival printed and digital publications, whether they are free or not (the Encyclopædia Britannica being probably the most famous one), it has also become far and away the largest encyclopedia ever written. And it has done it without advertisement on its pages, and avoiding the use of pay-walls, subscriptions or “premium” content. Wikipedia only gets money from donations, and uses just a small amount of it in order to maintain its servers and relatively small number of employees.³ In short, Wikipedia “is a miracle.”⁴

¹RAFAELI, SHEIZAF and YARON ARIEL (2008). “Online Motivational Factors: Incentives for Participation and Contribution in Wikipedia”. In: *Psychological Aspects of Cyberspace: Theory, Research, Applications*. Ed. by AZY BARAK. Cambridge University Press, pp. 243–267. URL: <http://gsb.haifa.ac.il/~sheizaf/cyberpsych/11-Rafaeli&Ariel.pdf>. (accessed 22 January 2016).

²“In Internet slang, a troll is a person who sows discord on the Internet by starting arguments or upsetting people, by posting inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community (such as a newsgroup, forum, chat room, or blog) with the deliberate intent of provoking readers into an emotional response or of otherwise disrupting normal on-topic discussion, often for their own amusement.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_troll

³Most of the income is stocked in order not to have problems in case in the future there would be a shortage of funds. In fact, this has lately become an important point of criticism for some of Wikipedia’s more radical supporters. See Caitlin Dewey on the Washington Post for more information on this: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2015/12/02/wikipedia-has-a-ton-of-money-so-why-is-it-begging-you-to-donate-yours/> (accessed 11 December 2015).

⁴AURAY, NICOLAS, CÉCILE POUDAT, and PASCAL PONS (2007). “Democratizing Scientific Vulgarization. The Balance between Cooperation and Conflict in French Wikipedia”.

If Wikipedia has managed to do this, it is only thanks to its “functional anarchy”, which resembles the structure of an ants’ nest: thousands and thousands of users from all around the world every day contribute, check and correct its articles, forming a self-regulating community.⁵ Everyone of them contributes how, where, and when s/he can, according to his/her competences and interests, without getting instructions from above. This method is for sure not free of shortcomings, but the online encyclopedia thrives and prospers nonetheless. Notwithstanding the fact that it is often considered unreliable or incomplete it has become the *de facto* primary source of knowledge at a planetary level, thanks to the ease of access to information it gives its visitors.

This work relates the outcomes of a project that tried to bring Wikipedia inside university courses. The first half of the thesis tells briefly the history of the free encyclopedia, and explores the available literature regarding the relationship between students and academics with Wikipedia. We then move on the benefits these three actors could gain from the integration of editing into university classes. Possible activities are presented, as well as the most common difficulties one has to face when working on what probably is the largest collaborative cultural project ever. An entire chapter is focused on the reasons that motivate users to contribute to Wikipedia, as well as those that make them flee, analysing many different articles mostly published in the last ten years. It must be said, though, that many of these studies must be considered exploratory, because they were carried out manually on a relatively small number of articles, or used the classical interview method, or online questionnaires, with small numbers of participants. There is an overall dearth of large-scale studies on Wikipedia, a matter which should seriously be addressed in the near future.

The second part presents the results of the current project held during the autumn semester of 2015 at Ca’ Foscari University in Venice. Two pro-

In: *Observatorio (OBS*)* 3, pp. 185–199. URL: <http://obs.obercom.pt/index.php/obs/article/view/152/109>. (accessed 9 January 2016).

⁵Interview by Anna Ferri to Andrea Zanni from *Wikimedia Italia*, in Italian. <http://www.conversomag.com/wikipedia-intervista-andrea-zanni> (accessed 11 December 2015).

fessors accepted a proposal to substitute part of their final exam with work on Wikipedia. Quite a few students liked the idea and were taught how to create articles on subjects relevant to the course. Each step of the project is described in detail, and so are the results of their efforts. A comparison between the two groups is then made, integrating students' feedback, both positive and negative. There is also space for some final considerations at the end.

Part I

Theoretical frame: a general overview

Chapter 1

Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia

The `wikipedia.org` domain is currently ranked at 7th place among all websites in the world.¹² Initially, it was born as a complementary project for Nupedia, an online encyclopedia that was meant to be edited solely by qualified contributors via a complex multi-step peer review process. This kind of writing proved to be quite demanding in terms of time, and experts proved reluctant to contribute. A wiki³ was then launched in order to provide drafts and additional ideas for articles, then to be taken on by Nupedia's editors.

Wikipedia⁴ was launched on Monday 15 January 2001 on its own domain, `wikipedia.com`, and was formally announced two days later in a message on Nupedia's mailing list by Jimmy Wales. From then on, Wikipedia has kept growing. It quickly overtook Nupedia and became the global project we know today, with multiple language versions and many sister projects.⁵

¹Since July 2015, according to Alexa Internet: <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/wikipedia.org> (Accessed 30 January 2016)

²For all other Wikipedia-related statistics consult <https://stats.wikimedia.org/>

³Wikis are web-based, collaborative sites for writing. Pages are hyperlinked to each other and all users are potentially authors and editors at the same time. The name comes from a Hawaiian word meaning "fast."

⁴The name was suggested by Larry Sanger, co-founder of Wikipedia with Jimmy Wales. See the archived Nupedia mailing-list: <http://web.archive.org/web/20030414021138/http://www.nupedia.com/pipermail/nupedia-1/2001-January/000680.html>

⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Wikipedia

Over the years Wikipedia has been subject to criticism for various reasons. One can, for example, read the short list of critical points compiled by Denning, Horning, Parnas, and Weinstein in 2005.⁶ This is because Wikipedia has decided to “push to its extreme possibilities the principles of openness and of cooperation.”⁷ Unlike traditional encyclopedias Wikipedia keeps visibility of names of authors very low, and there is no editorial committee and no proofreader list. Anybody can propose changes and anybody can be a proofreader (users are actually encouraged to correct and expand existing articles, besides creating new ones). The main accusation is therefore that of being unreliable in comparison with peer-reviewed publications.

This charge has suffered a huge counter-blow when *Nature* published research which stated that their reviewers had identified an average of 4 errors in each Wikipedia article, and 3 in each *Britannica* article.⁸ This research is now dated however, even if it keeps being cited. A more recent enquiry by Rector⁹ again compared Wikipedia with entries from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and also from *The Dictionary of American History* and *American National Biography Online*. The results revealed that the overall accuracy rate of Wikipedia was 80% against 95-96% in the other two. Furthermore, unattributed direct quotations and verbatim text were found in Wikipedia, suggesting that the average level of the articles can be very variable.

Notwithstanding all criticisms intrinsic to its structure, over the years Wikipedia has been able to establish itself as a fast and easy way to access information, essentially monopolizing the role of the online encyclopedia. It even has had an asteroid named after it (officially *274301 Wikipedia*).

⁶DENNING, PETER et al. (2005). “Wikipedia risks”. In: *Communications of the ACM* – “The semantic e-business vision” 48 (12). (Dec), p. 152. URL: <http://www.csl.sri.com/users/neumann/insiderisks05.html>. (accessed 1 February 2016).

⁷AURAY, NICOLAS, CÉCILE POUDAT, and PASCAL PONS, “Democratizing Scientific Vulgarization. The Balance between Cooperation and Conflict in French Wikipedia”.

⁸GILES, JIM (2005). “Internet encyclopaedias go head to head”. In: *Nature* 438, pp. 900–901. URL: <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v438/n7070/full/438900a.html>. (accessed 9 December 2015).

⁹RECTOR, LUCY HOLMAN (2008). “Comparison of Wikipedia and other encyclopedias for accuracy, breadth, and depth in historical articles”. In: *Reference Services Review* 36 (1), pp. 7–22. URL: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/00907320810851998>. (accessed 14 January 2016).

1.1 Criticism

Instead of focusing on the common charge of unreliability, Mastrangelo and Petrucci –both Wikipedians for the Italian version and both very critical towards certain aspects of the Italian community– wrote a book on very serious issues connected with the primary position in knowledge-making acquired by Wikipedia during the years.¹⁰

The main danger for Wikipedia –according to these two authors– is not the fact that politicians, multinationals, and religious groups use it to promote themselves, white-washing the articles containing criticism and purging them of “unpleasant” truths. Also the risk of circular references/circular reporting¹¹ is not particularly high. It happened very rarely that the media reported false facts obtained from the free encyclopedia and then those facts ended up in the encyclopedia itself, corroborating those same false pieces of information. Using the authors’ words “If [the article] is reliable, the media will have reported ‘the Truth’, if it is not the media will have created ‘a truth.’” Everybody copies from Wikipedia, therefore the point is not only its reliability. The main hazard is leaving Wikipedia in the hands of an oligarchy of admins, who fiercely oppose edits contrasting with their opinions, coming from outsiders.

Mastrangelo and Petrucci’s book deals with the specific case of the Italian version of Wikipedia, but it is possible that faults may be found in the others. The admins form an oligarchy, protecting themselves against new users, applying the rules at their own discretion, forming a pool of ideas from on which the media then draw, creating a cultural hegemony based on the beliefs of a restricted group of people. Admins tweak the rules and use them for their means, so that if an admin is in the minority in a discussion,

¹⁰MASTRANGELO, EMANUELE and ENRICO PETRUCCI (2013). *Wikipedia. L’enciclopedia libera e l’egemonia dell’informazione*. Milano: Edizioni Bietti.

¹¹“In source criticism, circular reporting or false confirmation is a situation where a piece of information appears to come from multiple independent sources, but in fact is coming from only one source.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circular_reporting
Wikipedia warns its users with these words: “Do not use articles from Wikipedia as sources. Also, do not use websites that mirror Wikipedia content or publications that rely on material from Wikipedia as sources.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Verifiability#Wikipedia_and_sources_that_mirror_or_use_it

s/he states that there is no consensus for the edit, whereas if s/he is in the majority, then it is the proposer who is against the general consensus and therefore might be dealt with all the severity necessary for problematic users. This way of operating is perfectly summed up by Halfaker, Geiger, Morgan, and Riedl:¹²

Wikipedia has changed from ‘the encyclopedia that anyone can edit’ to ‘the encyclopedia that anyone who understands the norms, socializes him or herself, dodges the impersonal wall of semi-automated rejection and still wants to voluntarily contribute his or her time and energy can edit.’

The proposed solution –the only one apparently– is to enlarge the users’ constituency, in order to better reflect the plurality of the external world. Wikipedia does not work alone and the existence of a community is essential. If Wikipedia stays at the mercy of the politicized, it would become a mere medium for propaganda. If it is ruled by the nerds, it will be flooded by bureaucracy, unintelligible by outsiders. If it becomes the arm of the intellectuals, it will eventually evolve to an old-style encyclopedia, with a editorial board controlling itself. Wikipedia influences the world outside of it –say Mastrangelo and Petrucci– and therefore it cannot be left in control of sociologically limited groups, for the sake of our liberty.

1.2 Students and Wikipedia

Studies like Head and Eisenberg’s might no longer be up-to-date in our fast-changing present (five years do seem like an eternity, if we are talking about computer-related matters); but it can still give us some insights into the reasons students steadily resort to Wikipedia even when explicitly told not to do so. It surely is true that Wikipedia “meets the needs of college students

¹²HALFAKER, AARON et al. (2012). “The Rise and Decline of an Open Collaboration System: How Wikipedia’s Reaction to Popularity Is Causing Its Decline”. In: *American Behavioral Scientist*. (Dec). URL: https://www-users.cs.umn.edu/~halfak/publications/The_Rise_and_Decline/halfaker13rise-preprint.pdf. (accessed 7 February 2016).

because it offers a mixture of coverage, currency, convenience, and comprehensibility” (the “four Cs” –as the authors call them– that the students have come to expect).¹³ As Murley¹⁴ underlines, Wikipedia is easily accessible and free to use for everybody. In addition, the more the students find what they were looking for –or at least something they find helpful– the more their belief in Wikipedia is strengthened.

An interesting point regarding students’ usage of Wikipedia is that there seems to be no major difference between the use teachers make of it and that by their pupils. A research project on Wikipedia undertaken at Liverpool Hope University (UK) and based on a sample of 133 academics and 1222 students, found widespread usage (75%) by both students and academics. In fact, the rate of Wikipedia usage found was the same for both communities, showing that they were both making large use of it.¹⁵ We could perhaps presume that teachers can make a more conscious use of Wikipedia, but since they do use it so much themselves, why do they bar it to their students? As Cann said, “If you think you can shut your students off from the influence of Wikipedia you are mistaken.”¹⁶ They will consult it any way. As found out by Trotman and Alexander in their study carried on in 2008 at the University of Otago (Dunedin, New Zealand),¹⁷ students’ use of Wikipedia rises steadily during the semester, with peaks during examination sessions (see Figure 1.1, taken from Trotman et al. 2009). The average time spent on an article is

¹³HEAD, ALISON J. and MICHAEL B. EISENBERG (2010). “How today’s college students use Wikipedia for course-related research”. In: *First Monday* 15.3. URL: <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/rt/prINTERfriendly/2830/2476>. (accessed 11 December 2015).

¹⁴MURLEY, DIANE (2008). “In defense of Wikipedia”. In: *Law Library Journal* 100.3. URL: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1122602. (accessed 14 January 2016).

¹⁵KNIGHT, CHARLES and SAM PRYKE (2012). “Wikipedia and the University, a case study”. In: *Teaching in Higher Education* 17.6, pp. 649–659. URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13562517.2012.666734>. (accessed 11 December 2015).

¹⁶CANN, ALAN (2008). *Assessment 2.0: Wikipedia writing projects*. URL: http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/Resources/Cann_CS_Web2-0.pdf. (not available online anymore at the time of writing).

¹⁷TROTMAN, ANDREW and DAVID ALEXANDER (2009). *University Student Use of the Wikipedia*. URL: <http://www.cs.otago.ac.nz/homepages/andrew/papers/2009-11.pdf>. (accessed 14 January 2016).

about one minute and a half, which tells us they do not study it but simply use it as an aid to sorting out difficult subjects, or as a starting-point overview of a new chapter. All this notwithstanding the fact they are usually told not to use it at all.

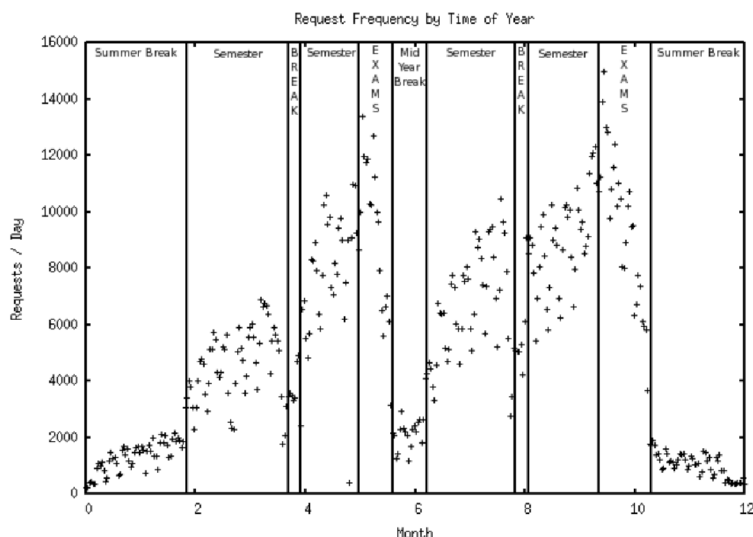


Figure 1.1: *Students' access to Wikipedia by date (Trotman et al. 2009)*

In general, as Murley points out,¹⁸ students should not cite Wikipedia in their research, and we can agree on that, considering that in fact they should not cite any kind of encyclopedia at all, since encyclopedias are not meant for that purpose. Wikipedia, just like any other encyclopedia, is great as a reference source and a starting point for new research but is not mature enough to sustain the burden of complete coverage of a subject. From there students can start their research, looking for more authoritative texts to consult and moving onto those once they have found them, or simply use the articles as brief recaps of irksome subjects.

Therefore it would probably be wiser to acknowledge the usage of this medium and start working in a way that permits students to learn a better method of making use of this powerful resource.

¹⁸MURLEY, DIANE, "In defense of Wikipedia".

1.3 Academia and Wikipedia

Using an apt metaphor, Konieczny has portrayed how Wikipedia was once seen by academics “as a barbarian invading the ivory tower.”¹⁹ This actually still holds true, even though more and more scholars have started to realize that it can also be used well and even sometimes become an effective teaching tool.

But why does the academic world mostly avoid it, even when not openly criticizing it? Maybe it distrusts the open and collective structure of a wiki, that redirects the traditional power-knowledge binomial into different, non-authoritative directions (with “authoritative” meaning not under the control of a designated authority).²⁰ Or maybe researchers simply do not feel like contributing to some article where they would have to deal with non-academic users. In some respect, it is quite interesting what a research conducted by Occhipinti²¹ found out. It shows that expert contributors are only a tiny fraction of the total number of users editing the encyclopedia. This, at least, is the case for the scientific articles of the Italian language Wikipedia taken into consideration by Occhipinti in her study. Nonetheless, it is a plausible and expectable outcome. According to her work, the scientific community only intervenes in articles its members already find solid. They don’t often decide to contribute, and when they do they try to avoid altercations with other users –for example working on pseudo-scientific articles– and prefer editing more reliable ones. In this way, the result is the creation of scientific articles written with the scientific community in mind. Scientists contribute but talk to themselves, without paying attention to everyday readers, who are

¹⁹KONIECZNY, PIOTR (2012). “Wikis and Wikipedia as a teaching tool”. In: *First Monday* 17.9. URL: <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3583/3313>. (accessed 11 December 2015).

²⁰FOUNTAIN, RENEE (2005). “Wiki pedagogy”. In: *Dossiers technopédagogiques*, pp. 319–325. URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20120706144036/http://www.profetic.org/dossiers/dossier_imprimer.php3?id_rubrique=110. (still retrievable thanks to the Internet Archive, accessed 11 December 2015).

²¹OCCHIPINTI, RITA (2015). “La partecipazione degli esperti alla produzione collettiva di conoscenza: il caso Wikipedia”. Master thesis. Trieste: Scuola Internazionale Superiore di Studi Avanzati. URL: <http://urania.sissa.it/xmlui/handle/1963/34783>. (accessed 9 December 2015).

not taken into consideration during their editing phase and therefore might find it hard to understand their articles.

Apparently though, as portrayed in a survey by Chesney²² on fifty-five academics, experts rate articles higher in the credibility scale than non-experts. Therefore we would think that since people from academia trust Wikipedia more, they would contribute more, but as we have seen, this is not the case. In their defence, it must be said that most standard systems for research assessment do not take publications in open platforms like Wikipedia into account, as has been stressed by some researchers.²³ This lack of formal incentives might also explain the small amount of active contributions to Wikipedia editing by university members.

And yet there are authors like Callis et al.²⁴ who –as part of a graduate seminar– have improved some articles within their scope of study (in this particular case it was ecology). The participants at the seminar found the activity to be, using Callis’ own words: “rewarding, similar in scope and time commitment to writing a more traditional term paper and extremely valuable as an exercise in critical thinking and communication skills.” They recognize that there are only limited time and professional incentives to work on Wikipedia, and that public recognition is virtually non-existent, but they believe in its importance for reaching people outside academia. Exactly as we are trying to demonstrate with this work, Callis suggests that a good way of doing so is by incorporating revision of Wikipedia articles “into undergraduate and graduate courses, the service activities of student organizations, laboratory meetings, extension programs and the annual meetings of professional societies.” In her words, it could even become part of publishing articles in peer-reviewed journals. And, we add, of the students’ final thesis.

²²CHESNEY, THOMAS (2006). “An empirical examination of Wikipedia’s credibility”. In: *First Monday* 11.11. URL: <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1413/1331>. (accessed 11 January 2016).

²³MESEGUER-ARTOLA, ANTONI et al. (2015). “Factors that influence the teaching use of Wikipedia in higher education”. In: *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*. URL: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/asi.23488/full>. (accessed 10 December 2015).

²⁴CALLIS, CHRISTINE L. et al. (2009). “Improving Wikipedia: educational opportunity and professional responsibility”. In: *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 24 (4), pp. 177–179.

Besides contributions to Wikipedia by the academic world, what is also interesting are the studies that show how Wikipedia is used in education. According to a survey carried on in 2015 by Aibar²⁵, scholars are frequent users of Wikipedia but prefer not to talk about it. They do not recommend its use to their students and even less to their colleagues, who are believed not to use it as much as they appear to do, according to the same survey. Actually, other studies (e.g. Meishar-Tal's survey of school teachers in Israel²⁶) tell us that many teachers deny consulting Wikipedia regularly, even though cross-questioning reveals the opposite. This is probably because, using Aibar's own words, "Wikipedia seems to be for academics what porn is for polite dinner conversations." In fact, as revealed by Mesequer-Artola²⁷, colleagues' perceived opinion of Wikipedia is what mainly adversely affects the idea of using it for teaching purposes. All in all, colleagues are strong role models for most faculty members and their supposed opinions can make others keep a low profile.

"Academics are trapped in this paradox of using Wikipedia but not contributing," says Dario Taraborelli, a research analyst for the Wikimedia Foundation.²⁸ They lament the fact that their efforts would not be recognized, since contributions are anonymous and scholars cannot cite themselves (no self-citing is one of the main rules of Wikipedia, in order to avoid self-promotion). Also, they fear their contributions can be wiped off at any time by any teenaged passer-by who believes s/he knows best. And in case of disagreements or even edit wars, the last word goes to the community and its discussions: academic importance of users is virtually non-existent among Wikipedians.

Unluckily, universities don't realize that it is exactly among their mem-

²⁵AIBAR, EDUARD (2015). *Wikipedia, Science, and Academia*. Presentation. IN³ (Internet Interdisciplinary Institute), Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/10609/44162>. (accessed 9 December 2015).

²⁶MEISHAR-TAL, HAGIT (2015). "Teachers' use of Wikipedia with their Students". In: *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* 40.12, pp. 126–140. URL: <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol40/iss12/9>. (accessed 9 December 2015).

²⁷MESEGUER-ARTOLA, ANTONI et al., "Factors that influence the teaching use of Wikipedia in higher education".

²⁸<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/mar/29/wikipedia-survey-academic-contributions> (accessed 11 January 2016)

bers that one can find the best suited people to improving the quality of the encyclopedia whose many flaws they lament. Are not universities places where knowledge is created? Should not it be freely and easily accessible to anyone? After all, as Andrea Zanni from Wikimedia Italia reminds us: “If something is missing from Wikipedia, it’s your fault. [...] If you notice an article that you don’t like, that is wrong and you understand it is since you have the right knowledge to judge it but still don’t decide to improve it, then it is your fault and not Wikipedia’s.”²⁹ Wikipedia potential would be enormous, if only it could rely on content systematically being created in colleges and universities.

²⁹<http://www.conversomag.com/wikipedia-intervista-andrea-zanni> Italian interview by Anna Ferri (accessed 11 December 2015)

Chapter 2

The student - teacher - Wikipedia triangle

Notwithstanding all the difficulties one will inevitably encounter embarking upon a project with students having to edit Wikipedia, the advantages of such an activity taken as complementary to a university course deserve our attention.

For sure the teacher who is responsible for the course will need to invest a larger amount of his/her time than usual in order to accurately prepare the timetable and the content of the weekly activities. This is particularly true when, as is most likely, none of the students has ever had any direct experience of contributing to Wikipedia. And of course it is especially the case when this is the first time for the teacher as well. In this last scenario it is advised that s/he contact a Wikimedia volunteer before the beginning of the course in order to have a tutor to contact in case help is needed. This will make teaching easier to handle and less time-consuming, at least during the planning stage. The teacher's program will get polished and adapted to change, while the students learn and get used to the encyclopedia.

Once a first class has been held, other teachers of the same institution should consider activating similar projects because the students will have acquired the know-how and the confidence needed to work with the new medium. The best thing for a teacher to do would be to replicate a similar

pattern in all his/her classes throughout the years of the degree, so that first-year student learn the basics, second-years students can dive deeper into the subject, and third-year student will be able to tackle more demanding tasks.

Some problems will most likely emerge and we will deal with those further on in this study. This chapter will instead focus on the positive aspects that working on Wikipedia in class will bring to all the members of an ideal relationship triangle: the students, the teacher, and Wikipedia itself.

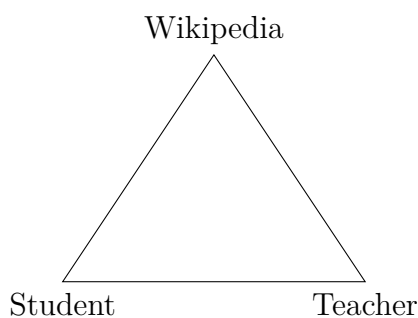


Figure 2.1: *The triangle.*

Before moving on to a description of the three vertices, let's take a look at Figure 2.1. Both teacher and student can directly contribute to Wikipedia, without mediation. Furthermore, the teacher might give the students some assignment to perform, and will therefore contribute through the hand of his/her students. It is also possible that the students ask the teacher for some help, in this way making an edit thanks to his/her help.

Furthermore, the benefits coming from Wikipedia might go straight to the students or to the teacher, as their editing capabilities progress, or reach the teacher as a consequence of what the students assimilate from Wikipedia as well as *vice versa*, when something learnt by the teacher then reveals itself as useful for her/his students.

2.1 Students

From the point of view of this project, students play the most important role. After all, they are the center of the educational effort, and before beginning

his/her course a teacher should always have them in mind. All the course, from the subject to the method, should be planned around those who will be attending it. Of course, it cannot be personally addressed to every single one of the students, but nonetheless it is around them that things will revolve.

Of course the results will never be the same for everyone, not even for two members of the same class. There are, however, some benefits coming from working on Wikipedia that are probably common to all possible activities, or at least most of them. Needless to say the mileage might vary, depending on how the class-group works, their skills, the ability of the teacher, the objectives of the project, the time at disposal, and many other variables.

One thing that students will surely learn is how to become active members and critics of the Wikipedia community, as well of the community at large. Using the words of Sample:

A key point of collaborative construction is that the students are not merely making something for themselves or for their professor. They are making it for each other, and, in the best scenarios, for the outside world. Collaborative construction obliterates that insular sense of audience inherent in more conventional student assignments. [...] Creative analysis is the practice of discovering knowledge through the act of creation — through the making of something new. Rather than having students write papers [...] I ask the students to do something they find severely discomfiting: creating something new for which no models exist.¹

For Sample, “collaborative construction” means that students are more motivated to write something they know will be read (and proof-checked) by thousands of people, than they would be producing a paper which in the best case scenario only their teacher will read. “Creative analysis” on the other hand, means creating something unusual. Instead of the old-fashioned Power Point presentation or a paper to print out and hand in, students have

¹SAMPLE, MARK (2012). *Building and Sharing (When You’re Supposed to be Teaching)*. URL: <http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-1/building-and-sharing-when-youre-supposed-to-be-teaching-by-mark-sample/>. (accessed 19 January 2016).

the opportunity to create a page with virtually never-ending possibilities of interlinks and hyper-links, containing audio, video, images, and much more. It's something they can plan out the way they want, without space constraints. In doing this, students learn how to collaborate with other students and also with scholars from other countries, accepting feedback (hopefully constructive feedback), and becoming able to recognize their mistakes and inaccuracies (both technical and theoretical), and learn how to intervene and correct themselves.

From a more practical point of view, students learn how to discriminate between reliable sources and the huge amount of less reliable ones, and at the same time learn how to cite them correctly. They actually learn how to consult their sources properly, and acquire the ability to create a reading list which will be adequate for their research. They become familiar with archives found in the university libraries, as well as online-retrievable articles, which might be open-access or only accessible on payment of a fee (which may be free for users with university credentials). All is done in public, and the student's research is available world-wide. This has been proved to drive students to make their work as accurate as possible, without leaving facts unchecked and avoiding plagiarism.²

It should not be forgotten that if the project is written up in a foreign language –as is the case with, for example, a Wikipedia translation project– the students improve their communication capabilities and expand their L2 lexicon, especially as regards terminology related to their field of research and the subject of the course.

Indeed students may also improve their mastery of their mother tongue. As Nix³ noticed, when a student publishes a poorly-written article, flags ap-

²GRAY, BRENNAN CLARKE (2011). *Learning (and Making Mistakes) in Public: The Pedagogy of Using Wikipedia in the Classroom*. 80th Congress of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton. URL: https://www.academia.edu/10605740/Learning_and_Making_Mistakes_in_Public_The_Pedagogy_of_Using_Wikipedia_in_the_Classroom. (accessed 7 February 2016).

³NIX, ELIZABETH M. (2010). "Wikipedia: How it works and how it can work for you". In: *The History Teacher* 43.2 (Feb). Society for History Education, pp. 259–264. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40543291>. (accessed 9 December 2015).

pear warning “This article or section needs copy editing for grammar, style, cohesion, tone or spelling.” This comment helped her answer her student’s complaint “But why do you count off for my writing?! This isn’t an English class!” Wikipedia emphasizes the importance of all these elements in establishing credibility. And students learn that it is not simply what you say, but how you say it, that is important.

As a last remark, it should be noted that continuous assessment –i.e. new short tasks to perform every week– helps students with the steep learning curve encountered at the beginning of a Wikipedia project, but it also helps avoid writing a whole concluding essay the last remaining days of class, a practice which results in most cases in a piece written in haste without enough time to go back and check it for errors.

2.2 Teacher

All that has been previously said under the “Student” section, can in a way be referred to the teacher. In fact, s/he can claim at least part of the merit (and especially the satisfaction) of having thought his/her students all that. Besides this, the teacher motivates his/her pupils showing them how their work will be (and actually is being) read by others.⁴

If this were not enough, the teacher will become conscious of having contributed to the creation of useful material for his/her field of study (supposedly quality material), that can be re-used in future by him-/herself, by other colleagues, or even by the students of his/her own course, or from other universities.

From a more general point of view, a Wikipedia-related project can be seen as a contribution to the academic world, because students writing articles can cite recent research, available in very specialistic sources not present in every common public library, to which a user contributing from outside

⁴It is interesting to read the reflections on the use of Wikipedia in a university course written by a teacher from the University of British Columbia, who asked his students to write articles related to the course subject, Latin American literature: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Jbmurray/Madness>

the university world might not have access. Quality research by scholars who don't get contracts with big publishing houses can be used as well, as niche publications can be more easily found in university libraries, than in a private library.

Lastly, but not to be overlooked, working week by week on Wikipedia means that the teacher does not receive a pile of student homework to correct a few days before the final exam, or even as part of the exam itself, hurriedly, a practice which is of little use to the student. It is already rare enough that a student takes in his/her hands and revises his/her paper, even more rarely s/he looks at the notes made by the professor. Students cannot be blamed for acting this way: since they will not be able to intervene further: it is obvious that they will pay attention only to the final mark.

2.3 Wikipedia

We have been focusing on the two items at the bottom of the triangle, but also the apex gains something from this kind of activity. Wikipedia is not only the platform on which the project is hosted, it is also the final recipient of all the content created. In fact, what Wikipedia mainly gains is a quantity of well-written articles from a university course. They are created by –or at least their creation is supervised by– experts in those areas. This of course helps debunk the myth of Wikipedia as a non-reliable source of knowledge. If more and more articles were written by people in academia, there will be much more “featured” content at the disposal of humanity. In case of enhanced articles, these are enriched by new quotes from recent sources, with newly available data and latest theories in circulation.

Secondly, the encyclopedia gains a huge number of users. Many of these will probably stop editing Wikipedia the second after their class is over, but they have all received training and know well the rules of the site and how it works. All the students are registered on the website and are therefore potentially future active users, who might decide to continue writing articles on what interests them during the years to come.

Furthermore, as Auray, Poudat, and Pons⁵ have demonstrated, registered users make contributions with a higher rate of survivability than unregistered (IP) users. Auray et al. believed previous studies were based on too exiguous corpora, and therefore “extracted the complete database of the edits done on the French encyclopedia since its beginning (March 2001)” on 4 April 2006. They studied a database containing the complete history of all the edits. In this database, “each revision is associated with an author (login or IP address), a timestamp and the contribution of each author to every page by the number of distinct contributions, the number of inserted, deleted and moved characters, the number of the characters remaining in the final version and the number of reversions done.”

For the top 100 members of the French version of Wikipedia taken into consideration by their study, Auray et al. found that 78.68% of all characters inserted remained (what they call “resistant characters”). For the IP editors, this figure was less than 50%.

	% of IP users	% of registered users	% of bots
Semi-protected articles	49.29%	46.25%	4.36%
The database as a whole	19.35%	65.22%	15.43%
Quality articles	35.64%	54.65%	9.71%

Figure 2.2: *Passer-by contributors are over-represented in the controversial articles.*

Moreover, IP users (or “passer-by contributors”) appeared to be usually more involved in the redaction of controversial articles, such as the “semi-protected articles”, which are articles edited often and heavily (when not vandalized), with disputes among the users about the content. As can be seen in Figure 2.2, also taken from Auray et al. (2007), normally this is not the case with registered users.

What is more, registered users often provide minor and formal corrections in addition to inserting new content, whereas unregistered users usually have

⁵AURAY, NICOLAS, CÉCILE POUDAT, and PASCAL PONS, “Democratizing Scientific Vulgarization. The Balance between Cooperation and Conflict in French Wikipedia”.

a predilection for creating and producing new content.⁶ They have something they want to add, and they simply do it, without much technical knowledge of how the website works. Their contributions can sometimes be better than those of registered users, as Anthony, Smith, and Williamson found.⁷ These anonymous users are called by Anthony et al. “good Samaritans.” Since they are just passer-by users, they usually do not feel confident enough in correcting other people’s work, nor are they willing to undertake structural reforms. Probably they do not even care much if they spot small mistakes while wandering around on the encyclopedia; they probably believe it is someone else’s duty to do the “dirty job”.

	number of inserted characters	number of contributions	average number of characters per insertion
Top 100	167 670 072	412 961	40 601.91
Registered users	1 259 942 753	3 590 426	35 091.73
IP users	373 619 816	422 874	88 352.51

Figure 2.3: Average number of characters per insertion for each class of contributors.

On the contrary, as can be seen in Figure 2.3 –taken as well from Auray et al. (2007)– the average number of characters for each contribution in registered users (the “Zealots”, using again Anthony et al.’s terminology) is about half that of IP users. This rises a bit if we consider the kernel activists, meaning those who accept this extra burden of keeping the encyclopedia tidy and orderly, instead of focusing only on the content of the articles.

⁶AURAY, NICOLAS, CÉCILE POUDAT, and PASCAL PONS, “Democratizing Scientific Vulgarization. The Balance between Cooperation and Conflict in French Wikipedia”.

⁷ANTHONY, DENISE, SEAN W. SMITH, and TIM WILLIAMSON (2007). *The Quality of Open Source Production: Zealots and Good Samaritans in the Case of Wikipedia*. (Technical Report TR2007-606). Department of Computer Science, Dartmouth College. URL: <http://www.cs.dartmouth.edu/reports/TR2007-606.pdf>. (accessed 28 January 2016).

Chapter 3

Possible activities

This chapter will be entirely devoted to outlining the possibilities available to teachers wishing to create projects that can be integrated into a university course. Most of what follows need not necessarily be conducted in an academic context. In fact, a high-school class might work on them with almost the same level of proficiency. “Start them young” is always a good credo, although it is probable that students in their last year at university can be more easily directed creating useful content, since they have already had many years of education and are –one hopes– able to do research and write about it well and using the correct scholarly conventions and terminology.

3.1 Writing new articles

Creating a new article from scratch is probably the easiest activity to integrate into a course. Once the subject is chosen (either directly by the student or assigned by the teacher), the user needs only know how to structure an article well, and possibly how to write using a style suitable for an encyclopedia. S/he does not have to deal with other users’ previous work, nor to interact with the community, at least not until s/he gets out of the sandbox or asks for help. It is probably the best case scenario for a numerous class: it is of course the simplest way to be sure all students begin at the same level of difficulty, individual progress is easy to follow, and evaluation of stu-

dents should be quite straightforward (depending on how much attention their articles get from others).

3.1.1 Expanding stubs

A stub is an article on Wikipedia which has been created –usually some time previously– but only contains a few lines of information. It has not yet reached the status of real article, usually contains few or no sources and is all in all missing a lot of content. Working with stubs has all the positive aspects of working with new articles, plus one major advantage: the stub exists already and has been in existence for a while. Why is this important? Well, the problem of creating a new article is that it must comply with Wikipedia’s guidelines (I cannot create a page about myself, for example, since I am not a notable person). A stub which has not been deleted by some user means that it is deemed useful, and its presence on the encyclopedia will probably not be questioned in the future.

3.1.2 Translating articles

Since every single item on Wikipedia is original and/or published under a Creative Commons licence¹ or compatible, one could decide to translate an article from one language to another without incurring in any copyright infringement. It should be remembered that it is best way to translate from a foreign language to the student’s mother tongue, but if the necessary precautions are taken, also the opposite activity could be useful. Translating the article about one’s country to English will make it accessible to a much larger readership worldwide. Even better than a merely literal translation would be a culturally-relevant activity in which the original article is expanded and adapted to suit the receiving language’s readers. As Pfeil, Zaphiris, and Ang demonstrated,² users from different versions of the encyclopedia have differ-

¹Specifically, Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike (CC BY-SA).

²PFEIL, ULRIKE, PANAYIOTIS ZAPHIRIS, and CHEE SIANG ANG (2006). “Cultural Differences in Collaborative Authoring of Wikipedia”. In: *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (1), pp. 88–113. URL: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00316.x/pdf>. (accessed 30 January 2016).

ent approaches when editing articles, and a foreigner should consider this when editing another language version of Wikipedia.

3.2 Enhancing existing articles

As Lih³ has showed, quantitative analysis of Wikipedia reveals that there is constant improvement in the “rigor” and “diversity” of its articles. Lih’s research indicates that change is more abrupt after an article gets cited in the news, but it is something that in any case keeps happening one time, only less suddenly. In fact, rigor (the total number of edits for an article) and diversity (the total number of unique users editing it) cannot technically decrease over time, whereas more editing cycles and more editors mean presumably better articles. This is something also confirmed by Wilkinson and Huberman’s research.⁴ In their study, they underline the fact that large collaborations tend to fail or at least achieve ambiguous results as the size of the participants increases, while for Wikipedia the quality of the articles keeps growing as the users do and therefore their edits become more numerous and usually beneficial. Wilkinson and Huberman’s very technical study can be summarized with their own words: “edits beget edits”. The greater the interest in a certain topic or the more relevant it is felt to be, the more quickly related articles will improve.

Working on existing articles is therefore much more important than creating new ones, even though it is surely more difficult, especially for newbies. Users must deal themselves with existing material which they cannot simply erase in order to start anew. Other members of the Wikipedia community might keep an eye on articles they are interested in or articles they have contributed to and intervene when a new user starts “messing” with it. Some-

³LIH, ANDREW (2004). “Wikipedia as Participatory Journalism: Reliable Sources? Metrics for evaluating collaborative media as a news resource”. In: *Proceedings of the 5th International Symposium on Online Journalism*. held at the University of Texas at Austin (16–17 April). URL: <http://www.ufrgs.br/limc/participativo/pdf/wikipedia.pdf>. (accessed 9 January 2016).

⁴WILKINSON, DENNIS M. and BERNARDO A. HUBERMAN (2007). *Assessing the Value of Cooperation in Wikipedia*. arXiv.org. URL: <http://arxiv.org/pdf/cs/0702140v1.pdf>. (accessed 14 January 2016).

times the article needs radical re-structuring or even complete rewriting. As a last remark, it should be noted that it is not easy to evaluate work done on existing articles, especially if many other users work on it at the same time as the student.

3.2.1 Sources (“Citation needed”)

Sometimes existing articles lack citations and bibliography. Teaching students to consult sources correctly and cite them is vital for their academic life and Wikipedia can be a wonderful training ground for this. By correcting errors and false attributions articles will gain credibility and readers will have access to a list of books treating a certain subject. Universities have access to recent volumes and articles (often quite expensive ones) and can therefore render a good service to the scholarly world by citing these.

3.2.2 External links and wikilinks

Links to external websites and internal links to other Wikipedia articles are both fundamental paths to exploring a subject deeply. Researchers and students alike are usually aware of important information sources such as archives or databases which could be profitably linked to relevant articles of the free encyclopedia.

3.2.3 Images, videos and more

In the white simplicity of a Wikipedia article images add a nice touch of color. A biography looks much more complete if there is a portrait of the person; a battle becomes more vivid if it is accompanied by a famous painting of it; scans of an old illuminated manuscript reveal all the beauty accompanying the text; and pictures of historic buildings offer an immediate way of understanding detailed architectural description. Also graphs, maps, plots and similar explanatory materials can be useful for comprehending an article’s content. Videos can be even more telling, but in most cases at least they are limited by copyright. Those which are not are usually in the public domain

since they were filmed quite a long time ago. A useful activity could be the creation or translation of subtitles of videos already existing in Commons.

There is no doubt that the main problem in working with media is copyright. Many works of art can be reproduced for didactic purposes claiming "fair use", but usually this is not the case of photography. The same problem can be encountered when scanning a recent book, for example, with "recent" meaning "still under copyright" (this can simply be a new edition of an old classic). To make things even more complicated copyright practice varies from country to country, since legislation is different in each. Of course if a contributor creates the content him-/herself, s/he can then release it under an open license and make it freely accessible to everyone.

3.2.4 Audio

Besides uploading audio samples of classical music either of the first wax recordings, or of famous speeches, or even of the correct pronunciation of proper names and so on, which I would take to pertain to the previous section, what "audio" means here is reading of the articles. Many featured articles have embedded audios made by a user who reads the latest revision of it, making it accessible also to the sight impaired. The problem with this kind of activity is to obtain a good-quality recording –possibly with standard pronunciation– of an article which is considered of high level. A so-called "featured article" would probably be the best choice. Featured articles are Wikipedia's very best: they are well-written, reliable, neutral. They include images or other media, respect Wikipedia's recommended structure and are of an appropriate length.⁵

3.3 Working on sister projects

Another relatively easy way to contribute to the improvement of Wikipedia is by searching Commons for useful materials to be inserted into the articles.

⁵See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Featured_articles for more information.

The same can be said for Wikisource: finding the text of an author and linking it to his/her page helps connect a range of materials around the encyclopedia. A direct consequence of this kind of work would be being able to upload the material in the first place, releasing it under a Creative Commons licence. Looking around for freely usable images or creating them and then making it available to everyone else. Scanning and digitizing ancient books from libraries and then sharing them on Wikisource can be very useful for the growth of the encyclopedia.

Without lingering more on this section, which is perhaps of greater interest to an art academy or a design faculty than for the students we have worked with, I should recall also two other interesting projects: Wikibooks and Wikitravels. The first aims at creating free school books, which could also be tailored for specific university needs. The second instead focuses on creating travel guides, which can be a good activity for language classes, especially when working with a teacher coming from the same country of the guide being written.

Chapter 4

Encouraging and discouraging factors for contribution

Maintaining Wikipedia is not a simple task. It is a time-consuming job that requires attention and a lot of dedication, especially considering that in most cases the work is unpaid. One can have a hard time trying to figure out what are the reasons lying behind the contributions to the free encyclopedia. Kuznetsov sums up these doubts in the following way:

Wikipedians must ensure that all information is correct, unbiased and comprehensive. Their work is often anonymous, their time is unpaid, and their edits are impermanent. What motivates these people to contribute effort and time to the Wikipedia project, and what role does Wikipedia play in fostering these motivations?¹

The question Kuznetsov poses is interesting and in fact many other scholars have tried to answer it over the last decade. Understanding the motivations of Wikipedians is crucial, since the content of the encyclopedia is created by volunteers and it relies on them to keep expanding and improving.

¹KUZNETSOV, STACEY (2006). “Motivations of contributors to Wikipedia”. In: *ACM SIGCAS Computers and Society* 36.1 (2). (June). URL: <http://staceyk.org/personal/WikipediaMotivations.pdf>. (accessed 12 January 2016).

Nov² is one of the first researchers to investigate why Wikipedia users volunteer their knowledge and time knowing that they will not receive any monetary reward. When approaching this study, one should consider that Wikipedia has been in existence for a few years. Nov himself says his sample of 370 randomly-chosen users (of which only 171 gave valid replies) came from the full list of contributors of the English Wikipedia, back then amounting at 2,847 total users. Even without knowing that today the number of users have grown to 27,301,523 (of whom 119,666 have edited in the last thirty days)³ one can easily understand that times have now changed, so that the reasons behind users' motivation could be different now. Bearing that in mind, there are a few things worth mentioning that may still be considered valid nowadays.

The top motivations found by Nov were Fun and Ideology. Ideology did not however show an exact correlation with the contribution level (measured in hours per day). This could mean that people with strong ideological opinions are also devoted to other open source projects, spending less time on Wikipedia alone –speculates the author– or that their expectations do not always translate into actual behavior. Nov also found that Enhancement, Fun, and Protective motivations seem to improve with age. Enhancement serves the ego of the contributor, makes him feel important and exhibit his/her knowledge. Fun is self-explanatory, while Protective means the user contributes in order to eliminate negative feelings, such as the sense of guilt for knowing something others do not. Apparently –at least according to Nov's research– the older the users are, the higher their motivation. Another thing that was found with this questionnaire was that apparently on average women contribute more, but at the time women represented only 7,3% of the respondents and therefore we cannot trust this finding completely.

²Nov, ODED (2007). “What motivates Wikipedians?” In: *Communications of the ACM* 50 (11). (Nov), pp. 60–64. URL: http://faculty.poly.edu/~onov/Nov_Wikipedia_motivations.pdf. (accessed 22 January 2016).

³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedians#Number_of_editors (accessed 22 January 2016).

A few years before, between 2004 and 2005, an even smaller study had been performed by Forte and Bruckman⁴. Their study was based on two rounds of interviews, which reached only nine and thirteen people respectively. As can be seen, a huge problem with Wikipedia-based studies is the small scale of projects, which renders their findings not completely reliable for statistical purposes. In this case, the many years that have passed make the data even less reliable, because Wikipedia has expanded so much and its user composition has changed a lot. Nonetheless, this is the data we have at our disposal at the moment and it is with this that we are going to have to deal. Forte and Bruckman’s study might not be perfect for statistical purposes, but we can still extract from it some useful piece of information from their work.

For instance, they compared the incentive system that motivates contributions to Wikipedia to the incentive system typical of the scientific community. These two resemble each other in some ways but differ in others. Most notably, they stressed the indirect attribution of authorship for Wikipedia contributors. Unlike traditional scientific contributors, Wikipedia authors cannot claim ownership of the articles they write, mainly because as time passes it becomes more and more the result of a collaborative effort and not the work of a single individual. But it is true that checking the edit history of a page one can easily find out who started the article and who contributed most to it. Furthermore, Wikipedians usually create elaborate résumés of their work for the encyclopedia on their user pages, therefore clearly claiming recognition for it. The most active members of Wikipedia gain credibility among their peers for their involvement and might access administrator roles thanks to their votes, which is surely a factor of further motivation for them. Forte and Bruckman’s work might seem dated, but their results still hold up nowadays.

⁴FORTE, ANDREA and AMY BRUCKMAN (2008). “Why Do People Write for Wikipedia? Incentives to Contribute to Open-Content Publishing”. In: *Proceedings of 41st Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS)*, pp. 1–11. URL: <http://www.andreaforte.net/ForteBruckmanWhyPeopleWrite.pdf>. (accessed 11 January 2016).

Another limited study we want to take into consideration is that by Schroer and Hertel⁵. Their study is founded on a web-based questionnaire administered to 106 participants chosen from among the members of the German Wikipedia. We say their research is limited because of the relatively small size of the sample, but most importantly because the participants were all deeply involved members of the encyclopedia. They spent on average 133 minutes on the website per day, and more than one-third of them (37% to be precise) were administrators. We cannot therefore expect their findings to be valid for more occasional contributors.

What Schroer and Hertel found was that Wikipedians evaluated their satisfaction in working for Wikipedia taking into account various factors. For example, talking of costs and benefits, the reported engagement was negative. But, somewhat surprisingly, users demonstrated high tolerance to the lack of external incentives for contributing. The motives most frequently reported by the interviewees as important were task enjoyment, information sharing, and working for the benefit of others in the future (i.e. “generativity” motives). Intrinsic motivation played the major role in engagement, whereas the feedback received from others did not appear too negative as regards the overall experience.

Rafaeli and Ariel⁶, on the other hand, believe that what drives people to contribute to Wikipedia is the users’ strong sense of community. The fact that users call themselves “Wikipedians” is already revealing. In fact, it is true that there are many opportunities for participating in the social structure of the encyclopedia. Besides editing the articles, there are talk pages on every one of them. One can also hold a conversation on a user’s personal page, at the “help desk” or even at the “Teahouse.”⁷ There are also

⁵SCHROER, JOACHIM and GUIDO HERTEL (2007). “Voluntary Engagement in an Open Web-Based Encyclopedia: Wikipedians and Why They Do It”. In: *Media Psychology* 12 (1), pp. 96–120. URL: https://www.academia.edu/17338024/Voluntary_Engagement_in_an_Open_Web-Based_Encyclopedia_Wikipedians_and_Why_They_Do_It. (accessed 24 January 2016).

⁶RAFAELI, SHEIZAF and YARON ARIEL, “Online Motivational Factors: Incentives for Participation and Contribution in Wikipedia”.

⁷The Teahouse is “an area specifically for new users to get help with editing, article creation, and general Wikipedia use, in a friendly environment.” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Teahouse>

discussions for organizing fund-raising events or changing the editing rules. Project pages have users discussing and so do the proposals for articles to be placed on the main page. What Rafaeli and Ariel suggest is that this community-based interaction is at the basis of Wikipedia's long-running and unexpected success.

What is also interesting, is their proposal for examining Wikipedians' participation. They suggest that we take into consideration several points, contrasting the following perspectives:

1. professional versus non-professional participation;
2. constructive, confrontational, and vandalistic participation;
3. continuous versus one-time participation;
4. anonymous versus identifiable participation;
5. content contribution, community involvement, and (silent) participation in the form of lurking.

Another study on how motivation affects individual knowledge-sharing behavior in Wikipedia has been recently carried out by Yang and Lai.⁸ They too encountered many difficulties in obtaining a large starting sample. Nonetheless, they found out that –at least for their interviewees– internal self-concept-based motivation (i.e. the importance of making something that gives a sense of achievement) is the most important motivation for knowledge sharing in Wikipedia. External self-concept-based motivation (i.e. the need for public recognition and approval) on the other hand is not related to sharing knowledge in a significant way, probably –the authors hypothesize– because it is not easy to create bonds in the real world simply by contributing to Wikipedia. Furthermore, the questionnaires revealed that intrinsic motivation (i.e. the pleasure of helping sharing one's knowledge with others) has no real impact on a user's willingness to contribute to Wikipedia.

⁸YANG, HENG-LI and CHENG-YU LAI (2010). "Motivations of Wikipedia content contributors". In: *Computers in Human Behavior* 26 (6), pp. 1377–1383. URL: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563210000877>. (accessed 22 January 2016).

Yang and Lai’s study is a perfect example of how difficult it can be to perform a survey contacting Wikipedians directly. They randomly selected 2000 members of the English Wikipedia with user pages, who were then contacted by email. Inside each email there was a link to access the online survey questionnaire. The problem was that of the 2000, 1157 emails were not delivered because the email addresses were not valid, or because the users had chosen not to receive emails from others. Out of the remaining 843 members with valid email addresses, only 235 responded after having received a reminder two weeks later. In the end, after four weeks had passed, sixteen questionnaires were found to be incomplete and therefore invalid, leaving a total of 219 complete interviews. Automated computer-aided surveys can probably be much more effective in evaluating how a user interacts with Wikipedia, but unluckily old-fashioned questionnaires are the only direct means we have for investigating personal point of views on subjects like motivation.

A really wide range of respondents has been obtained by the first global Wikipedia Survey. Glott, Schidt. and Ghosh published in 2010 a complete overview of the results, stating to report 176,192 cases from 231 countries in the world.⁹ From the motivational point of view, the participants chose in most cases to contribute to Wikipedia because they “like the idea of sharing knowledge and want to contribute to it” (72.91%) and “saw an error [they] wanted to fix” (68.78%). Ideology also appears to be a quite strong motivational factor. Not surprisingly, if we consider that the average amount of editing time spent by the interviewees amounts at four hours a week. In fact, 37.86% of the users contribute “because [they] think information should be freely available to everyone” and 30.07% “because [they] like Wikipedia’s philosophy of openness and collaboration.” On the other hand, almost half of the respondents replied that they had never contributed because they do not think they had enough information to contribute or because they felt fine just reading Wikipedia, without editing it. Potential contributors instead ad-

⁹GLOTT, RÜDIGER, PHILIPP SCHMIDT, and RISHAB GHOSH (2010). *Wikipedia Survey-Overview of Results*. Report. United Nations University, UNU-Merit, Collaborative Creativity Group. URL: http://www.ris.org/uploadi/editor/1305050082Wikipedia_Overview_15March2010-FINAL.pdf. (accessed 10 January 2016).

mitted they would rather contribute if they knew what topics could benefit from their help (39.63%) or if they realized that other people would benefit from it (34.89%). This reveals that providing guided contribution could be a way of enlarging the active users pool, and university projects like the one we are going to talk about in the second part of this work could actually convince undecided readers to finally start editing.

4.1 Becoming contributors

In 2005 Bryant, Forte, and Bruckman conducted a series of interviews (through telephone and by email) on nine active Wikipedia members who carried out editing activity daily.¹⁰ Thanks to these conversations –which cannot be considered more than chats– they reconstructed the phases a passive user of the encyclopedia undergoes to become a fully-fledged active Wikipedian. These steps are largely still valid today, ten years later.

The first encounter with Wikipedia is usually on Google search results page. But after having become a reader of the encyclopedia, ease of editing makes it simple for a novice to become an editor. The reader therefore becomes writer. As Kuznetsov discovered through an informal survey conducted on over one hundred New York University students,¹¹ a regular reader of Wikipedia is more likely to create new content than people who rarely use it. This happens if reading the user feels s/he has something to offer, something that is still missing.

Bryant, Forte, and Bruckman continue with the first steps in contribution. Novice users usually limit themselves at correcting small mistakes. But then, at some point they might start to feel the urge to contribute in domains of personal interests and hobbies. We have therefore a gradual shift from minor article changes to drastic interventions, especially in those fields the user believes s/he is competent enough. They thus become creators.

¹⁰BRYANT, SUSAN, ANDREA FORTE, and AMY BRUCKMAN (2005). “Becoming Wikipedian: Transformation of Participation in a Collaborative Online Encyclopedia”. In: *Proceedings of GROUP: International Conference on Supporting Group Work, Sanibel Island, FL*, pp. 1–10.

¹¹KUZNETSOV, STACEY, “Motivations of contributors to Wikipedia”.

As soon as they register on the website, they get a user page. It does not matter at what point they decide to create a Wikipedia account, what is important for us is that the account gives them a nickname by which they become recognizable by the community, allowing them to maintain a consistent identity throughout their contributions. They can create a “watchlist”¹², which enables them to keep an eye on the articles of their interest and tracking their work. Moving towards more central participation they become aware of the community they join, which is what drives their everyday efforts.

This gradual evolution from novice to expert is confirmed by Asadi, Ghafghazi, and Jamali¹³ in a relatively recent study on the Persian Wikipedia. Persian or Farsi is an official language of Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, though it is also spoken and understood in various other countries in the Middle East and central Asia. In this research, the ever-recurring problem of obtaining a large sample was encountered: 100 users were selected, but 35 were removed from the list because they were inactive during the period during which data collection took place (July 2011). Out of the remaining 65, 33 agreed to take part in the study, though 1 withdrew shortly after. 6 were interviewed face-to-face and the remaining 26 by email. But after two rounds of reminders only 12 completed the questionnaire. In the end therefore only 18 complete interviews were considered. Disregarding the difficulty in gathering the data, Bryant et al.’s conclusions are confirmed: for a new user, curiosity and personal information are the reasons for starting to contribute. Respectful behaviour by other members encourages Wikipedians to continue their work and to share their experience with junior members. The more a user gains competence by editing Wikipedia, the more s/he is likely to continue contributing. This is because –as we already said above– users are vastly encouraged to collaborate when they feel useful and gain social acceptance.

¹²“A watchlist is a page which allows any logged-in user to keep a list of ‘watched’ pages and to generate a list of recent changes made to those pages (and their associated talk pages).” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Watchlist>

¹³ASADI, SAEID, SHADI GHAFGHAZI, and HAMID R. JAMALI (2013). “Motivating and discouraging factors for Wikipedians: the case study of Persian Wikipedia”. In: *Library Review* 62 (4/5), pp. 237–252. URL: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1108/LR-10-2012-0114>. (accessed 9 January 2016).

A senior user can then aim at personal advantages, such as a promotion to “administrator”, “bureaucrat” or “steward” status (all roles with greater editing power than the average contributor). It is not difficult for a popular member of the community to be elected to one of these roles, since they are very time-consuming. The possibility of being elected however, can encourage more participation and editing in the user.¹⁴

4.2 Leaving Wikipedia

If it is easy –as we have seen– to become a contributor, it is likewise easy for a user to decide to quit Wikipedia. Asadi et al.¹⁵ have also investigated the elements that discourage Wikipedians from continuing to collaborate. First of all, there are external factors, such as lack of a reliable Internet access and sociocultural issues. This is not a problem for most Western countries, but is certainly true for the Persian Wikipedia studied by Asadi, Ghafghazi, and Jamali. Now that smartphones with Internet access capabilities are becoming ubiquitous also in emergent countries, this problem is likely to become marginal. In fact, many mobile carriers have signed up to *Wikipedia Zero*, an agreement with Wikimedia which basically permits smartphone owners to freely navigate Wikipedia pages without actually spending money for data usage.

In second place, there are elements strictly connected with the inner Wikipedia structure, such as the jungle of guidelines and rules to follow, together with the difficulties of the editing environment (now vastly improved by the implementation of the Visual Editor).

In addition to this –Asadi et al. state– personal issues can also concur as factors that cause users to reduce their time and efforts or to completely leave Wikipedia. One can be scared of changing some content, or not feel enough competent to write on an encyclopedia in the correct neutral style and provide proper references. Users might decide to stop their work after having their

¹⁴ASADI, SAEID, SHADI GHAFGHAZI, and HAMID R. JAMALI, “Motivating and discouraging factors for Wikipedians: the case study of Persian Wikipedia”.

¹⁵Ibid.

edits reverted or immediately changed. Misbehavior by other users, especially unfriendly senior ones and continuous edit wars can be decisive in this respect as well.

Instead of basing their work on interviews, Jiang and MacKie-Mason¹⁶ reached similar conclusions by means of a statistical analysis on a dataset. They downloaded the full edit history of every article and user page from the English Wikipedia on 16 July 2007. The researchers then studied four different elements: roles played in the system, peer feedback, work intensity, and article stability.

As per the other study, it was found that users like to see their edits persist and find it disappointing to see their work manipulated or –even worse– removed by others. Other discouraging factors also emphasized by the study are the feeling of hopelessness and disappointment when interacting with others.

What is interesting, is what else emerged from this more thorough investigation: two additional reasons for leaving the encyclopedia. The first is burn-out. When this happens, an editor decides to quit because s/he is overwhelmed by work, whether it comes from vandalism or simply from being an admin. The second could be considered quite the opposite: the user abandons because s/he was only interested in editing a limited number of pages. When the articles of his/her interest are deemed stable enough s/he will find little motivation in moving onto others. The hypothesis by Jian et al. is that the more stable the articles that an editor cares about, the more likely that this editor will stop contributing.

The difficulty here lies in the fact that the persistence of an article could be a cause for editors to quit, because their *raison d'être* is fulfilled, but on the other hand, the removal or heavy manipulation of it might cause desertion too, since the editor feels that his/her help is being rejected.

¹⁶JIAN, LIAN and JEFFREY KING MACKIE-MASON (2007). *Why leave Wikipedia?* Conference Poster. iConference 2008. URL: <https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/15126>. (accessed 11 January 2016).

Chapter 5

Overview of the difficulties

Before starting a project involving Wikipedia, one should be aware of the fact that there are always unforeseen difficulties that might pop up unexpectedly. If something happens, the teacher must be able to deal with it, in order to prevent the project from failing. Some of these problems are almost unavoidable, therefore being able to face them is as important as organizing the rest of the work. The fact that it is not possible to avoid many of the issues we are going to talk about in this chapter is particularly true when the students taking part in the project have never edited Wikipedia in the past. Unfortunately, this is most likely to be the case.

Most of the issues are predictable, for they are recurrent. This must not be considered as a draw-back but as a factor which helps prepare for what could happen. Here we try to compile a list of issues which though evidently not complete, may at least help shed a light on the difficult aspects of working on Wikipedia with a class. They are on the whole surmountable difficulties, in some cases even avoidable from the start if the tutor knows about them in advance. For each issue we try to give some possible solutions.

5.1 The editor

Luckily Wikipedia has recently implemented the so-called “Visual Editor”, which gives its users the possibility of contributing using a WYSIWYG in-

terface¹ instead of the classic mark-up language. This last method remains available to all users wishing to continue with the old method. Visual Editor has been a great step forward in improving user experience, since the old way of editing definitely had a steeper learning curve and this dissuaded many potential users from contributing.

5.2 Other users/admins

The impact with the community can be more or less traumatic. The outcome depends on the people the students get in touch with. As Forte and Bruckman² have noticed, whereas on Wikipedia there is no straightforward attribution as in a scientific context, users often claim as theirs the articles they started, or those to which they made substantial contributions. The editing history is always visible to others, but contributors often choose to list the articles they have been working on in their userpage, making it readily accessible to everyone, thus gaining “credibility” in the community. If a student intervenes in articles watchlisted by other users, they might revert their edits, thus demotivating him/her. This is even more possible in a scenario like ours, where the students are newbies and therefore prone to errors. New users are not familiar with how the talk pages work and might find the hurried messages written by people patrolling dozens of pages every day rude.

On the other hand, becoming a member, enjoying communicating with other like-minded users, and especially receiving positive feedback are very encouraging factors, as noted by Asadi et. al.³ It is a good practice then to always approach interaction with others positively, and try to become an active part of the community, to feel one is a Wikipedian. This feeling appears even to overcome political affiliations in the external world. At least that was so for the 1,390 members of the English language Wikipedia who explicitly

¹The acronym stands for “What You See Is What You Get”.

²FORTE, ANDREA and AMY BRUCKMAN, “Why Do People Write for Wikipedia? Incentives to Contribute to Open-Content Publishing”.

³ASADI, SAEID, SHADI GHAFGHAZI, and HAMID R. JAMALI, “Motivating and discouraging factors for Wikipedians: the case study of Persian Wikipedia”.

admitted their affiliation either to the Democratic or the Republican Party of the USA and were taken into consideration in a study by Neff, Laniado, Kappler, Volkovich, Aragón, and Kaltenbrunner.⁴ What was discovered is that instead of reflecting the so-called “cyberbalkanization” of the blogosphere, Wikipedia users tend to form strong interactional bonds with other Wikipedians, even with those with opposite political views. This is certainly a comforting note for new users, who might be scared of interaction with savvier ones.

5.3 The rules

Besides the fundamental principles of Wikipedia,⁵ which are quite simple to comprehend and apply, the most difficult thing is probably to decide the “encyclopedicity” of a newly created article. The criteria for accepting an article as deserving to appear in an encyclopedia are very personal and it is not rare for disputes on controversial cases to start. This may even more easily occur when editing articles in a foreign language version of Wikipedia, where one should also consider the cultural differences between one language edition and another.

⁴NEFF, JESSICA J. et al. (2013). “Jointly They Edit: Examining the Impact of Community Identification on Political Interaction in Wikipedia”. In: *PLoS ONE* 8 (4). (Apr), e60584. URL: <http://www.plosone.org/article/fetchObject.action?uri=info:doi/10.1371/journal.pone.0060584&representation=PDF>. (accessed 7 February 2016).

⁵The so-called “Five pillars”:

- Wikipedia is an encyclopedia;
- Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view;
- Wikipedia is free content that anyone can use, edit, and distribute;
- Editors should treat each other with respect and civility;
- Wikipedia has no firm rules.

5.4 Collaboration requests

Especially when working at university level, it might be useful to get in touch with external institutions which could in different ways be interested in the topic of the article on which the students are working. These can include museums, libraries, archives, or even established authors and researchers. Such bodies are often very happy to participate, lending materials and giving information though it could also happen that they do not like the idea of seeing their documentation appear on websites other than their official ones, or be published under Creative Commons, thus somehow losing control over it. In Anglo-Saxon countries there is usually more openness than in Italy, as is clear if you think of the terminology involved. In Italy we talk about “beni culturali” (literally “cultural goods”), whereas the English expression would be “cultural heritage”. On the one hand we have knowledge considered as a good to safeguard (possibly in an exclusive way), on the other hand, we are talking about a heritage to pass on to future generations. This is something that should be stressed, showing the people working in a potential partner institution how it might also benefit from a well-written article.

5.5 Overload

This is a more practical example of difficulty. An overload can easily occur at the beginning of a project when in a few lessons one must explain to the students all the “technical” aspects of editing Wikipedia, its rules, structure and functioning. The student may feel overwhelmed and decide to abandon the project even before getting started on the preliminary research phase and the creation of new content. It is a good idea to plan these first steps carefully and proceed slowly, giving the minimum amount of information necessary for the next task, gradually leading to the autonomous writing of new articles. Feeling more and more confident, the students will start exploring the tutorials and the manual pages alone, following where their curiosity and their needs lead them. A good thing to do would be to create a short handbook –it does not have to be printed– to be expanded session

by session, containing everything that has been learned up to that point. Writing it collaboratively can add a nice Wikipedia flavor to it.

5.6 Evaluation

Evaluation is of course a problem only for the teacher or tutor. It depends greatly on how the course has been structured, but it is no easy task to find a good way to grade all the work done by the students (or even just follow their work at all), considering that they all start with different articles at a different stage of completeness. One should also consider that other users intervene in the writing, both from within the classroom and without, and that some articles might be in need of heavy restructuring or rewriting. A good way to tackle this is to make the mark awarded count only partly for the final grade, keeping some margin for a standard test or an oral exam. One could consider the intervention of other users as a help to the teacher: their are probably correcting some mistake, or suggesting something to do. This should be taken into consideration when evaluating the students' work.

Part II

Research project: a practical activity

Chapter 6

Objectives

Once the two groups of students that will take part in the project have been identified, the difficult part is designing an activity that will motivate them to continue with the project. They are not obliged to edit Wikipedia if they do not want to, since it is not officially part of the syllabus. In fact, they could simply write a final essay and sit an oral exam to get their grade. Therefore, once they volunteer it is important to make them participate right to the end of the project.

In order not to make them feel incapable of editing, every week they are given a short tutorial to read or watch on a specific subject, and are then asked to apply what they have learnt to a practical task. At first registering an account and personalizing the user page, then learning how Wikipedia is structured, how to perform small edits, how to recognize well-written articles from badly written ones. After having overcome this relatively steep curve at the beginning, they will start with the editing of articles inherent to the course.

What is hoped is that they will learn how Wikipedia works, from the point of view of the users (creating, modifying, patrolling pages) to its inner structure (what are talk pages, history pages, user pages, and so on). They will learn the basics of copyleft and the importance of respecting legal rights. They will become aware of the importance of citing one's sources when stating facts, and become able to write a bibliography according to

the international conventions of the academic community. They will learn how Wikipedia is written and be more critical when consulting it, being able to recognize when an article is not reliable. They will also know that they can edit it at any point if they encounter mistakes or inaccuracies, and they will respect more profoundly the work infused by its thousands of volunteers. They will understand what collaborative work means in terms of advantages and draw-backs.

Hopefully, once they have been formed as users they will feel the impulse to continue contributing. What this project tries to teach them –besides the more technical aspects of contributing to Wikipedia– can actually be summarized by the “wiki prayer”, cited in Lamb¹ (which is a parody of the Serenity Prayer authored by Reinhold Niebhur and adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous):

Please, grant me the serenity
to accept the pages I cannot edit,
The courage to edit the pages I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

In short, the students should become able to discriminate between badly written articles and reliable ones, learn the basics of editing so as not to be scared of intervening when necessary, and respect the community of Wikipedians, their efforts and their work.

¹LAMB, BRIAN (2004). “Wide open spaces: Wikis, ready or not”. In: *EDUCAUSE review* 39.5, pp. 36–48. URL: <http://er.educause.edu/articles/2004/1/wide-open-spaces-wikis-ready-or-not>. (accessed 11 December 2015).

Chapter 7

Participants

When this project was first outlined, it became immediately clear that not every course would be suitable for this kind of activity. The following points were taken into consideration:

- M.A. vs B.A.: Students taking a M.A. were deemed to be in a better position to take part, both because of their linguistic competence (at least those working on the English version of Wikipedia) and because of their competences in academic writing, citing and working collaboratively;
- Course subject: Only courses which allowed easy integration of an on-line activity were taken into consideration;
- Final evaluation: Courses where students are requested to write a final essay were chosen, in order to ask the teachers to give their pupils the choice between a standard exam and writing for the free encyclopedia;
- Teacher availability: The willingness of the teacher to take part in the project was –as is easy to imagine– crucial;
- Schedule: The courses had to be held in the first semester of the year, in order to allow follow-up research during the winter break and time enough to produce this dissertation before graduation.

Two courses were deemed enough, since too many students to work with at the same time would have made it possible to keep an eye on everybody and give the same care. After some enquiries, two teachers agreed to propose the project to their classes.

7.1 Group A

The first group was formed by students of a M.A. course in “History of English Culture”, held at Ca’ Foscari university between 7 September 2015 and 14 December 2015. They were given the choice between a standard oral exam and a contribution in the form of an article for the English language version of Wikipedia, paired with the writing of a final essay. In other words, an elective Wikipedia assignment was integrated into the syllabus of the course. A large part of the class volunteered.

By the end of the project, 21 students completed their assignment. At the beginning of the class, however, 32 signed up for the project and compiled a basic questionnaire administered in order to understand who they were and what was their relationship to the editing of Wikipedia. This could also be non-existent: in fact only one of them had edited Wikipedia before.

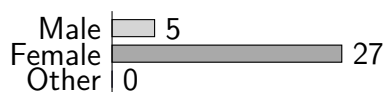


Figure 7.1: *Are you...?*

As can be seen in Figure 7.1, a large majority of the students were female. This can be considered normal in Italy, where humanistic faculties –and especially foreign-language degrees– are preponderantly attended by female students. This figure is very distant from the average gender distribution of Wikipedia, where most contributors are instead male.¹ We are happy to think that with our minuscule intervention we have contributed a very tiny fraction to restoring the balance between sexes.

¹In the worldwide Wikipedia Editor Survey 2011 of all the Wikipedias, 91% of respondents were male. https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Editor_Survey_2011

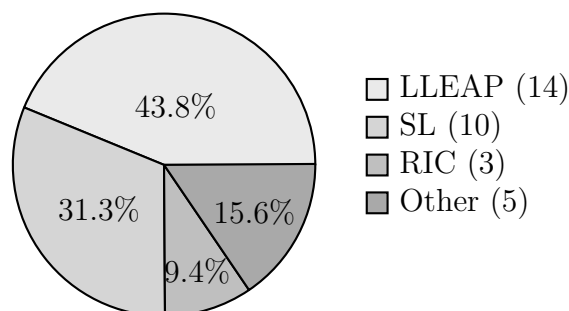


Figure 7.2: *What is your degree?*

The students came from a variety of different backgrounds, but the majority was enrolled in a literature degree. Fourteen of them came from the “Lingue e Letterature Europee, Americane e Postcoloniali” degree (“European, American and Post-Colonial Languages and Literatures”) while ten from “Scienze del Linguaggio” (“Language Sciences”), a more linguistics-based curriculum. Three came from “Relazioni Internazionali Comparate” (“Compared International Relationships”) and five more chose the “Other” option, which most probably just meant they were Erasmus students (see Figure 7.2).

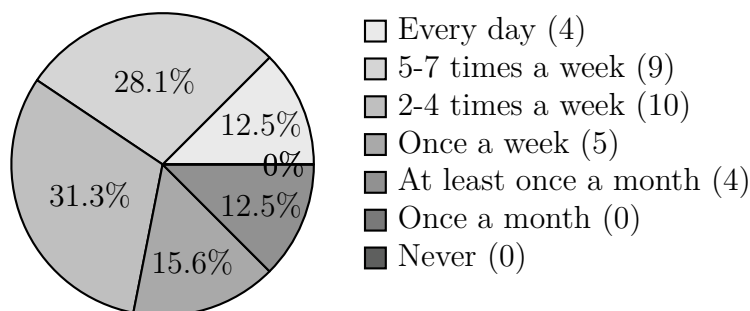


Figure 7.3: *How often do you consult Wikipedia?*

Regarding their interaction with Wikipedia, unsurprisingly the majority declared that they consulted its articles regularly. More precisely, 9 admitted to reading it 5-7 times a week and 10 said 2-4 times a week. 4 said every-day, while 5 said once a week. The remaining 4 stated that they consulted

Wikipedia at least once a month (see Figure 7.3).

The reasons for using it can be very different from person to person. What interested us for this project was to see how many of the participants actually use Wikipedia for study purposes.

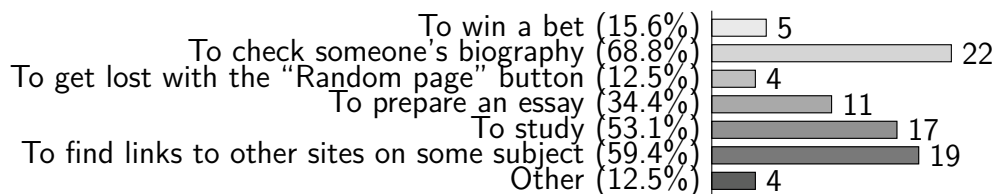


Figure 7.4: For what reasons?

As can be seen in Figure 7.4, more than half admitted doing so. Actually we could consider “studying” to include checking a person’s biography, and preparing an essay, two activities which were acknowledged by 22 and 17 students respectively (they could choose more than one answer). Another 19 declared to use it as a source of bibliography, which in a way is also part of the study process.

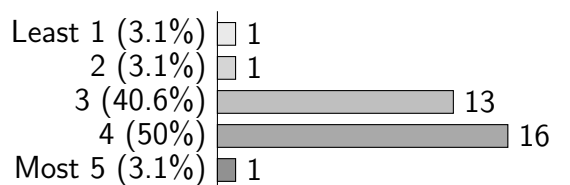


Figure 7.5: On a scale from 1 to 5, how reliable do you think Wikipedia is?

This outcome is confirmed by the two graphs in Figure 7.5 and Figure 7.6, which tell us that the students perceive Wikipedia as on the whole reliable and as containing many high-quality articles. These results match those obtained by a recent survey carried out by Aibar from the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya.² Aibar conducted his research in two Spanish universities and received 913 valid answers, all from faculty members. What he found out

²AIBAR, EDUARD, *Wikipedia, Science, and Academia*.

was that the quality of Wikipedia articles is highly valued, and that more than half of the faculty members are active users of Wikipedia themselves (55.3% use it for academic matters, non considering their everyday visits to the website for other reasons).

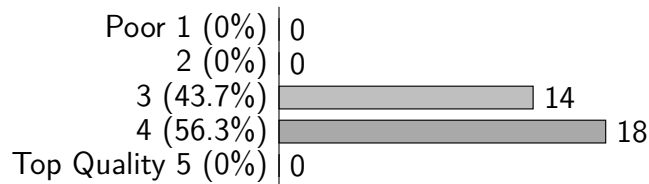


Figure 7.6: On a scale from 1 to 5, what is the average quality of the articles?

Nevertheless, almost half of our student group claimed to have found obvious mistakes sometimes (see Figure 7.7), even though they almost never correct them (see Figure 7.8).

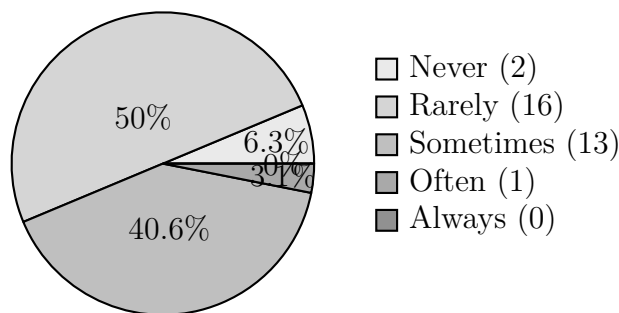


Figure 7.7: Did you ever find obvious mistakes?

What is most interesting is to learn why they never intervene. Analysing Figure 7.9, we discover that the vast majority stated they simply never thought about doing it. One fourth of the students believe they don't have enough knowledge to contribute, which might be true for specialized articles, but not can surely be true for everything. Some just resort to the excuse of not having time.

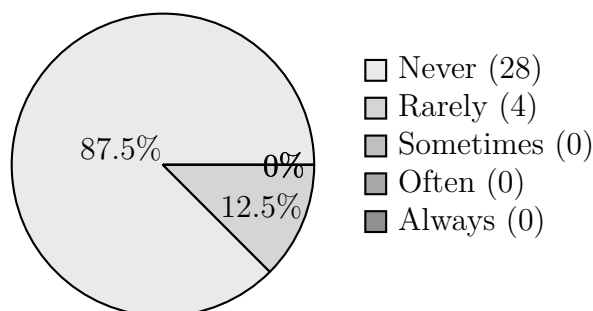


Figure 7.8: *Did you ever correct something?*

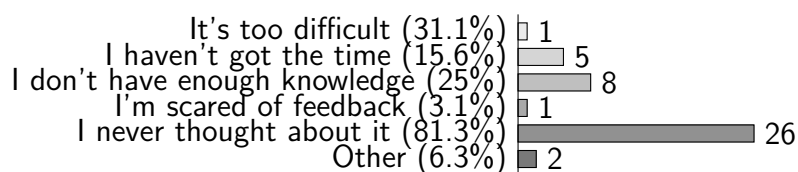


Figure 7.9: *Why did you never correct anything?*

7.2 Group B

Besides the first group mentioned above, another cohort of students from Ca' Foscari took part in the project: another M.A. course, this time in “Storia delle biblioteche sp.” (“History of Libraries”), held between 14 September 2015 and 14 October 2015. As the name already suggests, the lessons were held in Italian, therefore the work on Wikipedia was devoted to the Italian version instead of the English one. As with Group A, this assignment was elective, in alternative to writing a final paper. Only a fraction of the class volunteered.

At the beginning of the class, 11 students showed an interest in the project, but only 10 of them actually signed up and compiled a basic initial questionnaire³ administered in order to understand who they were and their relationship with editing Wikipedia. Again this could also be non-existent, and in fact only one out of the ten had edited Wikipedia before. By the end of

³The questionnaire was in Italian. For convenience, all questions appearing in the graphs in this chapter have been translated into English.

the project 9 students completed their assignment, a much larger percentage as compared with the first group.

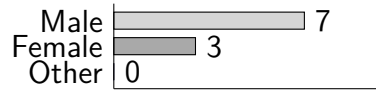


Figure 7.10: *Are you...?*

As can be seen in Figure 7.10, in this case the majority of the students were male. The 70% figure however, is lower than the average for Wikipedia, where contributors are even more preponderantly male. A 2008 survey conducted by the Wikimedia Foundation and United Nations University and published two years later⁴, claimed that only 12.7% of Wikipedia contributors are female. This number was later revised by a study by Hill and Shaw⁵, who estimated instead that the female users were 16.1%. It is still a sadly low figure, nonetheless.

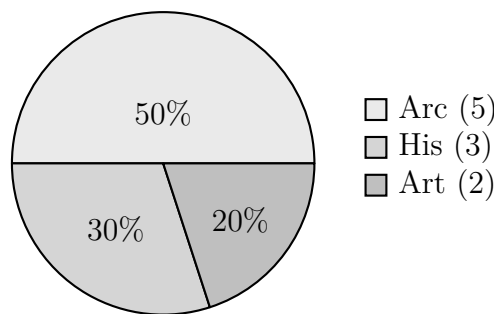


Figure 7.11: *What is your degree?*

As Figure 7.11 clearly shows, half the students taking part in the project were enrolled in the “Storia e gestione del patrimonio archivistico e bibliografico” degree (“History and management of the archival and bibliographic

⁴GLOTT, RÜDIGER, PHILIPP SCHMIDT, and RISHAB GHOSH, *Wikipedia Survey-Overview of Results*.

⁵HILL, BENJAMIN MAKO and AARON SHAW (2013). “The Wikipedia Gender Gap Revisited: Characterizing Survey Response Bias with Propensity Score Estimation”. In: *PLoS ONE* 8 (6), e65782. URL: <http://www.plosone.org/article/fetchObject.action?uri=info:doi/10.1371/journal.pone.0065782&representation=PDF>. (accessed 1 February 2016).

heritage”). Three more came from a more historical degree such as “Storia dal Medioevo all’Età Contemporanea” (“History from the Middle Ages to the Contemporary Age”), while the last two were from “Storia delle arti e conservazione dei beni artistici” (“History of the Arts and Conservation of Artistic Goods”). This was a highly specialized course, so the absence of Erasmus students should not surprise too much, especially considering that it was held completely in Italian.

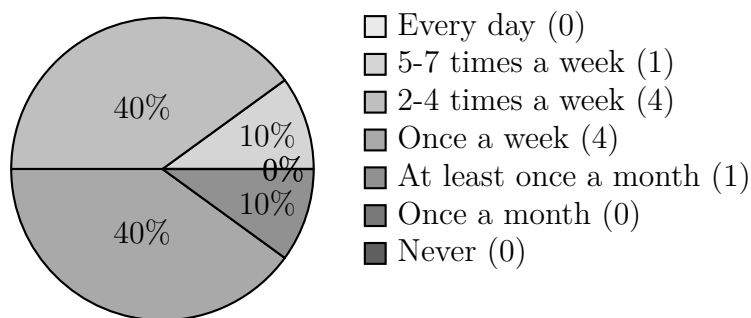


Figure 7.12: *How often do you consult Wikipedia?*

Regarding their interaction with Wikipedia, again the majority of students declared that they consult its articles regularly, even though apparently fewer than in Group A. More precisely, 1 admitted to read it 5-7 times a week and 4 said 2-4 times a week. Another 4 said once a week, while the remaining 1 consults Wikipedia at least once a month (see Figure 7.12).

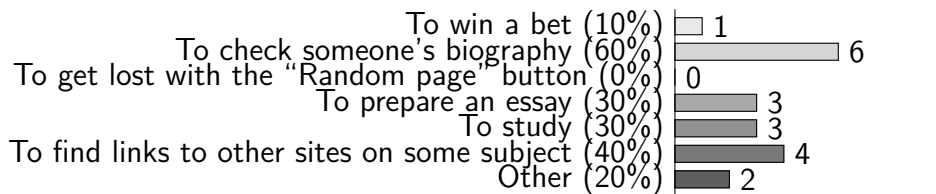


Figure 7.13: *For what reasons?*

As we have already stated above, the reasons for usage can be very different from person to person. What interested us for this project was to see how many of the participants would actually use Wikipedia for study purposes.

As can be seen in Figure 7.13, only one third admitted to done so. Actually we could consider “studying” to include checking a person’s biography, and preparing an essay, two activities who were acknowledged by six and three students, respectively (it should be remembered here that they could choose more than one answer). Another four used it as a source of bibliography, which in a way is also part of the study process. Nobody seemed to appreciate the “Random page” button, which –in my opinion– denotes a more “light” and maybe frequent usage of the website.

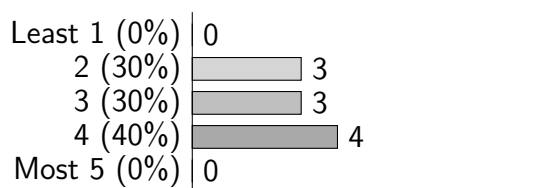


Figure 7.14: *On a scale from 1 to 5, how reliable do you think Wikipedia is?*

Even if the admitted usage of Wikipedia is not so high as it was with Group A, its reliability and quality were highly valued, as is confirmed by the two graphs in Figure 7.14 and Figure 7.15.

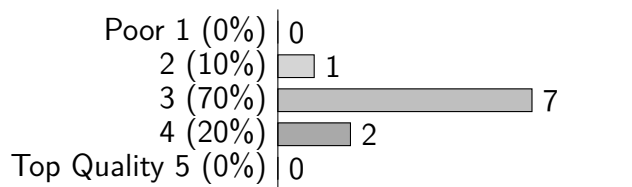


Figure 7.15: *On a scale from 1 to 5, what is the average quality of the articles?*

These tell us that these students find Wikipedia all in all reliable and containing many high-quality articles. As we already noted above, these results are consistent with those obtained by a recent survey held by Eduard Aibar from the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya.⁶ Aibar conducted his research in two Spanish universities and received 913 valid answers, all from faculty members. What he found out was that the quality of Wikipedia articles is

⁶AIBAR, EDUARD, *Wikipedia, Science, and Academia*.

highly valued, and that faculty members are active users of Wikipedia themselves (55.3% of them use it for academic matters). The results here speak more of an average perceived quality, but we should remember that in this case the students' sample was very small, and statistics tend not to give a fully trustworthy picture.

As for quality, more than half of this student group claimed to have sometimes found obvious mistakes (see Figure 7.16), even though –again– they never correct them (see Figure 7.17).

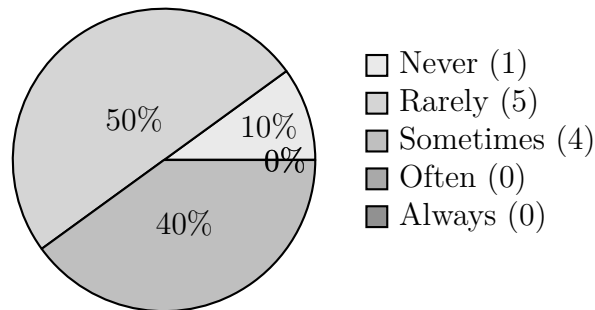


Figure 7.16: *Did you ever find obvious mistakes?*

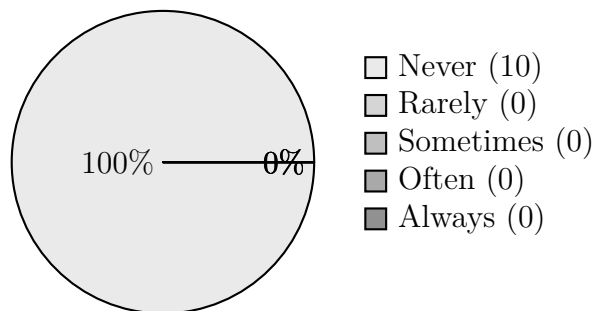


Figure 7.17: *Did you ever correct something?*

Why is that so? We can get a hint by analysing Figure 7.18. Apparently the vast majority stated they simply never thought about doing so. This is the second time it happens, out of two groups, and is therefore a pivotal cause for reflection for Wikipedia. Many readers –also among regular visitors to the

encyclopedia— do not know that they can freely intervene and modify any article they want. Most of them believe some kind of registration is necessary, or that one must be accepted in some way as a contributor.

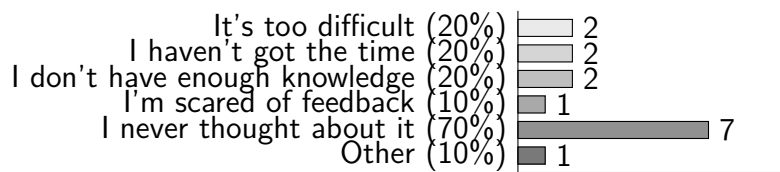


Figure 7.18: *Why did you never correct anything?*

Other frequent answers tell us that students believe they don't have enough knowledge in order to edit articles, which might be true for specialized topics (even though we are talking about M.A. students here), but can not surely be true for everything. Some just resort to the excuse of not having time or it being too difficult.

Chapter 8

Activity

The original idea was to find two classes to participate, doing two different kinds of work on Wikipedia. The first one would have worked on translating articles from one language to another, the second one would have created new content. After the translation proposal was rejected, a teacher was found who agreed to a second editing activity. Thus, the two classes worked following the same direction, with one working on the English Wikipedia, the second on the Italian version. As we will see below, the project had to be adapted according to the courses' different timetables.

8.1 Group A

Since this course was on crime, justice, and law enforcement in 18th Century England, many of the articles chosen were biographies, either of famous criminals or notable citizens of the time, who were for various reasons tried at the Old Bailey. In fact, the Old Bailey Online trial reports¹ played a major role in the development of the course, together with Hitchcock and Shoemaker's book "Tales from the Hanging Court".² The possible subjects were identified by myself in collaboration with the teacher, so as to be a) relevant to the course content and b) in need of editing. The list was however open to

¹<http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>

²HITCHCOCK, TIM and ROBERT SHOEMAKER (2006). *Tales from the hanging court*. Hodder Arnold.

student suggestions and in fact a few new ones were accepted and actually incorporated, thus giving the more involved students the chance to choose a subject they would like to write on. Among others, some of the articles were on general subjects such as “pick-pocketing” or “thief-taker”. Others related to less well known pamphlets by Daniel Defoe, which ones didn’t figure in the list of the author’s works on Wikipedia but dealt with criminality in London and were therefore deemed of interest for the course.

All the articles selected were posted on a table on the teacher’s user page on Wikipedia, and students were able to choose the one they preferred with the good old first-come, first-served method. There were actually more articles listed than students taking part into the project, therefore some were never chosen and remained untouched.

At the beginning, the students were given a live-session tutorial on Wikipedia and a series of practical exercises aimed at making them autonomous contributors. Not all of them were expected to get to the point of writing a featured article, and actually some dropped out along the way, but by the end those who kept working all succeeded in creating or expanding the pages they chose, with variable outcomes.

8.2 Group B

As per the second group, during the previous years it was customary for the teacher to assign the students a paper to write on one historically important library, such as the Congress Library of the one of Alexandria. This year some of the students chose to write the relative Wikipedia article instead, so it was chosen to make it easier for them to retrieve information about the library assigned, therefore working on nearby libraries. All of them were located in the Veneto region, as near as possible to each student. This way they could physically go to the library and ask for historical sources and other useful material to consult to the director or personnel.

Larger libraries were preferred, trying to avoid the creation of new articles for smaller ones, which might have been deemed non-encyclopedic by the Wikipedia community and therefore cancelled. Nonetheless, students were

encouraged to create satellite pages for the main ones, mostly about fundamental figures related to the library such as founders, historically relevant librarians, or important donors.

At the beginning, the students were given a live-session tutorial on Wikipedia and a series of practical exercises aimed at making them autonomous contributors. The outcomes vary from student to student, and one actually dropped out along the way, but none of them was expected to write a featured article.³ At the end, those who kept working all succeeded in creating or expanding the pages they were assigned to.

³“Featured articles are considered to be the best articles Wikipedia has to offer, as determined by Wikipedia’s editors.” [Wikipedia:Featured_articles](#)

Chapter 9

Schedule

As stated above, the two courses followed different calendars. The first took place over three months, with one two-hour lesson per week, while the second was concentrated into one month of two three-hour lessons per week. The scheduling of activities had therefore to be planned to comply with these two different timetables.

9.1 Group A

Each week for twelve weeks an email was sent to all participants giving suggestions on how to start, and then how to improve the articles. Students found tutorials attached and useful links to consult. They did not of course start working on their articles until after some weeks of preparation. In this way they did not have to cope with too much information at once. This eased the steepness of their learning curve and permitted them to deal with the subject of their articles step by step, instead of doing all the work in a rush at the end of the course.

This is how the activity was outlined:

Week 1 - Registration Presentation of the project. Interested students were asked to create an account on en.wikipedia.org and complete the

online training for students, a walkthrough tutorial dedicated to new users.¹

Week 2 - The basics Students were asked to create their user pages, write something about themselves, and then send a message to the instructor’s talk page. In this way they would learn how to interact with users external to the class, who could easily know about the project by reading a student’s user page presentation.

Week 3 - Anatomy of an article Students were taught how to distinguish between a good and a bad article. They were also asked to think of possible new articles to create –or just improve– and post them to the teacher’s talk page. By doing this, they would learn to move around on Wikipedia with a more critical eye. What is more, they would get to choose the topic of their articles, if they are smart enough to take advantage of this opportunity.

Week 4 - Live tutorial Q & A session with a *Wikimedia Italia* volunteer about Wikipedia culture, rules and etiquette. Exercises both in the sandbox² and on the talk page were also performed in the University computer lab, in order to get the basics of editing straight before starting.

Week 5 - Evaluation criteria Students were asked to reflect on what makes an article a good one. They were shown them some featured articles as well as some stubs, or articles lacking citations, or biased in some way. To be sure they had fully grasped Wikipedia particular messaging method, they had to send their thoughts to their instructor’s talk page. Without knowing it, they were themselves selecting the criteria which were going to be applied in their final assessment.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Training/For_students

²The so-called “sandbox” is the training ground for Wikipedia contributors. It consists in a wiki-page that any user can easily create for oneself, in which one can practice writing the article before publishing it. If one is not a registered user, or simply wants to perform some tests without actually editing a published article, there is also a public sandbox, regularly wiped clean, which serves the same purpose: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Sandbox>

Week 6 - Choosing an article Half way through the time we had available, it was time to start with real editing. The students had to choose an article from the list which had been compiled by the teacher incorporating their suggestions. Having done that, they had to send a message to that article's talk page telling the community that they would soon start improving it as an assignment for their university course. They were also asked to post a preliminary bibliography, in the hope of getting feedback from other users who had contributed to that page in the past.

Week 7 - Planning the work Students starting new articles were asked to start writing the lead section of it in their sandboxes, whereas students going to improve existing ones had to post an outline of their proposed intended improvements on the article's talk page. Students were reminded to engage politely with any responses.

Week 8 - Editing Time to get out of the sandbox. Students were reminded to always fill in the "subject" box when saving their edits, so that other users (teacher included) could see easily what they had been doing in a particular edit. We also told them not to panic if their contribution disappeared and not to force it back in if it did. It is normal to make mistakes at the beginning, and not all users patrolling Wikipedia have the time to write long explanations about their actions. They are however usually willing to explain them if asked politely.

Week 9 - Adding images While continuing to develop their articles, students were asked to incorporate images, if possible uploading new ones on Commons, or simply looking for existing material there.

Week 10 - Offering suggestions Based on their ideas of what makes a well-constructed encyclopedia article, students were asked to leave a message on one other student's article talk page, explaining their suggestions for improvement.

Week 11 - Revising Student were advised to make edits according to their peers' reviews. In case of disagreement, talk pages were to be used until a consensus had been reached.

Week 12 - Final article Further improvements and final touches to the article, which had then to be printed out and handed to the teacher for grading. They had also to print a brief description of the work done: describe the article as it was before they had intervened, which parts had been added, had images been uploaded? Had they created new stubs³, and/or contributed to other articles? Had they encountered any difficulties, either technical or in interacting with others? In this way, the teacher didn't have to check every single edit of each student in the history of each article. Furthermore, the students were given the opportunity to present their work under in what they thought would be the best light, underlining what they believed were their strengths: something they would probably need to do often in the future, especially when applying for a position.

9.2 Group B

More or less once a week (there were two lessons per week) for one month, emails were sent to all participants giving suggestions on how to start, and then how to improve the articles. The initial tasks were all very short and easy, becoming more and more demanding with time. Students found tutorials attached to the emails and useful links to consult (containing either manual pages or instructional videos). They did not of course start working on their articles until after a few weeks of preparation. In this way they did not have to cope with too much information at once, with the risk of feeling frustrated. This eased the steepness of their learning curve and permitted them to confront with the subject of their articles step by step, instead of doing all the work in a rush at the end of the course.

³A "stub" for Wikipedia is "an article that, although providing some useful information, is too short to provide encyclopedic coverage of a subject, and that is capable of expansion." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Stub>

This is how the activity was outlined:

Week 1 - Registration Presentation of the project. Interested students were asked to create an account on it.wikipedia.org and watch a video introduction to Wikipedia.⁴

Week 2 - The basics Students were asked to create their user pages –write something about themselves– and then send a message to the instructor’s talk page. In this way they would learn how to interact with users external to the class, who could easily know about the project by reading a student’s user page presentation.

Week 3 - Live tutorial Q & A session with two *Wikimedia Italia* volunteers about Wikipedia culture, rules and etiquette. Exercises both in the sandbox and on the talk page were also performed in the University computer lab, in order to get the basics of editing straight before starting. Students were reminded to always fill in the “subject” box when saving their edits, so that other users (teacher included) would easily know what they had been doing, without having to spend too much time checking the “history” tab of each page.

Week 4 - Practice Students were asked to perform twelve small edits on articles of their choice. Correcting misplaced commas, a typo, a missing link, or even rephrasing an entire sentence made the students more confident with the editor, showing them the power Wikipedia bestows upon its users. As a second task, they had to write a message on the talk page of two of their classmates, in order to make them understand how to communicate with other members of the community. Last but not least, they had to leave a message on the talk page of their assigned article warning the contributors that they were soon going to start working on it as part of a university assignment. Students were reminded to engage politely with any responses.

⁴https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wikipedia_ridotto.ogv

Week 5 - The editing begins Students were told not to panic in case their contribution disappeared and not to force it back in if it did. It is normal to make mistakes at the beginning, and not all patrolling users on Wikipedia have the time to write long explanations about their actions. They are usually willing to explain them if politely asked, though.

The things to check were: bibliography; citations; wikilinks; paragraphs and sub-paragraphs (restructuring if needed); uploading pictures to Commons if missing; inserting them if already there; creating sister articles for red wikilinks (i.e. missing related pages).

Week 8 - Final article The students worked at their articles for three weeks, often resorting to emailing the tutor for explanations. The final articles were then printed out and handed to the teacher, who corrected and marked them. Students were also asked to insert the corrections in the online article, in order not to leave incorrect material available to the public.

Chapter 10

Results

One of the advantages of working with Wikipedia is that every single edit is preserved. Every time someone makes a change to the encyclopedia, that change is recorded. The record then remains publicly accessible to everybody, making it very easy to reconstruct the history of a page. Admittedly, working with thirty people would make this process quite time-consuming, but there are various tools available for automated data extraction. One of this is the Wikimedia Foundation’s Wikimetrics,¹ that has here been used to calculate the following statistics.

To better understand who we were to work with, a questionnaire was administered to the students prior to the activity in order to verify their existing knowledge of Wikipedia and their usage and opinion of it. A final questionnaire was completed at the end of the course, to see if their perceptions of Wikipedia had changed. This last questionnaire –of which we talk more extensively later on– contained also more open questions asking for criticisms and suggestions.

10.1 Group A

In total, from the beginning of the activity on 9 October 2015 to the deadline for writing the articles on 30 November 2015 a net sum of 493104 bytes was

¹Wikimetrics is freely accessible at <https://metrics.wmflabs.org/>

added to the English Wikipedia and 37 new pages were created. The “save edit” button was hit 2934 times by the 21 students who went through all steps until the end of the project. It is important to note that all these numbers refer only to main space pages, i.e. articles. User pages, talk pages, etcetera were not taken into consideration in the creation of these statistics.



Figure 10.1: “Second Thoughts are Best” total hits during November 2015

Incidentally (it was not the aim of this project), one article complied with the requirements for inclusion in the “Did you know?” section of the home page and was therefore submitted for review. It underwent revision, passed, and appeared shortly afterwards on the main page of the English version of Wikipedia on 19 November 2015 (see Figure 10.2), where it stayed for six hours, until that specific section was –as it is routine– updated. During that single day it received 2110 views as against the average 48 it received on the other days of the month (see Figure 10.1). Most probably this means that this student’s work has been seen (and will be seen) much more often than any other piece of writing she had produced in her academic career.

10.2 Group B

In total, from the beginning of the activity on 14 September 2015 to the deadline for writing the articles on 31 October 2015 a net sum of 248781 bytes was added to the Italian Wikipedia and 66 new pages were created (the average number of created pages per person being 7.3, higher than in Group A). The “save edit” button was hit 1247 times by the 9 students who went through all the steps until the end. It is important to note that all these numbers refer only to main space pages, i.e. articles. User pages, talk pages, etcetera were not taken into consideration for these results.

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5,012,809 articles in English

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From today's featured article

Romance is the eighth studio album by Mexican singer Luis Miguel (pictured), released by WEA Latina in 1991. After songwriter Juan Carlos Calderón pulled out of collaboration on pop songs and ballads, Miguel recorded an album of classic boleros instead, at the suggestion of his manager. Singer-songwriter Armando Manzanero co-produced the album with Miguel, with arrangements by Bebu Silvetti. Miguel promoted the record with a tour of the United States and Latin America. The songs were generally well received by music critics, who praised the singing and production, and Miguel received a Grammy nomination for Best Latin Pop Album. *Romance* sold over seven million copies worldwide. In the United States, it spent 32 weeks at number one on the *Billboard* Latin Pop Albums chart, and was the first Spanish-language album by a non-crossover Latin artist to be certified gold; it was also certified gold in Brazil and Taiwan. *Romance* is the third-best-selling album of all time in Mexico, and the bestselling record in Argentina by a non-native artist. The album revived interest in bolero music, and Miguel released three more bolero records between 1994 and 2001. (Full article...)


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Did you know...

- ... that Arizona Territorial Superintendent of Public Instruction **George W. Cheyney** (pictured) resigned his office to serve in the territorial legislature?
- ... that the fossil scorpion *Tityus apozonalli* is named from a Nahuatl word meaning sea foam?
- ... that Bill Plonsford was the first cricketer to score centuries in each of his first two Test matches?
- ... that *Second Thoughts are Best* is a 1729 pamphlet about the increase of criminality rate in London, written by Daniel Defoe under the pseudonym of Andrew Moreton?
- ... that the character of Ed Argent in "Show Me the Monkey", an episode of *Veronica Mars*, was originally envisioned to be a cameo by Ted Nugent?
- ... that Barbara Oakley's book *Pathological Altruism* explores negative aspects of altruism and empathy?
- ... that Vietnamese people in Poland, significantly composed of illegal immigrants, are one of the largest ethnic group minorities in Poland?
- ... that the *Adventure Time* episode "Time Sandwich" was inspired by a slowed-down video of Paula Deen making a sandwich?

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The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things is a painting attributed to Hieronymus Bosch, completed around 1500 or later. Presented in a series of circular images: four small circles, detailing "Death of the Sinner," "Judgment," "Hell," and "Glory", surround a single large circle showing the seven deadly sins. At the center of this circle is Jesus emerging from his tomb. The painting is now held by the Museo del Prado in Madrid.

Painting: Hieronymus Bosch

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Other areas of Wikipedia

- Community portal** – Bulletin board, projects, resources and activities covering a wide range of Wikipedia areas.
- Help desk** – Ask questions about using Wikipedia.
- Local embassy** – For Wikipedia-related communication in languages other than English.
- Reference desk** – Serving as virtual librarians, Wikipedia volunteers tackle your questions on a wide range of subjects.
- Site news** – Announcements, updates, articles and press releases on Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation.
- Village pump** – For discussions about Wikipedia itself, including areas for technical issues and policies.

Wikipedia's sister projects

Wikipedia is hosted by the Wikimedia Foundation, a non-profit organization that also hosts a range of other projects:

- Commons** – Free media repository
- Wikibooks** – Free textbooks and manuals
- Wikiquote** – Collection of quotations
- Wikiversity** – Free learning materials and activities
- MediaWiki** – Wiki software development
- Wikidata** – Free knowledge base
- Wikisource** – Free-content library
- Wikivoyage** – Free travel guide
- Meta-Wiki** – Wikimedia project coordination
- Wikinews** – Free-content news
- Wikispecies** – Directory of species
- Wiktionary** – Dictionary and thesaurus

Wikipedia languages

This Wikipedia is written in English. Started in 2001, it currently contains 5,012,809 articles. Many other Wikipedias are available; some of the largest are listed below.

- More than 1,000,000 articles: Deutsch · Español · Français · Italiano · Nederlands · Polski · Русский · Svenska · Tiếng Việt
- More than 250,000 articles: العربية · Bahasa Indonesia · Bahasa Melayu · Català · Čeština · 한국어 · Magyar · 日本語 · Norsk bokmål · Português · Română · Српски / Српски · Srpskohrvatski / Српскохрватски · Suomi · Türkçe · Українська · 中文
- More than 50,000 articles: Bosanski · Български · Dansk · Eesti · Ελληνικά · English (simple) · Esperanto · Euskara · Galego · עברית · Hrvatski · Latviešu · Lietuvių · Norsk nynorsk · Slovenčina · Slovenščina · Телугు

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Figure 10.2: “Second Thoughts are Best” in the DYK section on 19-11-2015

Chapter 11

Comparison

In comparing the most obvious difference between the two groups is the percentage of students who decided to take part in the project. It would be interesting to find out the reasons for this difference but unluckily we do not possess enough data to be certain. One could speculate that it depends on how the teacher has presented the activity at the very beginning of the course, or to the individual differences among the students themselves. Probably the presence of Erasmus students in class might have pushed the others to take part in the project. In fact, students coming from foreign universities are in general more confident with seminars and classroom activities as compared with Italians. These last are usually more used to traditional, *ex cathedra* teaching. It is therefore not surprising that the class with more Erasmus students in it had such a large participation rate, compared to the exclusively Italian one. But this remains a hypothesis that could be further investigated in the future.

Larger numbers of course mean larger difficulties for the organizers. Following many students almost daily is not an easy task, especially if the teacher is alone with just one tutor, as in our case. This probably explains why only twenty-one of the English students out of thirty-two successfully reached the end of the project, compared to the nine out of ten in the Italian class. Of course this cannot be considered the only reason. It could also simply mean that Group B's students were more motivated, for some reason. Supporting

this last hypothesis is the fact that Group A’s project stretched on a much longer time span, and it is possible that not all of the students had enough time to keep up with the requested weekly assignments. The difficulty of the task is confirmed by many of the students in the answers they gave in the follow-up questionnaire.¹ One of them also stated that “the Wikipedia project is time-consuming, and if for the course one has to read books and write an essay, it is possible that adding such a project one might render the course too demanding for the students.”²

For some reason Group A adopted more willingly the idea of asking the tutor for help using Wikipedia’s talk pages, whereas Group B stuck with the classic email. This is probably caused by the fact that the teacher in the first class used Wikipedia as well, creating a profile and discussing the work of the students, while the second one preferred not to take an active part on Wikipedia and talked to the students only in class or via email, as they were already used to doing.

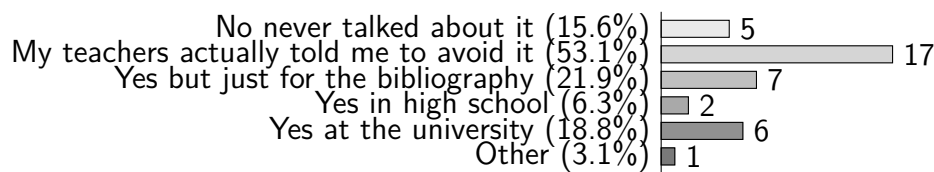


Figure 11.1: *Did any one of your teachers ever suggest using it? (Group A)*

Overall, the two groups were very similar at the start of the project. Most of the students used Wikipedia on a regular basis, and even used it as a study aid, notwithstanding the fact that they were often told by teachers not to do so (see Figures 11.1 and 11.2).

They mostly valued Wikipedia’s articles as trustworthy and well-written, but had sometimes encountered mistakes. These mistakes –whether minor

¹These are some excerpts from the follow-up questionnaire: “the whole work was quite difficult”, “I personally found the technical part the most challenging”, “it was a challenging [...] experience”, “I found it more challenging and intestine than just writing an essay”, “it required a not insignificant commitment”, “it was very demanding.”

²Most of the answers given in the follow-up questionnaire were in Italian and have been here translated for the reader’s convenience.

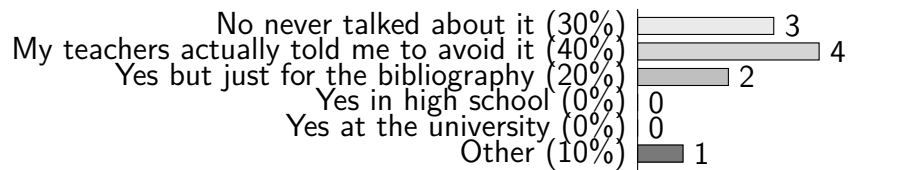


Figure 11.2: *Did any one of your teachers ever suggested to use it? (Group B)*

or not— before the course had almost never been corrected, mostly because the students “never thought” about doing so. According to the overview of the results of the first global Wikipedia Survey, presented in 2010 by et al.³, most people avoid contributing to Wikipedia because they are not sure about what kind of information they can contribute, and also because they don’t feel it is really necessary for them to do so. Our respondents too stated that they “never thought about correcting any mistake”. Practical difficulty does not emerge as a deterrent in Glott’s study, but it clearly does in our research, whereas another common result is the believed lack of knowledge on the part of users. They don’t feel that they are able to provide useful material for the encyclopedia. Hopefully from now on they will be more aware of how Wikipedia works and how it relies on their help if it is to keep expanding.

11.1 Follow-up questionnaire

On 30 January 2016 a check was performed on all the usernames created by the students during the activity, and they were all found to be still active. Thanks to Wikimetrics⁴ we can measure the survival rate of the accounts, and the result for the two groups was that all thirty users had made at least one edit during the month of January; that is, more than a month after the official end of the course. In this respect, it would be interesting to see how many of the students will remain active members of Wikipedia in the following months, if not years.

³GLOTT, RÜDIGER, PHILIPP SCHMIDT, and RISHAB GHOSH, *Wikipedia Survey—Overview of Results*.

⁴<https://metrics.wmflabs.org/>

For now, an anonymous follow-up questionnaire has been sent to all thirty participants of the two groups (respectively 21 and 9), containing both closed and open questions.⁵ Some questions were present also in the first questionnaire, to allow us to make a comparison between before and after the project. Other questions were instead aimed at understanding if and eventually how much their opinion of Wikipedia has changed since the beginning of the class activity. Nineteen of the students responded, confirming that they are going to continue editing in the future (see Figure 11.3).

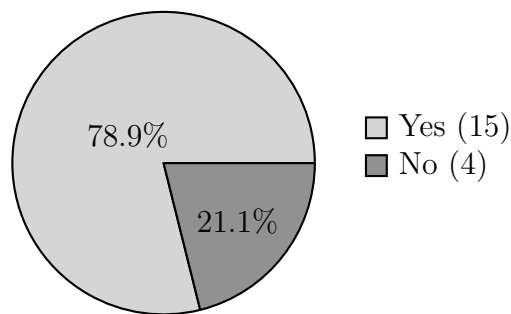


Figure 11.3: *Are you going to keep contributing in the future?*

This answer is confirmed by what the students of Group A wrote when handing in their work to the teacher for evaluation. For example: “In the future [...] I am willing to improve articles of my own concern”, and “I’m planning to keep on contributing to the article and then submit it for peer review to attract other users’ attention on it.”

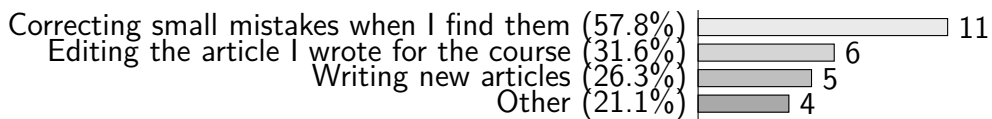


Figure 11.4: *How will you keep contributing?*

As we can see in Figure 11.4, most of them will correct small mistakes when they find some, meaning that they are now aware of the possibility of

⁵The questionnaire was in Italian, all questions and answers here reported have been translated into English for the reader’s convenience.

clicking the “edit” button. One third would like to continue to work on the articles they have been revising for their class, and a little over a quarter thinks that they will write completely new articles. Of course we cannot be sure that these wishes will be realized, but it is undeniable that the situation has changed since the beginning of the course, when nobody had ever contributed and when 80% for the first group and 70% for the second one never even thought about editing something.

Some of the students (specifically 42.1% of them) believe they use Wikipedia more now, and –compared to the initial questionnaires– more of them now admit to consult it for study. Hopefully now they do it in a more critical way. If we can trust the last questionnaire they do: 47.4% state that now that they know what lies behind the creation of an article they will pay more attention to what they are reading. More than one third will keep an eye on the citations, and the same is true for the sources (see Figure 11.5).

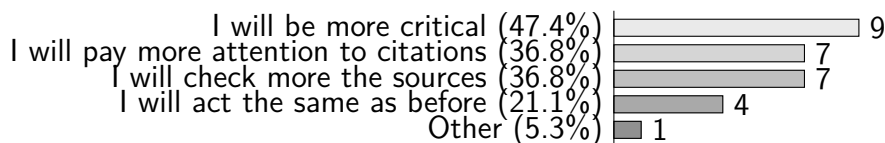


Figure 11.5: *Knowing how a Wikipedia article is created...*

What has also changed since the beginning of this project is perception of the average quality and reliability of the encyclopedia. Probably because it is no longer seen as something written by unknown sages somewhere in world, but by everyday people like the students themselves, it has lost the aura of infallibility that an encyclopedia usually has. Taking again from the opinions of the students, we have this good example: “I start thinking of the users as physical people, with virtues and limits and not as always-competent abstract entities.”

Moreover, the students have learned how the editing process works, how sources are selected and cited, so now –as can be seen in Figures 11.6 and 11.7– they have a slightly more distanced view of Wikipedia, compared to the results they gave at the beginning of the course.

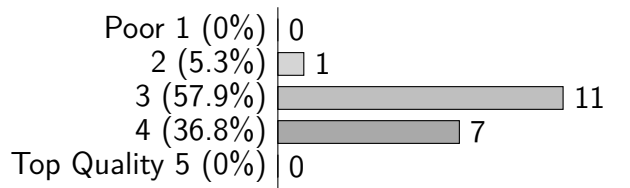


Figure 11.6: *On a scale from 1 to 5, what do you think now is the average quality of the articles?*

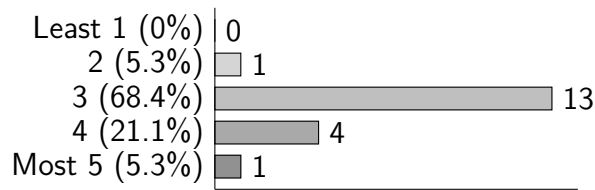


Figure 11.7: *On a scale from 1 to 5, how reliable do you think Wikipedia is now?*

Notwithstanding the criticism –which is in our opinion a positive outcome of the activity– most of the students have liked the editing activity. They found it more difficult compared to the writing of an essay, but they felt more motivated and involved by it. They believe the activity has been all-in-all more formative and useful. As can be seen in Figure 11.8, the wide majority of the students would like to be given the chance to repeat their experience in other courses.

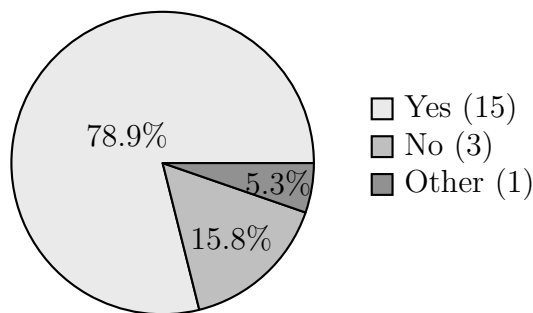


Figure 11.8: *Would you like other courses to integrate Wikipedia editing in their syllabus?*

The answers to the open questions offered plenty of positive feedback

about the project and many students would like to repeat it if it were possible. “I would definitely repeat it”, “the activity was very interesting, it allowed me to see the other side of Wikipedia, to understand how much work lies behind it”, “I would like that other courses used similar ways because it make me get to know the background of Wikipedia and I believe it could be useful not only to us university students, but also to younger ones, beginning to approaching the sources and taking everything as it is, without verifying if the piece of news is actually reliable or not”, “surely the project has been more than useful. I suggest everybody to try and write an article”, “I think it has been something new that has made the course more lively, driving the participants to do their best even more, making more sense out of study”, “the Wikipedia project has enthused me. [...] It surely is useful for an in-depth analysis of the course subject”, “I would repeat it”, “Without doubt a more-than-positive experience”, “yes, I can say I would repeat it many other times. [...] It has constantly stimulated me from beginning to end and I felt responsible of my content”.

Thanks to the follow-up questionnaire and the self-analysis of the work compiled by Group A we can understand also how the Wikipedia community is seen by the students. Apart from one who clearly has a negative opinion (“[They are] closed. Some sort of ruling caste towards the freely given contents. Too rigid and often arrogant.”) and some who have encountered some difficulties in interaction with others, most of the students have kind words for them: “[they are] very careful in correcting possible errors and accommodating in helping new users.” They felt quite surprised by their involvement and speed: “One time someone adjusted the size of the first picture I put in the article (I was amazed by their speed, since it wasn’t even there for five minutes before they changed it)”, and some embraced their philosophy as well: “A few mistakes and punctuation problems have sometimes been fixed by other users, and by and by I have done the same on other articles.”

At the beginning, some of the students did not even know that there was a community of people creating the encyclopedia and how much effort they would put into Wikipedia: “I didn’t know there was a ‘staff’ checking the articles and their content, I am happy to know they exist!”, “before

starting the project I never thought of Wikipedia as a community and I never thought of those who write it. Now I admire who contributes often to Wikipedia because I know all the work of sources research and selection that lies behind it”, “the project is interesting, it opened to me a new world I didn’t know existed. I didn’t value much Wikipedia before knowing exactly what lies behind its creation”, “I had never written on Wikipedia before, and now that I know how much work there is behind it I respect this website and the people who keep on improve it more.”

The participants were actually disappointed when nobody interacted with them: “nearly nobody contributed to the writing of this article. I am actually a bit disappointment by this, and I hope that in the future maybe some Wikipedians would add more to this article”, “Ever since I left a message on the talk page of ‘*article title*’, no one has answered. This hasn’t been a problem, after all, but I was expecting someone to acknowledge my presence.” Apparently this has been a sensitive issue, since many others wrote about it: “I was a bit disappointed to see that no one even answered my message on the Talk Page of the article”, “unluckily my article did not attract the community’s attention, and I haven’t received any feedback”, “I only regret that the article I chose to work on did not rally enthusiasm from other Wikipedians.”

What also emerges from the students’ opinions is that they appreciated the presence of weekly tasks and tutorial suggestions sent by their instructor. These helped them not to feel incapable of contributing at the beginning and gave little checkpoints and goals to reach, benchmarks by which to test their increasing abilities day by day: “I can admit that working on the article at the beginning was a bit complicated because it was my first experience with contribution to Wikipedia. Gradually, it was getting easier, the possibility to ask questions online and get responses almost immediately was a great help. What is more the instruction letters which we got every week were clear and contained useful information and links”, “Entering the world of Wikipedia has been a great surprise for me, I enjoyed learning how to deal with this new tool and step by step I got familiar with the technical writing system, which at the beginning scared me a little, but after the first uncertainty, it

was all downhill”, “the weekly tasks helped me to structure my work and to keep up with it, continuously working on it”, “I must say that having structured activities every week has been fundamental”, “it was a good idea to give all the participants the deadlines timetable at the beginning, so that who is really interested in the project can better organize the work.”

After they had been shown where to look for help, some students continued learning by themselves using the manual pages or asking the community: “I sometimes clicked on the ‘edit source’ of different articles in order to see how other users had done their editing”, “A good thing about Wikipedia is that there are easy tutorials explaining how to do things”, “I always found prompt answers when I had doubts, either from Wiki members or Wiki-guides.”

Some students also explained the pros and cons of this kind of activity; for example one stated that: “if a student is not used at writing essays using structured paragraphs and regularly citing sources, this kind of activity is ideal.” On the other hand one wrote that “usually one article is too wide for one student alone [...] Other times the structure of Wikipedia presents a confused organization of articles pertaining to the same subject, which might force the student to undergo a setup work that has to do with his/her exam only marginally.”

Almost unanimously the students liked the fact that their work was devoted to something useful, and not destined to be read only by their teacher and then be thrown away immediately after, or condemned to sit forever in some closet. “I really liked the project. We were not just doing an assignment supposed to be read only by our teacher and rapidly forgotten, we participate in worldwide project”, “one can capitalize on the great quantity of study, supported by the specialized literature sharing it with everybody and making it potentially eternal. Also this awareness has been a source of motivation”, “thank you very much for the initiative you promoted, it has been really useful because we [...] only create texts, essays and so on that then end up covered in dust in the drawer”, “I am really happy about my participation in the project. Especially because I had the impression that my editing did not just serve to get a grade and expand my personal knowledge,

but to share it with others”, “I [...] really appreciated the philosophy of co-building knowledge.”

It is our opinion that this has been an absolutely positive experience, especially for the students taking part in it. It would probably be really difficult to find other students talking in these terms of their last exam: “I am very proud of what I have done” and “I feel this very interesting and refreshing experience will have a very positive effect on my further university work and not only.”

Conclusion

Students are usually told that using Wikipedia is not a good choice, but most of the time they are not told why.¹ They eventually consult it –openly or not, since usually they are not allowed to cite it as a source– without knowledge of how it functions, without being able to distinguish unreliable information, material without citation, statements that have not reached community consensus. Of course, they find it an incredibly useful resource, but maybe today, now that Wikipedia has more than half a billion unique users a month² we should start accepting its existence and that it is used not only as a bibliography source.

Despite its ubiquity and popularity –or maybe especially because of it– it would seem essential for instructors to teach their students to approach Wikipedia correctly, showing them how to use it in an intelligent way.³ Teachers themselves should become more acquainted with it, to be able to train their students properly.⁴ Instead of contrasting the value and quality of the free encyclopedia with traditional ones, we should think of the myriad of other online sources people would use to inform themselves if Wikipedia were not in existence.⁵ These would probably be much less well monitored and reliable than is Wikipedia, and are also less easy –when not impossible– to correct.

¹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Jbmurray/Madness>

²As per April 2013, now they are probably many more. www.thenextweb.com/insider/2013/04/19/sites-owned-by-the-wikimedia-foundation-now-receive-over-500m-unique-visitors-each-month/ (accessed 1 February 2016).

³GARRISON, JOHN C. (2015). “Getting a “quick fix”: First-year college students’ use of Wikipedia”. In: *First Monday* 20.10. (Oct). URL: <http://128.248.156.56/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/5401/5003>. (accessed 6 February 2016).

⁴MEISHAR-TAL, HAGIT, “Teachers’ use of Wikipedia with their Students”.

⁵OCCHIPINTI, RITA, “La partecipazione degli esperti alla produzione collettiva di conoscenza: il caso Wikipedia”.

As we have seen –especially from the questionnaires regarding our activity– students enjoyed the assignment and found it very interesting and useful for their future academic careers. Using the words of Brailas, “Editing Wikipedia’s articles as a course assignment can be quite a beneficial activity for both improving specific subject learning and Wikipedia literacy. Before the specific intervention students were consumers of Wikipedia’s content. During the intervention students became producers of Wikipedia’s content, while the way they consume this content radically changed.”⁶ Of course Wikipedia literacy plays a major role in this, and the best case scenario would be that students arrived at university already comfortable with how the free encyclopedia works and how to learn with it.

A lot of work has still to be done before reaching that point, but until then making the professors more confident with Wikipedia is a much-needed step. Apparently, there is at least one journal (RNA News) that asks its authors to contribute to Wikipedia before publishing their articles.⁷ A similar approach should be applied in the university, asking students to contribute to the articles connected to their essays and class presentations. A more radical move would be to ask students about to graduate to do so, in connection with their thesis research. Or request teachers to contribute, as part of their academic activity.

As Meseguer-Artola, Aibar, Lladós, Minguillón, and Lerga discovered, faculty members are particularly prone to consider their colleagues’ own experiences and suggestions.⁸ It is believable that their students are even more. Therefore, it would be very effective if faculty members already using Wikipedia as a learning tool would publicly acknowledge it, sharing insights and

⁶BRILAS, ALEXIOS (2011). “Using Wikipedia in a Course Assignment: Implications for Wikipedia Literacy in Higher and Secondary Education”. In: *Never Waste a Crisis!* EDEN Open Classroom 2011 Conference. (Oct. 27–29, 2011). Ed. by Sofoklis Sotiriou and András Szűcs. European Distance and E-Learning Network. Ellinogermaniki Agogi, Athens, Greece, pp. 116–121. URL: http://www.eden-online.org/system/files/OCLR_2011_Athens_Proceedings.pdf. (accessed 9 December 2015).

⁷BUTLER, DECLAN (2008). “Publish in Wikipedia or perish”. In: *Nature News*. URL: <http://www.nature.com/news/2008/081216/full/news.2008.1312.html>. (accessed 11 December 2015).

⁸MESEGUER-ARTOLA, ANTONI et al., “Factors that influence the teaching use of Wikipedia in higher education”.

materials. They should explain the positive effect this kind of activity has on the students, possibly documenting these practices with papers and reports to present to the academic world.

Meanwhile, each one of us can do his or her part. As Banaji from Harvard University put it, in a challenge to fellow scholars from the Association for Psychological Science to help improve psychological-related articles on Wikipedia: “Wikipedia is the encyclopedia that anybody can edit. But have you?”⁹

⁹BANAJI, MAHZARIN R. (2010). “Wikipedia is the Encyclopedia that Anybody Can Edit. But Have You?” In: *Observer* 23.10 (Dec). URL: <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/publications/observer/2010/december-10/wikipedia-is-the-encyclopedia-that-anybody-can-edit-but-have-you.html>. (accessed 10 December 2015).

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Appendix A

Group A questionnaire



Wikipedia

Thank you for having chosen to take part in this project. Please, take a few minutes of your time to answer these questions on you and your experience with Wikipedia so far. These data will be very valuable to my work!

*Required

You are *

- M
 F
 Other:

When were you born? *

(Year only)

What is your degree? *

- Relazioni Internazionali Comparete
 Lingue e Letterature Europee, Americane e Postcoloniali
 Scienze del Linguaggio
 Other:

What is your mother tongue? *

- Italian
- English
- Other:

What other languages do you know? *

- Russian
- Italian
- German
- Spanish
- French
- English
- Other:

Did you know Wikipedia already? *

- Duh, yes!
- No, I lived in a jungle until last week.

How often do you consult it? *

- Every day
- 5-7 times a week
- 2-4 times a week
- Once a week
- At least once a month
- Once a year
- Never

For what reasons? *

(Pick at least one)

- To prepare an essay
- To study
- To get lost with the "Random page" button
- To find links to other sites on some subject
- To check someone's biography
- To win a bet
- Other:

Did any one of your teachers suggested to use it? *

- No, never talked about it
- No, my teachers actually told me to avoid it
- Yes, but just for the bibliography

- Yes, in high school
- Yes, at the university
- Other:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how reliable do you think it is? *

1 2 3 4 5

Are you kidding, right? Very reliable

On a scale from 1 to 5, what was the average quality of the articles you consulted? *

1 2 3 4 5

Poor Top quality

Did you ever find obvious mistakes? *

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

Did you ever correct something? *

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All the time

Which of these top-10 Wikipedia versions do you use? *

- Swedish
- German
- Spanish
- English
- Dutch
- Italian
- Russian
- Other:

Which ones from the following Wikimedia projects do you use? *

- Wiktionary
- Wikinews
- Commons
- Wikibooks
- Wikipedia
- Meta-Wiki
- Wikiversity
- Wikispecies
- Wikiquote
- Wikisource
- Wikidata
- Mediawiki
- Wikivoyage

Did you ever contribute to Wikipedia? *

(apart from minor edits such as correcting typos etc.)

- Yes
- No

Why? *

- I never thought about it
- I haven't got time
- I'm scared of feedback
- I don't have enough knowledge
- It's too difficult
- Other:

Submit



100%: You made it.

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Appendix B

Group A results

32 responses

[View all responses](#) [Publish analytics](#)

Summary

You are

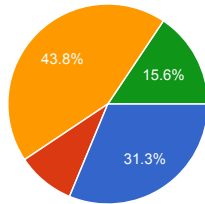


M	5	15.6%
F	27	84.4%
Other	0	0%

When were you born?

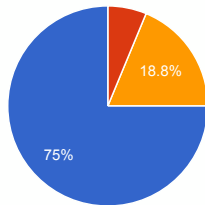
1990
1987
1986
1985
1983
1989
1988
24
1995
1994
1993
1992
1991
1947

What is your degree?



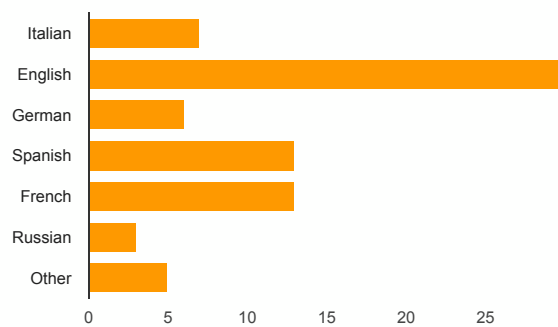
Scienze del Linguaggio	10	31.3%
Relazioni Internazionali Comparate	3	9.4%
Lingue e Letterature Europee, Americane e Postcoloniali	14	43.8%
Other	5	15.6%

What is your mother tongue?



Italian	24	75%
English	2	6.3%
Other	6	18.8%

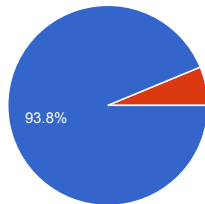
What other languages do you know?



Italian	7	21.9%
English	30	93.8%

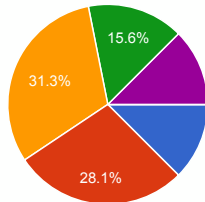
German	6	18.8%
Spanish	13	40.6%
French	13	40.6%
Russian	3	9.4%
Other	5	15.6%

Did you know Wikipedia already?



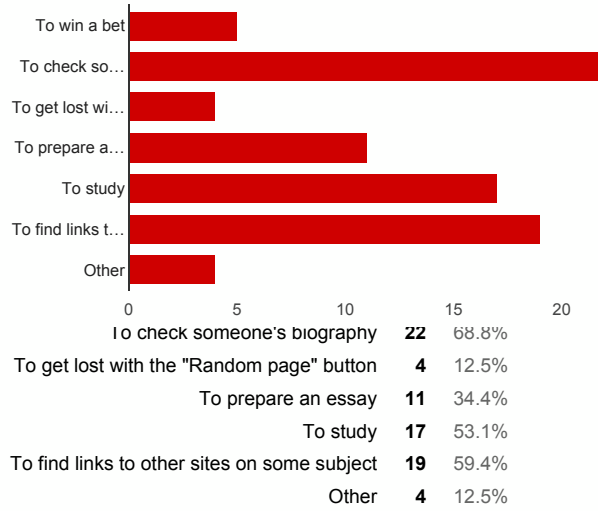
Duh, yes!	30	93.8%
No, I lived in a jungle until last week.	2	6.3%

How often do you consult it?

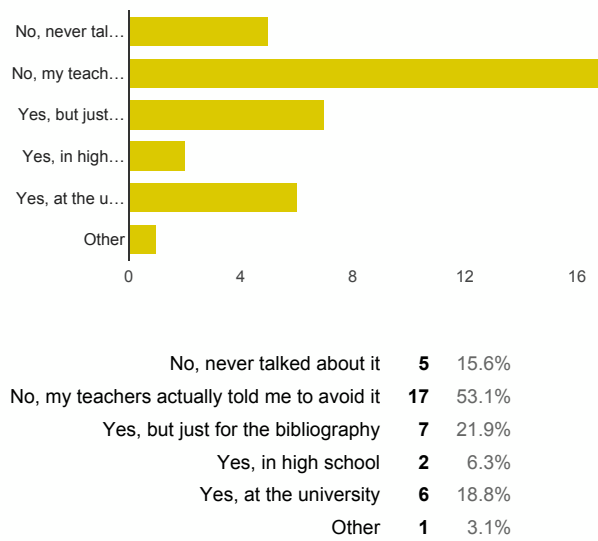


Every day	4	12.5%
5-7 times a week	9	28.1%
2-4 times a week	10	31.3%
Once a week	5	15.6%
At least once a month	4	12.5%
Once a year	0	0%
Never	0	0%

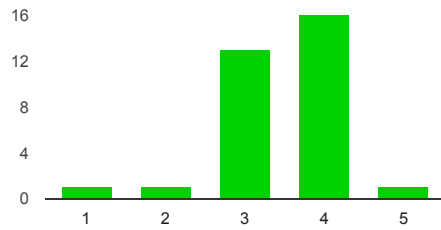
For what reasons?



Did any one of your teachers suggested to use it?

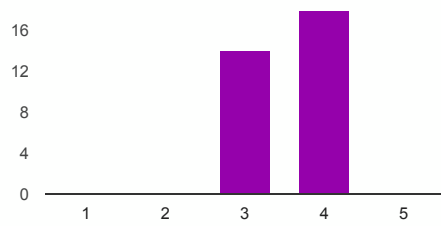


On a scale from 1 to 5, how reliable do you think it is?



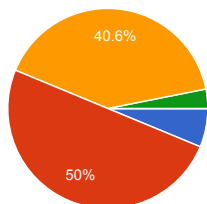
3	13	40.6%
4	16	50%
Very reliable: 5	1	3.1%

On a scale from 1 to 5, what was the average quality of the articles you consulted?



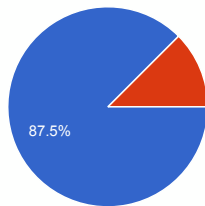
Poor: 1	0	0%
2	0	0%
3	14	43.8%
4	18	56.3%
Top quality: 5	0	0%

Did you ever find obvious mistakes?



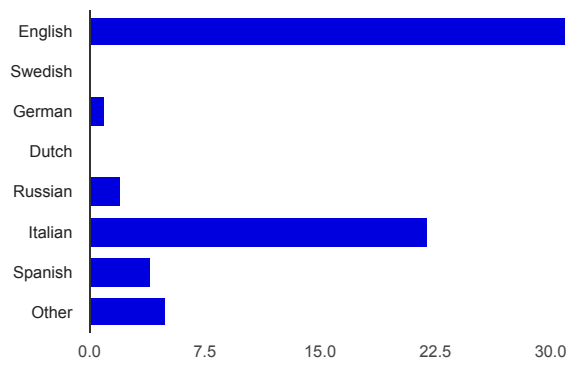
Never	2	6.3%
Rarely	16	50%
Sometimes	13	40.6%
Often	1	3.1%
Always	0	0%

Did you ever correct something?



Never	28	87.5%
Rarely	4	12.5%
Sometimes	0	0%
Often	0	0%
All the time	0	0%

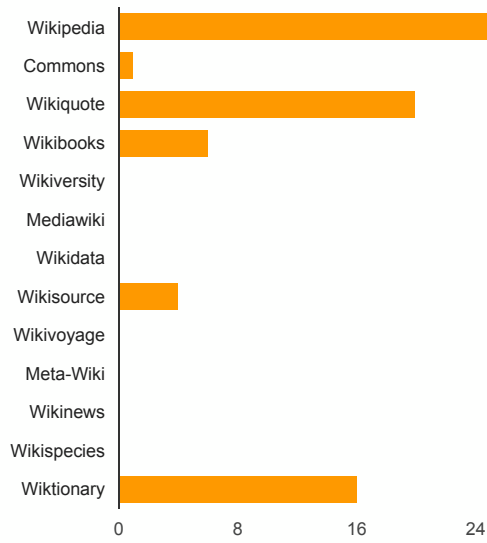
Which of these top-10 Wikipedia versions do you use?



English	31	96.9%
Swedish	0	0%
German	1	3.1%
Dutch	0	0%

Russian	2	6.3%
Italian	22	68.8%
Spanish	4	12.5%
Other	5	15.6%

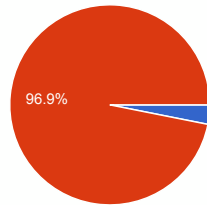
Which ones from the following Wikimedia projects do you use?



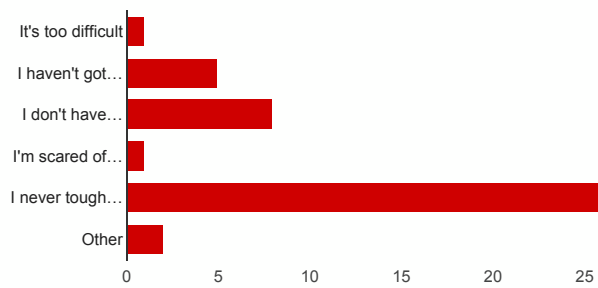
Wikipedia	32	100%
Commons	1	3.1%
Wikiquote	20	62.5%
Wikibooks	6	18.8%
Wikiversity	0	0%
Mediawiki	0	0%
Wikidata	0	0%
Wikisource	4	12.5%
Wikivoyage	0	0%
Meta-Wiki	0	0%
Wikinews	0	0%
Wikispecies	0	0%
Wiktionary	16	50%

Did you ever contributed to Wikipedia?

Yes 1 3.1%
No 31 96.9%

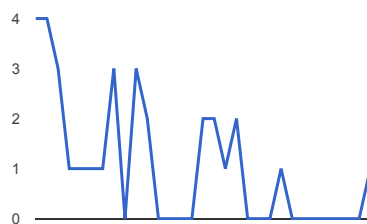


Why?



It's too difficult 1 3.1%
I haven't got time 5 15.6%
I don't have enough knowledge 8 25%
I'm scared of feedback 1 3.1%
I never thought about it 26 81.3%
Other 2 6.3%

Number of daily responses



Appendix C

Group A self-report excerpts

The whole work was quite difficult, [...] However I am proud of what I have done and I hope this could be useful for the entire community of Wikipedia.

I can admit that working on the article at the beginning was a bit complicated because it was my first experience with contribution to Wikipedia. Gradually, it was getting easier, the possibility to ask questions online and get responses almost immediately was a great help. What is more the instruction letters which we got every week were clear and contained useful information and links.

I sometimes clicked on the "edit source" of different articles in order to see how other users had done their editing.

I have encountered some difficulties in the interaction with other users explaining what my intents were and why I had done specific choices but I always appreciated the offered suggestions expressed in the talk page. In the future [...] I am willing to improve articles of my own concern.

I'm planning to keep on contributing to the article and then submit it for peer review to attract other users attention on it. It would be of great satisfaction if it reached the status of good article.

I feel this very interesting and refreshing experience will have a very positive effect on my further university work and not only.

Other users helped me with the more technical part, that I personally found the most challenging.

A good thing about Wikipedia is that there are easy tutorials explaining how to do things. They are very easy to understand and therefore very useful if you have any doubt concerning editing.

It was a pleasure to contribute to Wikipedia, a means to share information and learn something new every day.

Except from a few editors who corrected my article, nearly nobody contributed to the writing of this article. I am actually a bit disappointment by this, and I hope that in the future maybe some wikipedians would add more to this article. What actually took me more time was referencing the text. I wanted my references to be perfect and referencing took me time to understand and apply.

I am really happy about my participation in the project. Especially because I had the impression that my editing did not just serve to get a grande and expand my personal knowledge, but to share it with others.

One time someone adjusted the size of the first picture I put in the article (I was amazed by their speed, since it wasn't even there for five minutes before they changed it).

At first I experienced some difficulty, because of all the rules that control Wikipedia. Of course these difficulties came from my lack of experience, in fact it was the first time that I have been working on Wikipedia.

It was a challenging but interesting and nice experience. I had never written on Wikipedia before, and now that I know how much work there is behind it I respect this website and the people who keep on improve it more.

Entering the world of Wikipedia has been a great surprise for me, I enjoyed learning how to deal with this new tool and step by step I got familiar with the technical writing system, which at the beginning scared me a little, but after the first uncertainty, it was all downhill. I [...] really appreciated the philosophy of co-building knowledge. I always found prompt answers when I had doubts, either from Wiki members or Wiki-guides.

The weekly taks helped me to structure my work and to keep up with it, continually working on it.

Images were also quite difficult to aquire. Basically, every picture I found was protected by copyright. I even found a website with an image taken from Wikimedia Commons, but there was no link to it, and I couldn't manage to find it myself.

Ever since I left a message on the talk page of “Irish migration to Great Britain”, no one has answered. This hasn't been a problem, after all, but I was expecting someone to acknowledge my presence.

A few mistakes and punctuation problems have sometimes been fixed by other users, and by and by I have done the same on other articles, through the correction of a mistake or the addition of a note.

I was a bit disappointed to see that no one even answered my message on the Talk Page of the article, in which I explained the project that we have.


Grazie mille per l'iniziativa che hai promosso, è stata utilissima anche perché noi di studi umanistici rischiamo sempre di creare testi, saggi e quant'altro che finiscono solo impolverati nel cassetto. Imbocca al lupo per tutto e complimenti per il questionario: ben costruito e super veloce!!

Grazie ancora per l'esperienza

Appendix D

Group B questionnaire

[Edit this form](#)



Wikipedia

Grazie mille per aver scelto di prender parte in questo progetto. Per favore, spendete pochi minuti per rispondere a queste domande su di voi e la vostra esperienza con Wikipedia finora. Saranno informazioni molto utili per il mio lavoro!

***Required**

Sei *

M

F

Other:

Quando sei nato? *

(anno)

Qual è il tuo corso di laurea? *

- Storia delle arti e conservazione dei beni artistici
- Storia dal Medioevo all'Età Contemporanea
- Storia e gestione del patrimonio archivistico e bibliografico
- Conservazione e gestione dei beni e delle attività culturali
- Other:

Qual è la tua lingua madre? *

- Italiano
- Inglese
- Other:

Che altre lingue conosci? *

- Francese
- Russo
- Inglese
- Italiano
- Spagnolo
- Tedesco
- Other:

Conoscevi già Wikipedia? *

- Ma dai, ovvio!
- No, ho vissuto in una caverna fino a ieri.

Quanto spesso la consulti? *

- Ogni giorno
- 5-7 volte la settimana
- 2-4 volte la settimana
- Una volta a settimana
- Almeno una volta al mese
- Una volta l'anno
- Mai

Per quali ragioni? *

(scegli almeno una risposta)

- Per trovare collegamenti ad altri siti su un determinato argomento
- Per perdersi col pulsante "Una voce a caso"
- Per vincere una scommessa
- Per preparare una tesina
- Per controllare le info di un personaggio famoso
- Per studiare
- Other:

Per caso qualche docente te l'ha mai consigliata? *

- No, nessuno me ne ha mai parlato
- No, a dire il vero i miei insegnanti me l'hanno sconsigliata

- Sì, ma solo per la bibliografia
- Sì, al liceo
- Sì, all'università
- Other:

Su una scala da 1 a 5, quanto credi sia affidabile? *

1 2 3 4 5

Stai scherzando, vero? Molto affidabile

Su una scala da 1 a 5, quale ritieni che sia la qualità media delle voci? *

1 2 3 4 5

Bassa Il massimo

Hai mai incontrato errori palesi? *

- Mai
- Raramente
- A volte
- Spesso
- Sempre

Hai mai corretto qualcosa? *

- Mai
- Raramente
- A volte
- Spesso
- Di continuo

Quale di queste Wikipedia tra le 10 più usate al mondo consulti? *

- Spagnolo
- Olandese
- Tedesco
- Russo
- Inglese
- Svedese
- Italiano
- Other:

Quale dei seguenti progetti di Wikimedia utilizzi? *

- Wikivoyage
- Wikisource
- Wikibooks
- Wiktionary
- Wikidata
- Wikipedia
- Mediawiki
- Wikiquote
- Wikiversity
- Meta-Wiki
- Wikispecies
- Wikinews
- Commons

Hai mai contribuito a Wikipedia? *

(esclusi eventuali piccoli errori, di battitura etc.)


- Sì
- No

Perché no? *

- Non so abbastanza
- Temo il giudizio degli altri utenti
- È troppo difficile
- Non ci ho mai pensato
- Non ho tempo
- Other:

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 100%: You made it.

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Appendix E

Group B results

10 responses

[View all responses](#)

[Publish analytics](#)

Summary

Sei

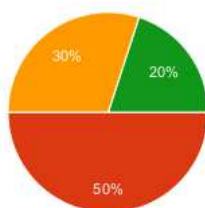


M	7	70%
F	3	30%
Other	0	0%

Quando sei nato?

1976
1990
1989
1993
1992

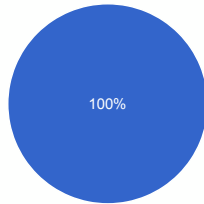
Qual è il tuo corso di laurea?



Conservazione e gestione dei beni e delle attività culturali	0	0%
Storia e gestione del patrimonio archivistico e bibliografico	5	50%
Storia dal Medioevo all'Età Contemporanea	3	30%

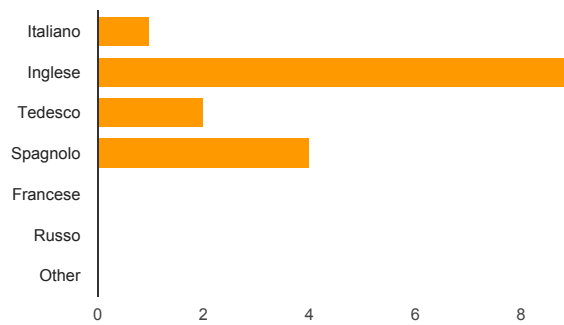
Storia delle arti e conservazione dei beni artistici **2** 20%
Other **0** 0%

Qual è la tua lingua madre?



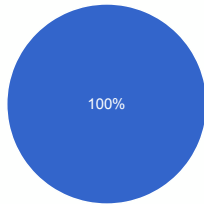
Italiano **10** 100%
Inglese **0** 0%
Other **0** 0%

Che altre lingue conosci?



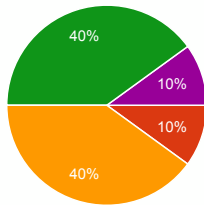
Italiano **1** 10%
Inglese **9** 90%
Tedesco **2** 20%
Spagnolo **4** 40%
Francese **0** 0%
Russo **0** 0%
Other **0** 0%

Conoscevi già Wikipedia?



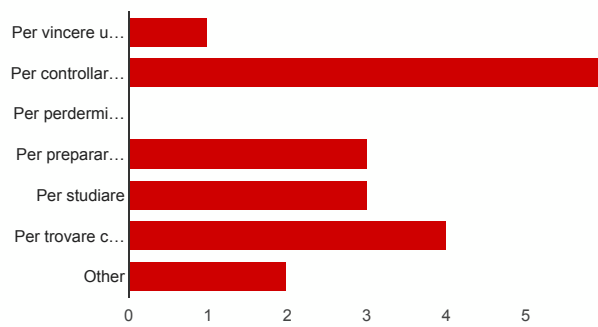
Ma dai, ovvio!	10	100%
No, ho vissuto in una caverna fino a ieri.	0	0%

Quanto spesso la consulti?



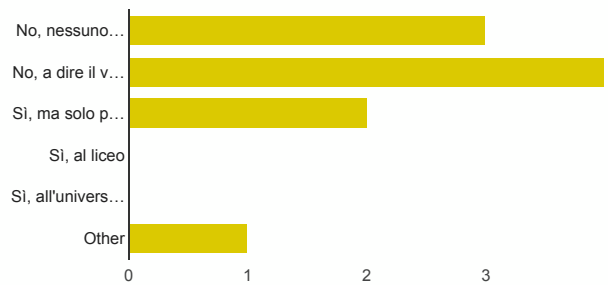
Ogni giorno	0	0%
5-7 volte la settimana	1	10%
2-4 volte la settimana	4	40%
Una volta a settimana	4	40%
Almeno una volta al mese	1	10%
Una volta l'anno	0	0%
Mai	0	0%

Per quali ragioni?



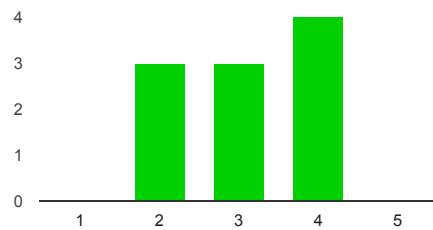
Per vincere una scommessa	1	10%
Per controllare le info di un personaggio famoso	6	60%
Per perdermi col pulsante "Una voce a caso"	0	0%
Per preparare una tesina	3	30%
Per studiare	3	30%
Per trovare collegamenti ad altri siti su un determinato argomento	4	40%
Other	2	20%

Per caso qualche docente te l'ha mai consigliata?



No, nessuno me ne ha mai parlato	3	30%
No, a dire il vero i miei insegnanti me l'hanno sconsigliata	4	40%
Sì, ma solo per la bibliografia	2	20%
Sì, al liceo	0	0%
Sì, all'università	0	0%
Other	1	10%

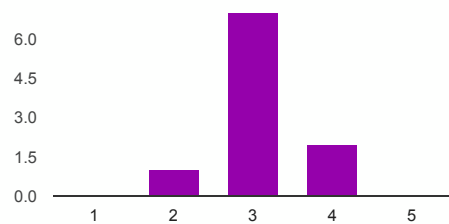
Su una scala da 1 a 5, quanto credi sia affidabile?



Stai scherzando, vero?: 1 0 0%

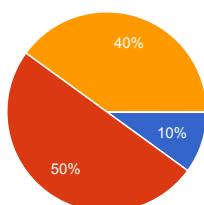
2	3	30%
3	3	30%
4	4	40%
Molto affidabile: 5	0	0%

Su una scala da 1 a 5, quale ritieni che sia la qualità media delle voci?



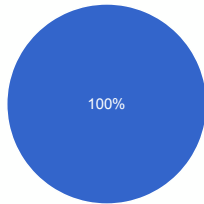
Bassa: 1	0	0%
2	1	10%
3	7	70%
4	2	20%
Il massimo: 5	0	0%

Hai mai incontrato errori palesi?



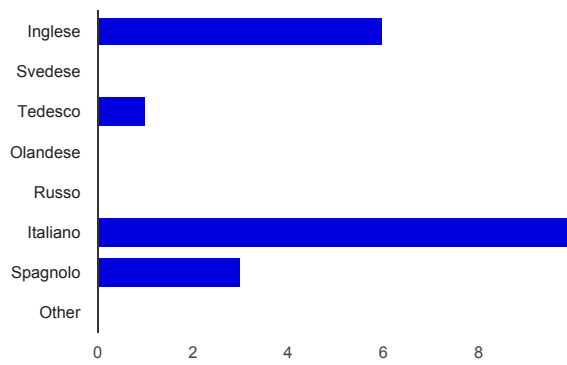
Mai	1	10%
Raramente	5	50%
A volte	4	40%
Spesso	0	0%
Sempre	0	0%

Hai mai corretto qualcosa?



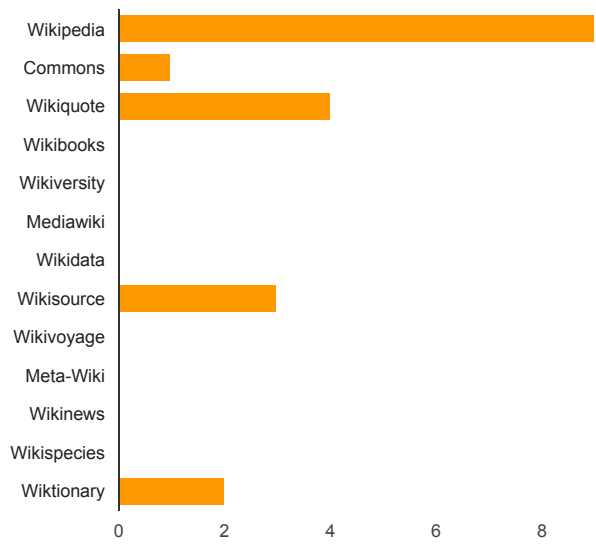
Mai	10	100%
Raramente	0	0%
A volte	0	0%
Spesso	0	0%
Di continuo	0	0%

Quale di queste Wikipedia tra le 10 più usate al mondo consulti?



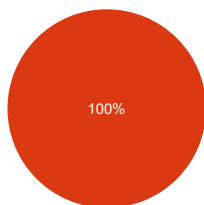
Inglese	6	60%
Svedese	0	0%
Tedesco	1	10%
Olandese	0	0%
Russo	0	0%
Italiano	10	100%
Spagnolo	3	30%
Other	0	0%

Quale dei seguenti progetti di Wikimedia utilizzi?



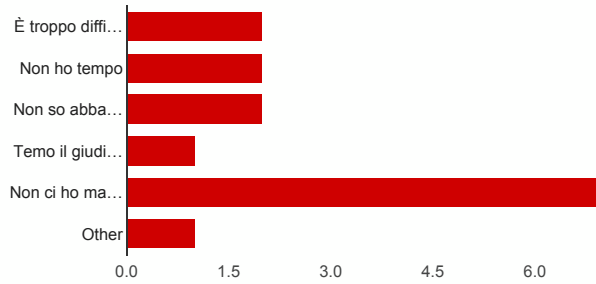
Commons	1	10%
Wikiquote	4	40%
Wikibooks	0	0%
Wikiversity	0	0%
Mediawiki	0	0%
Wikidata	0	0%
Wikisource	3	30%
Wikivoyage	0	0%
Meta-Wiki	0	0%
Wikinews	0	0%
Wikispecies	0	0%
Wiktionary	2	20%

Hai mai contribuito a Wikipedia?



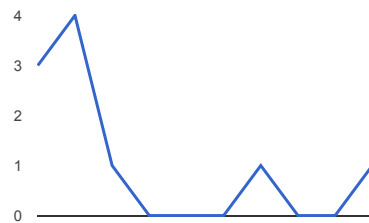
Si	0	0%
No	10	100%

Perché no?



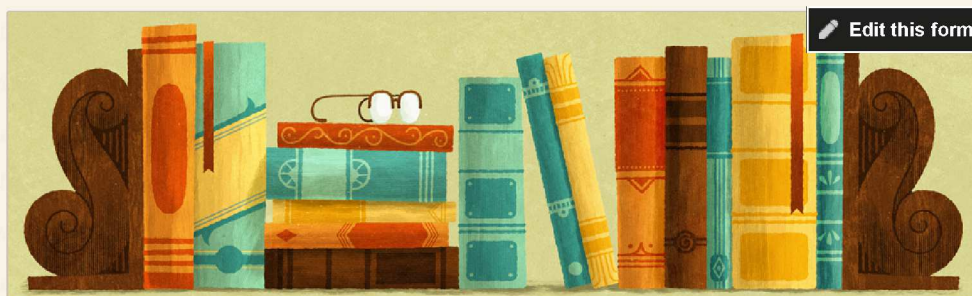
È troppo difficile	2	20%
Non ho tempo	2	20%
Non so abbastanza	2	20%
Temo il giudizio degli altri utenti	1	10%
Non ci ho mai pensato	7	70%
Other	1	10%

Number of daily responses



Appendix F

Follow-up questionnaire



Questionario follow-up

Per concludere il mio lavoro di ricerca per la tesi, vi chiedo gentilmente di compilare quest'ultimo questionario. Si tratta di poche domande che mi servono per capire se e cosa è cambiato nella vostra visione di Wikipedia tra prima e dopo il corso.

Il questionario è del tutto anonimo e i risultati verranno da me trattati in maniera aggregata solo per scopi statistici. Grazie mille.

***Required**

Per quali motivi consulti Wikipedia? *

(è possibile barrare più di una casella)

- Per vincere una scommessa
- Per controllare le info di un personaggio famoso
- Per perdermi col pulsante "Una voce a caso"
- Per preparare una tesina
- Per studiare
- Per trovare collegamenti ad altri siti su un determinato argomento
- Other:

Consulti più frequentemente Wikipedia da quando è finito il corso? *

- Sì
- No

Hai più contribuito a Wikipedia dopo la fine del corso? *

- Sì
- No

Hai intenzione di continuare a contribuire in futuro? *

- Sì

No

In che modo? (si può scegliere più di una risposta) *

(se non si intende farlo basta scriverlo nella casella altro. la casella altro può essere usata anche per indicare ulteriori possibilità)

- Correggendo piccoli errori quando li incontro
- Continuando il lavoro sulla voce che ho curato per il corso
- Scrivendo nuove voci
- Other:

Ti piacerebbe che altri corsi integrassero attività su Wikipedia nel programma? *

- Sì
- No
- Other:

Scrivere su Wikipedia anziché scrivere una tesina secondo te è: *

Più scelte sono possibili.

- Più facile
- Più difficile
- Più motivante
- Meno motivante
- Più formativo
- Meno formativo
- Più utile
- Meno utile
- Più coinvolgente
- Meno coinvolgente
- Other:

Dopo aver visto ciò che sta dietro alla creazione di una voce, in futuro: *

(è possibile scegliere più di una risposta)

- Mi comporterò alla stessa maniera di prima
- Controllerò meglio le fonti
- Sarò più critica/o
- Sarò più attenta/o alle citazioni
- Other:

Col senno di poi, su una scala da 1 a 5, quale ritieni che sia la qualità media delle voci di Wikipedia? *

1 2 3 4 5

Pessima Ottima

Col senno di poi, su una scala da 1 a 5, quanto credi sia affidabile Wikipedia? *

1 2 3 4 5

Pochissimo Moltissimo

Qual è la tua percezione attuale della comunità di Wikipediani? *

Commenti, critiche, suggerimenti?

Secondo te il progetto è stato utile per la tua formazione personale, ha dato un valore aggiunto al corso, è stato piacevole e interessante? Oppure si è trattato di un'esperienza da dimenticare? Che difficoltà hai avuto? Lo ripeteresti? Insomma, nessuna pietà.

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Appendix G

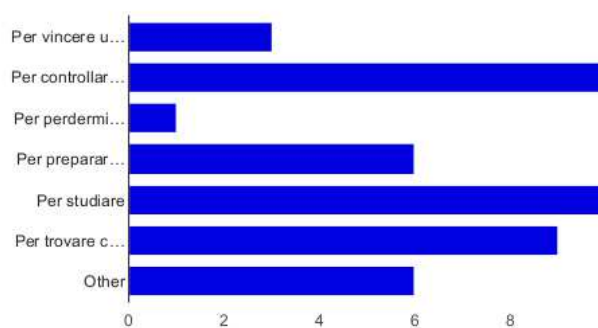
Follow-up results

19 responses

[View all responses](#) [Publish analytics](#)

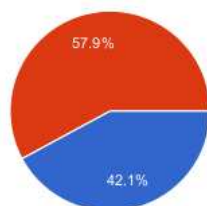
Summary

Per quali motivi consulti Wikipedia?



Per vincere una scommessa	3	15.8%
Per controllare le info di un personaggio famoso	10	52.6%
Per perdermi col pulsante "Una voce a caso"	1	5.3%
Per preparare una tesina	6	31.6%
Per studiare	10	52.6%
Per trovare collegamenti ad altri siti su un determinato argomento	9	47.4%
Other	6	31.6%

Consulti più frequentemente Wikipedia da quando è finito il corso?

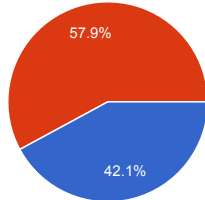


Si	8	42.1%
No	11	57.9%

Hai più contribuito a Wikipedia dopo la fine del corso?

Si	8	42.1%
----	---	-------

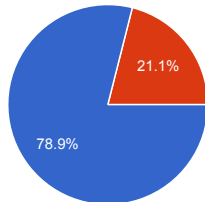
No 11 57.9%



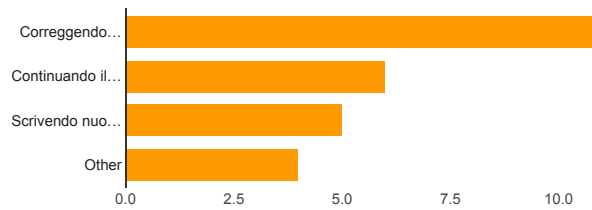
Hai intenzione di continuare a contribuire in futuro?

Sì 15 78.9%

No 4 21.1%



In che modo? (si può scegliere più di una risposta)



Correggendo piccoli errori quando li incontro 11 57.9%

Continuando il lavoro sulla voce che ho curato per il corso 6 31.6%

Scrivendo nuove voci 5 26.3%

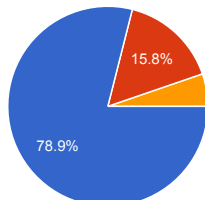
Other 4 21.1%

Ti piacerebbe che altri corsi integrassero attività su Wikipedia nel programma?

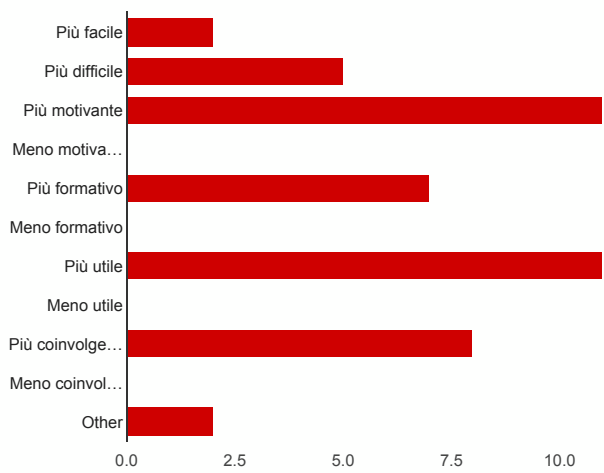
Sì 15 78.9%

No 3 15.8%

Other 1 5.3%

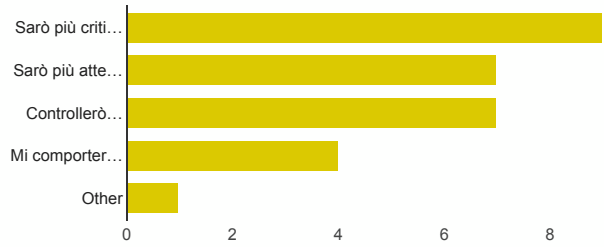


Scrivere su Wikipedia anziché scrivere una tesina secondo te è:



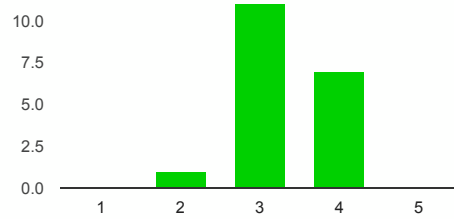
Più facile	2	10.5%
Più difficile	5	26.3%
Più motivante	11	57.9%
Meno motivante	0	0%
Più formativo	7	36.8%
Meno formativo	0	0%
Più utile	11	57.9%
Meno utile	0	0%
Più coinvolgente	8	42.1%
Meno coinvolgente	0	0%
Other	2	10.5%

Dopo aver visto ciò che sta dietro alla creazione di una voce, in futuro:



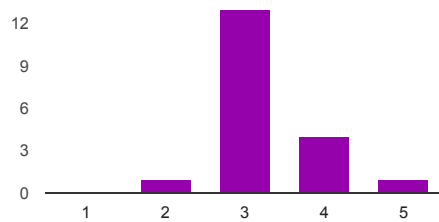
Sarò più critica/o	9	47.4%
Sarò più attenta/o alle citazioni	7	36.8%
Controllerò meglio le fonti	7	36.8%
Mi comporterò alla stessa maniera di prima	4	21.1%
Other	1	5.3%

Col senno di poi, su una scala da 1 a 5, quale ritieni che sia la qualità media delle voci di Wikipedia?



Pessima: 1	0	0%
2	1	5.3%
3	11	57.9%
4	7	36.8%
Ottima: 5	0	0%

Col senno di poi, su una scala da 1 a 5, quanto credi sia affidabile Wikipedia?



Pochissimo: 1	0	0%
2	1	5.3%
3	13	68.4%
4	4	21.1%
Moltissimo: 5	1	5.3%

Qual è la tua percezione attuale della comunità di Wikipediani?

Mi ha dato l'impressione di saper essere cooperativa

Ancora non ne ho un'idea chiara. Non pensavo esistesse una "redazione" che controllasse le voci ed il loro contenuto, sono felice di sapere che esistano! Tuttavia è una comunità così grande che averne un'idea complessiva penso sia difficile. Ritengo comunque che sia composta da una comunità varia che contribuisce in vario modo alla creazione/modifica delle più svariate voci, facendo un lavoro più o meno accurato.

Molto attenti a correggere eventuali errori e disponibili ad aiutare chi è alle prime armi
La collaborazione prima di tutto!

In generale i Wikipediani mi sembrano persone oneste e volenterose, gente che spende parte del proprio tempo per gli altri.

Chiusi, una sorta di casta dirigente rispetto ai contributi liberamente dati. Troppo rigidi e spesso superbi.

...

Comunità attiva e seria, formata da persone dagli interessi e le conoscenze più svariate. Il dialogo è semplice e permette sempre di lavorare in sinergia con altri al fine di migliorare le voci.

putroppo il mio articolo non ha attirato l'attenzione della comunità, e non ho ricevuto feedback. pertanto non posso dire granchè. nel mio caso, la mancanza di feedback evidenzia chiaramente un limite, ed è un segnalino dei limiti di applicabilità di wikipedia, ma è anche ragionevole, visto che wikipedia non si propone di presentare l'intero scibile umano.

Wikipedia è resa un grande progetto anche grazie a loro.

Comincio a pensare agli utenti come persone fisiche, con pregi e limiti e non più come entità astratte sempre competenti. Prima di collaborare al progetto, mi sembrava di imbartermi in articoli sempre relativamente curati o almeno in forma di bozza, nulla di pessimo quindi. Non so però se ho effettivamente avuto fortuna con le mie ricerche oppure se sia stata una percezione sfalsata che il progetto mi ha aiutato a sfatare.

Le persone sono in genere molto interessate a diffondere informazioni esatte tra il pubblico, al contrario di quanto si pensa di solito. Pur non conoscendosi, i membri della comunità collaborano per creare degli articoli scritti bene e che siano esatti.

Prima del progetto non ho mai pensato a Wikipedia come ad una comunità e non ho mai pensato a coloro che la scrivono. Adesso provo ammirazione per chi contribuisce a Wikipedia molto spesso perché conosco tutto il lavoro di ricerca e selezione delle fonti che c'è dietro.

Non ho mai veramente interagito con la comunità.

Buona

I like the idea that Wikipeople (editors) contribute to share the knowledge. There are not developing deep analysis on subjects but rather giving access to basic informations. It is up to its readers to check on the received knowledge and it's verity. Yet, the community is sharing information, without profit, the only aim is to share what one knows. It is also easy to use, as reader or editor. Cheer up for Wikipedians !

È un sistema utile, consultabile in modo rapido, con un'affidabilità delle informazioni più che adeguata.

Non ho avuto la possibilità di interagire con altri wikipediani per ora, questo mi da la percezione di una crescita molto lenta dell'enciclopedia, ma è una crescita attenta perché chi vi contribuisce vi dedica del proprio tempo ed energie.

Commenti, critiche, suggerimenti?

Lo ripetersi senza altro magari con qualche informazione tecnica in più sul inserimento e redazione della voci

mi permetto solo di segnalare i rischi dell'approccio 1 studente = 1 argomento. spesso 1 voce è troppo ampia per un solo studente nell'ambito del proprio esame, col risultato di paragrafi che sembrano artificiosi, all'interno del resto dell'articolo (es. innestare un quadro storico, e limitarsi ad un periodo circoscritto in una nazione specifica). in altri casi l'impianto di wikipedia presenta un'organizzazione confusionaria di voci che competono più allo stesso argomento, col rischio di doversi occupare anche qui di un lavoro di sistemazione che pertiene ad un esame solo marginalmente. nessuna tragedia, ovviamente, ma già che ci siamo ho ritenuto opportuno segnalare la faccenda.

I really liked the project. I found it more challenging and intestine that just writing an essay. We were not just doing an assignment supposed to be read only by our teacher and rapidly forgotten, we participate in worldwide project. Our research became therefore less personal. Being read by others, used by others was motivating but also scaring. Indeed, I was affraid that my refrences were not well made or that my argument was not neutral enough. I only regret that the article I chose to work on did not rally enthusiasm from other wikipedians. No one contributed to it, appart from correcting grammar (yet I'm glad that those people helped me make the article grammatically correct). To conclude, it was an interesting project and I am happy to have participated.

L'attività è stata molto interessante, mi ha permesso di vedere l'altro lato di Wikipedia, di capire quanto lavoro ci sia dietro e soprattutto ha confermato quello che già sapevo, cioè che è una risorsa validissima, al contrario di quello che dicono i professori di solito. L'esperienza in generale è stata positiva, ma presterei attenzione a non inserirla in un corso dove ci sia già tanto materiale da studiare. Essendo un lavoro di ricerca, il progetto Wikipedia occupa molto tempo, e se nel corso bisogna leggere più libri e scrivere una tesina magari aggiungere un progetto simile appesantisce troppo gli studenti. Piuttosto, deciso l'argomento del corso, si potrebbe fare un progetto del genere in sostituzione alla tesina, in modo che gli studenti

studino i libri e facciano un po' di ricerca ma senza avere un carico esagerato. Inoltre, gli articoli su cui si lavora non dovrebbero essere troppo "grandi", soprattutto per una prima esperienza.

Sono stata contenta, anche se all'inizio ero un pò scettica a causa di una "brutta esperienza" con Wikipedia alle superiori. Mi è piaciuta quest'esperienza perchè interattiva e rappresenta un modo alternativo di vivere il corso. Mi piacerebbe che altri corsi usassero modalità simili perchè comunque mi ha permesso di conoscere il background di Wikipedia e ritengo possa essere utile non solo a noi universitari ma magari anche a studenti più giovani che iniziano ad approcciarsi alle fonti e prendono tutto per come viene, senza verificare se la notizia reperita sia effettivamente affidabile o meno.

Sicuramente il progetto è stato più che utile! Consiglio a tutti di provare a scrivere una voce e a non spaventarsi se risulta complicato inizialmente.

Penso sia stato qualcosa di nuovo che ha vivacizzato il corso, spronando i partecipanti ad impegnarsi maggiormente dando più senso allo studio, vista l'utilità che potrebbe avere per tante altre persone. È stato difficile abituarsi alle differenze fra articolo ed essay, prima fra tutte imparare a scrivere prima di avere tutte le fonti a disposizione e successivamente ampliare la nuova voce inserita. Lo ripeterei ma non contribuendo con un nuovo articolo, magari aggiungendo materiale ad uno già esistente.

Il progetto wikipedia mi ha entusiasmato. Ho potuto scoprire e imparare ad utilizzare un nuovo strumento, sia utile che con una filosofia di condivisione libera del sapere. Avendo la possibilità di lavorarci, ho rivalutato in meglio l'affidabilità dei suoi contenuti. Mi sono appassionata al mondo dell'editing anche se riconosco non sia cosa facile, anzi, ha richiesto un impegno non indifferente. Sicuramente utile per un approfondimento di un tema del corso.

Il progetto mi è sembrato interessante, ho imparato a conoscere meglio uno strumento importante e a cui posso contribuire. Lo ripeterei!

Il progetto mi ha permesso di conoscere meglio un sito che ho sempre usato, ma mai mi ero chiesto cosa ci fosse dietro. È stato molto impegnativo, ma per svolgere un lavoro fatto bene penso sia inevitabile. Esperienza più che positiva senz'altro.

Secondo me è il progetto è interessante, mi ha aperto un mondo che non conoscevo. Non davo molta importanza a Wikipedia prima di conoscere esattamente cosa sta dietro alla sua creazione. Per me è stato un pò difficile dover seguire tutte le attività settimanali in quanto richiedono tempo e essere svolte e personalmente oltre a studiare lavoro quindi la mia disponibilità di tempo è un pò limitata. Per me personalmente non è stato molto piacevole e quindi non lo ripeterei. Tuttavia indipendentemente dalle ragioni citate, credo che il progetto abbia di per se del potenziale.

E' stata un'esperienza molto utile dal punto di vista personale, interessante e piacevole (a seconda del momento ovviamente, è stato stressante con la scadenza alle porte ma devo dire che avere attività strutturate ogni settimana è stato

fondamentale come anche una scadenza, visto che già di mio non finirei mai di apportare modifiche a quello che scrivo, in questo senso è stato proprio formativo). Mi ha stimolato molto l'uso del linguaggio di markup e per il fatto che forse tutto molto "guidato". Se uno studente non è allenato a scrivere tesine strutturando in paragrafi e citando le fonti regolarmente, questa un'attività è una palestra ideale. Si è esposti a un giudizio informale di più persone, e non del solo professore, ma allo stesso tempo si mantiene uno stato di "allerta" perché si tratta di uno spazio pubblico e ogni azione è rintracciabile (strafalcioni e superficialità comprese). Si posso dire lo rifarei un sacco di altre volte, non avessi da laurearmi ad un certo punto. Mi ha stimolato costantemente dall'inizio alla fine e mi sono sentita responsabile del mio contenuto. In più coi corsi di letteratura si affrontano spesso semestri di studio estremamente specifico e settoriale, accumulando competenze e nozioni che se non più coltivate si perdono con gli anni. Un gran peccato a cui pensavo non ci fosse rimedio. In questo modo invece si può capitalizzare questa grande mole di studio supportata da letteratura specializzata condividendola con tutti e rendendola potenzialmente eterna. E' stata una fonte di motivazione anche questa consapevolezza. Le difficoltà che ho avuto sono state poche e principalmente tecniche (citazioni, formattazione e allineamento immagini) data la mia competenza ancora limitata.

è stata un'esperienza interessante e credo fosse molto buona l'idea di far avere a tutti i partecipanti il calendario delle scadenze. Sapendole in anticipo, chi è veramente interessato al progetto può organizzare meglio i tempi di lavoro.

Number of daily responses

