Virtual Communities and Wikis from a knowledge management perspective

Wikimania 2005
Marco Prestipino
University of Zurich

About us

Information Management Group, University of Zurich

Research on virtual communities on the web

- Communities as information systems for travelers
- Can the quality stand up to information products?
- > How can technology support virtual communities?

Virtual Communities

Is it just socializing or is information exchange taking place?

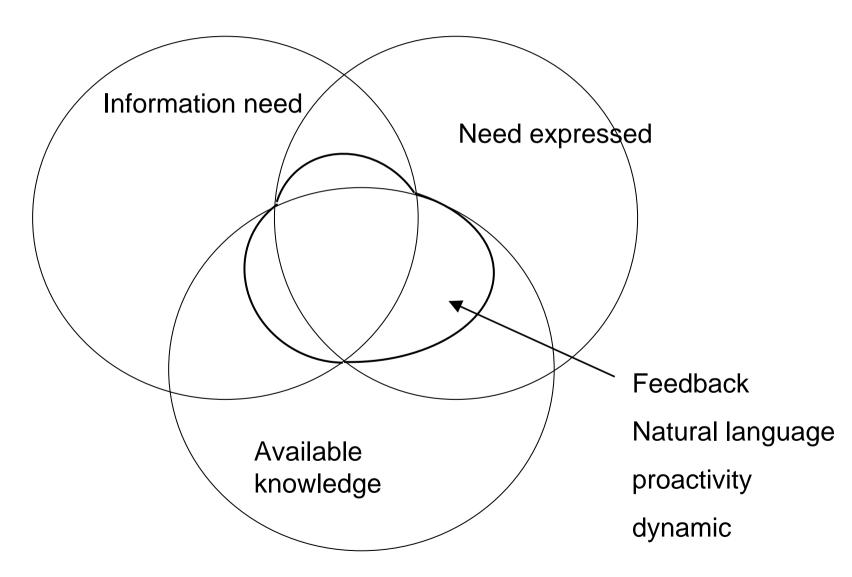
Example: rec.travel.europe

- introduced in 1994
- 8163 contributors writing 97'290 messages in 2003

Seemingly many benefits over commercial information markets and products

- Distribution of work load
- Coordination mechanism for knowledge
- Extension of personal networks
- Peer review

Virtual Communities as Information Systems



Visibility of discussions

Typical visualisation of discussion spaces leads to redundancy and outdated threads



Visibility of discussions

FAQs: maintenance is again carried out by single experts (if at all...)

The second second of the second secon	Secretaria de la compansa del la compansa de la compansa del compansa de la compansa de la compansa del compansa de la compansa del comp	The second secon
		The state of the s
Total Control of the		Entertainment of the control of the

 $\frac{\text{http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com/messagepost.cfm?postaction=reply\&catid=22\&threadid=65954\&messid=537003\&STARTPAGE=1\&parentid=0\&from=1\&showall=true}{\text{messid=537003\&STARTPAGE=1\&parentid=0\&from=1\&showall=true}}$

Unsolicited information in discussion spaces

Case study: brasil-web, online since 1998, ~ 55 Posts/day Analysis of 206 Threads

	Frequency	%
Travel-related question	105	51,46%
General question	11	5,34%
Meeting / Contact	10	4,85%
Travel diaries	13	6,31%
Unsolicited information	63	30,10%
Unsolicited Opinion	2	0,97%
Provocation	1	0,49%
Amusement	1	0,49%

Other Community technologies

Blogs

- no peer review
- One to one communication rather than cooperative knowledge creation
- difficult to ask questions regarding new or individual information needs
- Helps identify experts

Wikis

- shared material
- structure
- Focus on collaboration
- difficult to ask questions, express new or individual information needs.

Not Wikipedia - Information for Independent Travelers

"We start in Rio (where she lives) and travel to relatives in Pernambuco. We have about 3 weeks time. I thought we drive at least one way, either when going or returning. Doing the whole trip by car seems exhausting. So shall we drive there and fly back? Or better go one way by bus?"

- Highly individualized information needs
- Solution space very large
- Quality of information can only be judged after consumption, if at all
- Expected: Recommendations matching individual preferences, not NPOV

Wikis for travelers

May be able to create free guidebooks

- general information
- Wikireader Frankfurt

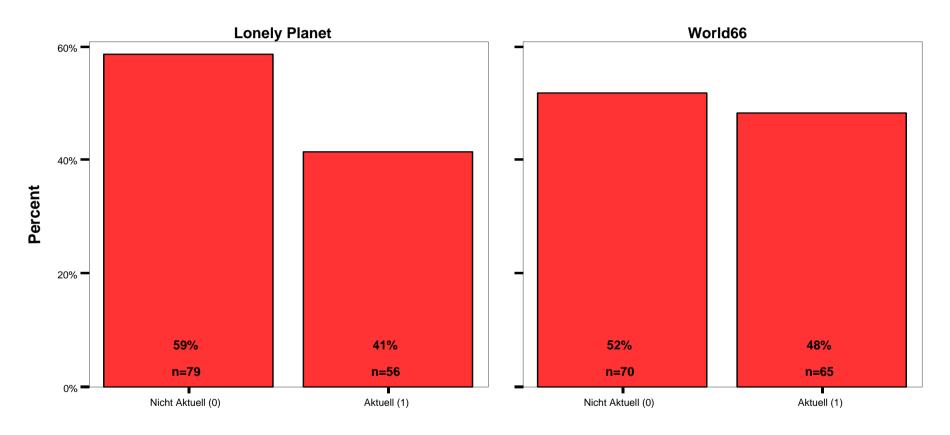
Didn't we say we can be better than guidebooks?

Social interface?



Outdated information

135 randomly selected elements checked for correctness (e.g. fees, addresses, phone numbers) in Guidebook and Wiki



Combining shared material with discussion spaces

Discussion outcome put into shared material, but discussion still visble



Combining shared material with discussion spaces

Field Study: Wiki grows and is used but...

Power users do most of the work in the wiki

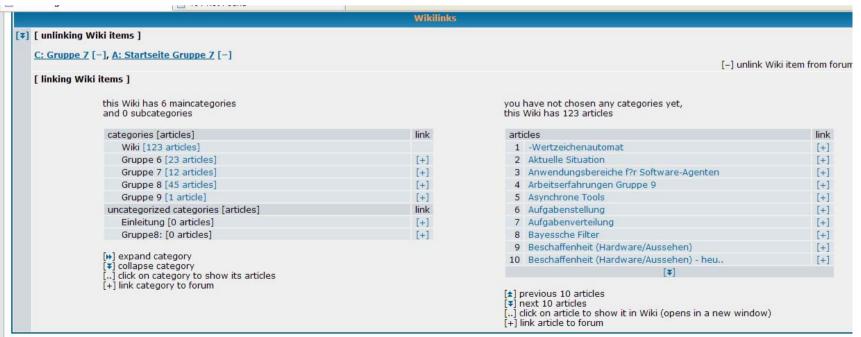
Wiki power users <> Forum power users

Integration features seldom used



Combining shared material with discussion spaces





What we are working on right now

- Further integration of wikis and discussion boards, relying more on Power users
- Virtual Communities do not support individual spaces for knowledge work

Example: Books can be manipulated by owner

- Annotate
- Bookmark
- •Rip out pages
- -> Create personal spaces interacting with community spaces

Fin

Thank you for the attention

contact

presti@ifi.unizh.ch