Ekologos Wiki — A Tool for Online Project Collaboration

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Wikis are editable web-based systems that allow the collaborative development of content. The most famous example of a Wiki is the free encyclopaedia known as Wikipedia, which now has versions in several languages and is supported by the American not-for-profit Wikimedia Foundation.

Ekologos now hosts an experimental Wiki at https://mediawiki.highlandinstitute.org, which is private; that is, the content is visible and editable only by logged-in users. Accounts were set up for the participants at the Highland Gathering Winter School workshop in December 2023, and any project participants or associates are welcome to request one.

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Introduction

Wikis can be used in numerous ways; they can be used by individuals for keeping notes or for organizing content over a long period of time, and groups of individuals can edit content, collaborating asynchronously, slowly, and over extended periods. In academic settings, they can be used to collate bibliographies and produce reviews and teaching materials. There are many possibilities for the use of the private Ekologos Wiki, and the best way to examine these possibilities is through experimentation.

Apart from the very well-known example of Wikipedia, private wikis have been widely used in teaching,[1] knowledge-sharing, project management, and research collaboration (see https://www.antwiki.org, a Wiki that deals with the ants of the world and has many of the world's leading ant researchers involved in it).
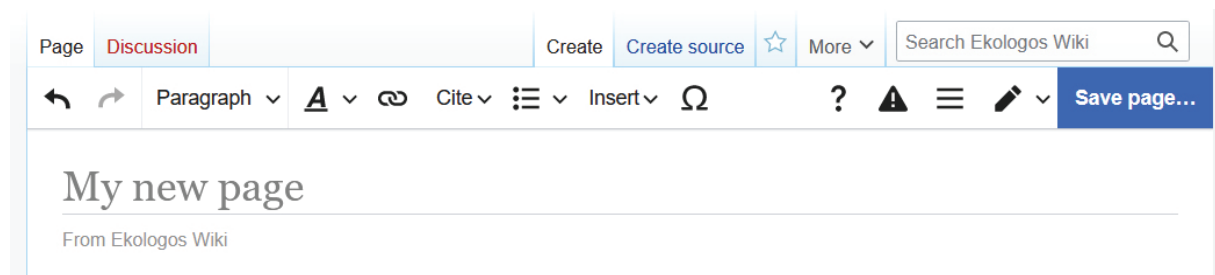
Wikipedia has also been considered a successful example of bottom-up rule-making for communities, and there has been much discussion on how such systems have questioned and altered traditional power structures and the gatekeeping involved in knowledge creation.[2] Comparisons have been made between

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1. See *Integrating Wikis in Anthropology Courses* by Mark Moritz: https://mlab.osu.edu/sites/mlab.osu.edu/files/wiki AN.pdf, accessed 21 March 2024.
2. The work of Peter Gallert and others in Namibia might be of particular interest; see *Indigenous Knowledge for Wikipedia: A Case Study with an OvaHerero Community in Eastern Namibia*; https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/2998581.2998600, accessed 21 March 2024.

Wikipedia and the way social insects work at their nests. Social insect colonies are long-lived, and the nest itself can withstand considerable damage even when large numbers of workers are lost to predators or other causes. The operating rules on wikis are typically established by the users themselves; there are no strict hierarchies; communities moderate themselves through discussion, and the evolution of these rules is documented on the wiki. This makes the system particularly robust. Even with a complete turnover of users, the rules evolved in the past are quickly restored, and the overall aims and the work that has already been produced are left unaffected and, at best, only improved over time. This does not make the users unimportant; on the contrary, it makes the system extremely dependent on the users and their initiatives.

Ekologos Wiki

This Wiki is currently private; only logged-in users can see or edit content. It is powered by the same software that powers Wikipedia, namely Mediawiki. Like Wikipedia, it permits the use of reference templates, has a visual editor, and allows the uploading of pictures and other media. However, it is recommended that heavy multimedia be hosted on YouTube or similar sites and accessed via links.

Creating a new entry

All you need to do is enter a URL that looks like this:
https://mediawiki.highlandinstitute.org/My_new_page
and then click on the 'create' tab to open the visual editor. Once you are happy with the contents of the page you can choose the 'Save page…' button on the top right to publish the page. Remember that every action is reversible, so one should not fear errors or seek perfection.

All the pages created so far can be found via:
https://mediawiki.highlandinstitute.org/Special:AllPages

Linking another entry on the Ekologos Wiki

Pages can be linked to each other. Look for the chain-link icon. Then highlight the text that you want to act as a hyperlink. On clicking the chain-link icon, choose the page that you reach after clicking.

Creating categories

Users can mark pages as belonging to a category. Categories allow users to find pages of a similar kind. So, one could, for instance, create a category for 'research methodology' pages, as we did during our Winter School workshop:

https://mediawiki.highlandinstitute.org/Category:Methodologies

All the categories that exist can be found at:
https://mediawiki.highlandinstitute.org/Special:Categories

Interactions between users

Wikis allow users to interact and communicate with each other using a public message system. Each user typically maintains a User page on which they can introduce themselves. They can write to each other via the User_talk pages. These communications are meant to be visible publicly and are typically used only in the context of the content on the wiki. Entries can also have their own entry-specific discussion pages. To produce threaded discussions, users may need to indent their comments explicitly. Users also sign their own comments, although all content additions or deletions can be examined through the page-editing history.

Sectioning text

A large body of text is typically structured into sections and subsections. Wikis allow sections to be created by adding section headings using the visual editor. This can also be done manually via the source editor by placing the section heading text between paired sets of == or === according to the section hierarchy.

The wiki automatically creates a linked index table at the beginning to navigate to the sections.

Adding images

Images can be added by following the 'Insert' > 'Images and media' menu item on the visual editing menu. Upload an image, and then choose to add it to the article. Typically, one adds images either to the left or the right and uses a zigzag layout with text flowing between the images. Note that more complex image layouts, such as galleries, are possible but require the use of source editing.

Adding footnotes or citations to literature

Once you master the basics of formatting, you may want to get into more detailed academic forms of writing that include references and footnotes. These can be easily done using the visual editor 'cite' menu for citing books and journals by entering the specific fields. One can also add more generic footnotes using a combination of notes embedded between <ref> and </ref> tags and by adding a special 'template' – {{reflist}} at the end of the article.

Special configuration options

On the Ekologos Wiki, we have a special 'namespace' called 'Private' – an example is:
https://mediawiki.highlandinstitute.org/Private:User_list
Anyone can create a page prefixed by 'Private:'. The prefix will keep the designated page private in case, at some point, the system is made readable in part. That means we can make the Ekologos Wiki contents readable for the public but restrict editing to a limited set of users, who can keep some parts of the Wiki accessible only to project members.

The future

Only time will show the value of the Ekologos Wiki, and we invite the community to start using the system. Feel free to experiment and suggest new possibilities. Remember that whatever you might see on other wikis can be incorporated on a need basis.

Complete editing tutorials can be found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Introduction and the instructions there largely apply to the Ekologos Wiki.

Let us know if you need user accounts and would like to try out the system for your private work or for any group activity. If you need one-on-one or group tutorials, please get in touch with me, and we can try to organize online sessions.

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