Mutually dependent: Encyclopedias and their audiences

or, how much information literacy do readers need to use an encyclopedia?
Personal Background

What can you expect from this talk?

Encyclopedias and information literacy

The changing role of the audience – alternating between consumer and prosumer

Summing up – the encyclopedic paradox

My Sources – Further reading …

Discussion
Ulrike Spree

Professor for Knowledge Organization / Information Architecture and Information Research at the Department of Library and Information Science at the University of Applied Sciences Hamburg (Germany)

In my teaching and research I try to combine my interest in current questions of knowledge access and accessibility with a historic perspective.

Last year students of my bachelor degree course „User Experience and Usability Evaluation“ had the opportunity to collaborate with the Usability-Evaluation the European Library Portal (TEL-Portal)

… Thank you for inviting me to your conference
Agenda

Personal Background

What you can expect from this talk

golden thread

a ‘working definition’ of encyclopedia

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„To know how to use an encyclopedia is better than to be an encyclopedia.“ (Alfred Nobel, 1833 - 1896)

This talk

- firstly, investigates the contribution of encyclopedias to enhance the information literacy of their readers as well as the demands on the presumed information competences,
- secondly, sheds light on the ways how encyclopaedias communicate and collaborate with their readers,
- thirdly tries to determine whether the concept of information literacy is a suitable framework for historical analysis of the open and fluent genre of encyclopedias.
A 'working definition' of encyclopedia

“encyclopedia, cyclopedia, encyclopaedia, cyclopaedia (a reference work (often in several volumes) containing articles on various topics (often arranged in alphabetical order) dealing with the entire range of human knowledge or with some particular specialty)”

“dictionary, lexicon (a reference book containing an alphabetical list of words with information about them)”

(WordNet 2012-11-08)
Dictionary and encyclopedia share the following characteristics:

1. A structured arrangement of entries following a given for the target group **obvious ordering principle** that aims to ease the use of the reference work;
2. offering **direct access to factual information** of linguistic and/or encyclopedic character;
3. because of their atomistic approach dictionaries and encyclopedias **favour and encourage a selective access** to information and are usually not meant for linear reading;
4. Dictionary and Encyclopedias are characterized by a primarily practical-informative purpose. They aim to **eliminate doubts** on the readers side **regarding the meaning and use of individual words and concepts**.
5. A dictionary or encyclopedia is usually the **result of a process of negotiating** what is regarded as worth knowing at a certain time in a defined context. (Herren, 2007)
Painting with numbers

Publications with encyclopedia in title in The European Library Catalog 1701-1940

Reihe1
Publications with encyclopedia in title in The European Library Catalog 1701-2010

- Reihe1
Agenda

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Discussion
Encyclopedias and information literacy

Requirements on information literacy

1. The ability to know when there is a need for information
2. Identifying and localizing resources.
3. Selecting and analyzing the usefulness of the information for solving the problem = Evaluating given information critically.
4. Organizing and synthesizing of the selected information in order to develop knowledge and solutions.
5. Creating and presenting the solution of the problem to the appropriate audience

(based on Big6, NFL, Referenzrahmen IK)

Searching
Evaluating - Reflecting
Adopting – Knowing
Representing – sharing
Encyclopedias and information literacy

Social historical Disclaimer

– illiteracy rates in Europe did not fall below 20% before 1850

– literacy rates varied widely not only between social classes but also regionally

1. The ability to know when there is a need for information

- The development of various types of systems of knowledge as such may serve to indicate a lack of information for the reader and encourage learning and study (Encyclopédie, Britannica).

- Selling/advertising information products and the “The Diffusion of Useful Knowledge” were always closely connected (Penny Cyclopedia, Meyers Konversationslexikon).
1. The ability to know when there is a need for information

- In the tradition of the enlightenment the alphabetical text presupposed an independent autonomous reader.
- From 1890 onwards encyclopedias assumed an independent consumer who would know when to check fact and figures, e.g. of consumer products.

2. Identifying and localizing resources

- The history of encyclopedias offers an abundance of innovations in structuring knowledge.
- Contemporary digitisation projects often carve out the potential of these structuring aids.
Framework Structure:
Proportion and distribution of paratexts and lemmata (lemmalist, preface, introduction, list of abbreviations, list of contributors, maps, ...)

Macro Structure:
Lemmatisation (order of articles), Sorting strategy, sort key (alphabetical, systematical, date, relevance)

Micro Structure:
Determination and order of structure elements inside an encyclopedic entry/article (semantic comment, definition, collocation, form comment, wordclass, valence, ...)

Reference/Link Structure:
References from encyclopedic data to other (internal or external)

Access Structure:
data- and/or userdefined Access (Alphabet, category system, index, search, visualisations e.g. map, tree, timeline, ...)

Structural aids:
Tree of Knowledge

Example: Macro Structure

Aus: Encyclopédie
Figurative System of Human Knowledge.jpg
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Encyclop%C3%A9die_Figurative_System_of_Human_Knowledge.jpg#file

Tree of Knowledge
Example: Macro Structure

Frontispiz Encyclopédie
Diderot / d’Alembert, Encyclopédie (1772)
Charles-Nicolas Cochin (1715–1790); Bonaventure-Louis Prévost (1747–1804?)

Allegoric presentation of knowledge

http://www.enzyklopaedie.ch/fronti/frontispizien_hauptseite.html

http://www.enzyklopaedie.ch/fronti/enzy.html
Chambers’ Cyclopaedia, Vol. 1, 1728, Preface, p. ii, View of Knowledge

Binary distribution of knowledge
# Systematisches Verzeichnis sämtlicher Artikel, nach den Wissenschaften, Künsten und Gewerben

Übersichtlich geordnet und gegliedert.

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NORWEGE, terre rouge de, (Hist. nat.) espece de terre bolaire, d'un rouge jaunâtre, qui se trouve près de Bergen, en Norwege; elle n'est point onctueuse, est très - légere, ce qui doit faire soupçonner qu'elle est calcaire. On la regarde comme un absorbant & alexipharmaque. Wormius l'appelle terra anti - scorbutica.
Modern adaptations of macro structures in digitized versions

Attributing Krünitz (1773-1858) articles to Dewey Decimal Classification
Example: Micro structure

and destined to admit of the occurrence of motions of flexion and extension. The tegumentary membrane which fills it never becomes encrusted or calcareous, but always continues soft and flexible.

The tegumentary skeleton supplies the apparatus of locomotion with fixed points of action as well as with the levers necessary to motion. The immediate or active organs of this apparatus are the muscles, the colour of which is white, and the structure of which presents no peculiarity worthy of notice. They are attached to the pieces which they are required to move either immediately by the intermediate of horny or calcareous tendons, which are implanted upon the edge of the segment to which they belong. To the fixed point they are most commonly attached immediately. Their structure is simple, and each segment in fact, as has already been said, being contrived to move in one fixed and determinate plane, the muscles which communicate motion to it can constitute no more than two systems antagonistic to each other, the one acting in the sense of flexion, by which the segment moved is approximated to that which precedes it, the other in the sense of extension, by which the segment is brought into the position most remote from the centre of motion. The muscles that produce these opposite effects, as might have been concluded, are found implanted into the opposite arms of the lever upon which their energy is extended.

The motions in flexion tend universally to bring the extremities and the different rings towards the ventral aspect of the body; it is consequently upon this aspect that the flexor muscles are inserted, and these are in general the more powerful. On the contrary, and in accordance with the nature of the motion produced, it is upon the superior or dorsal aspect of the segments that the exterior muscles are attached. In the trench the two orders of muscles generally form two distinct layers, the one superficial, the other deep; the former thin and sometimes absent, the second, on the contrary, very powerful wherever powerful motions are required. The muscles generally pass from the one immediately above, passing generally upon this head. The motion of translation or from place to place, the only kind upon which it seems necessary to say anything here, are effected in two modes, either by the alternate flexion and extension of the trunk, or by the play of the limbs.

In those Crustacea which are formed essentially for swimming, the posterior part of the body is the principal agent in enabling the animal to change its place; but here the motions, instead of being lateral, are vertical; and instead of causing the creature to advance they cause it to recede; it is by bending the abdomen suddenly downwards, and bringing it immediately under the sternum, that it strikes the water, and consequently by darting backwards that the animal makes its way through the liquid. (Assartrac, vol. i. p. 413.) From what has now been said it may be imagined that the Crustacea whose conformation is the best adapted for swimming have the abdomen largely developed, and this is in fact what we always observe; the Amphipoda and Decapoda Macroura are examples; whilst in the walking Crustacea, such as the crabs, the Caprella, the Oniscus, &c., this portion of the body attains but very insignificant dimensions. In the swimming Crustacea, the appendages of the penultimate segment of the abdomen also become important organs of locomotion, inasmuch as they for the most part terminate in two broad horizontal plates, which, with the last segment, also become lamelliform, constitute an extensive caudal fin arranged in the manner of a fan. We have already said that the thoracic extremities alone constitute true ambulatory limbs. When destined for swimming only, their segments are lamelliform, and the palp, as well as the stem, contributes to form the kind of ear which each of them then constitutes.

To conclude, the stenostolic portion of the thoracic extremities, whilst it still preserves the general form which we have assigned it, is modified in some cases to serve for walking as well as swimming, or to aid the animal as an instrument for burrowing with facility, and making a cavity for shelter among the pebbles that it burrow. The pedipeds that burrow, the last segment of the tarsus assumes a lancelated...
Example: Micro structure

Illustreret norsk konversationsleksikon (Seks bind, 1907–1913),
Vol. 5, 1912

Included dictionary
Micro structure

Example: Emanuel Wurm (delegate of German Reichstag), Volks-Lexikon, Vol. II, 1894

- different fonts for different meanings (foreign and German words)
- Pronunciation
- Word meaning
- historical background in smaller font size
- jump labels for skimming and scanning
- footnotes for more detailed information
A network of links - reference structure

- reference to table
- bibliographic references
- references to other articles expressed in various way
Encyclopedias and information literacy

2. Identifying and localizing resources.  

- Every new structural device needs to be learned by the reader/user.
- Simplifying access reduces the understanding of the internal structure of a knowledge resource
- Finding aids are simply overlooked,
- Users may no longer build a cognitive model of an information system

Find examples for people who were killed by the devices they invented?


Helpdesk support. Original taken from the show „Øystein og jeg” on Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK) in 2001. With Øystein Backe (helper) and Rune Gokstad (desperate monk). Written by Knut Naerum. 

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQHX-SjgQvQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQHX-SjgQvQ)
3. Selecting and analyzing the usefulness of the information for solving the problem.

-Besides the already mentioned structural tools (alphabetic keys, category systems, internal reference systems) encyclopedia articles may provide practical information (how-to) as well as moral guidance (*early editions of EB, encyclopedias directed to the 'lower orders' (Volkslexika)*).
POTATO (Solanum tuberosum), a well-known plant which owes its value to the peculiar habit of developing underground slender leafless shoots or branches which differ in character and office from the true roots, and gradually swelling at the free end produce the tubers (potatoes) which are the common vegetable food. The nature of these tubers is further rendered evident by the presence of "eyes" or leaf-buds, which in due time lengthen into shoots and form the haulm or stems of the plant. Such buds are not, under ordinary circumstances, formed on roots. The determining cause of the formation of the tubers is not certainly known, but Professor Bernard has suggested that it is the presence of a fungus, Fusarium solani, which, growing in the underground shoots, irritates them and causes the swelling; the result is that an efficient method of propagation is secured independently of the seed. Starch and other matters are stored up in the tubers, as in a seed, and are rendered available for the nutrition of the young shoots. When grown under natural circumstances the tubers are relatively small and close to the surface of the soil, or even lie upon it. In the latter case they become green and have an acrid taste, which renders them unpalatable to human beings, and as poisonous qualities are produced similar to those of many Solanaceae they are wholesome. Hence the recommendation to keep the tubers in cellars or pits not exposed to the light. Among the nine hundred

- Making common things interesting
- Inspiring the pursuit of knowledge
- Recommendation how to keep potatoes
3. Selecting and analyzing the usefulness of the information for solving the problem.

„You had been told one lie on the top of another. And all the time the truth was there, in the Encyclopaedia Britannica.“ (from the novel „Mary Olivier“ by May Sinclair, 1919)

Users need to:

- understand layout conventions
- understand and interpret rhetorical conventions / hidden allusions
- understand intentions of a text – read a text critically
4. Organizing and synthesizing of the selected information in order to develop knowledge and solutions.

a) Discriminating between fact and opinion
   - Up to the 1860s most British and German encyclopedias openly revealed that the articles reflected the bias of the eminent authors,
   - facts were backed by bibliographical footnotes
b) Noticing various interpretations of data
   - encyclopedias are far less consistent than we generally assume and a attentive reader is bound to detect contradictions (Encyclopédie; EB; Wikipedia?)
Encyclopedias and information literacy

4. Organizing and synthesizing of the selected information in order to develop knowledge and solutions.

c) Finding additional information if needed
   - Bibliographical references,
   - References to other articles

d) Organizing ideas and information logically
   - Encyclopedia articles are structured and topical and could be used model for text production (definition, historical development, secured facts, open questions …)

- Do the users discover, understand and use the offered tools?
- The chances are less good if help was outsourced in paratexts
5. Creating and presenting the solution of the problem to the appropriate audience

- the process of encyclopedic text production was only rarely laid open before Wikipedia (Wie ein Konversationslexikon gemacht wird 1879; Tomlinson 1986)

- based on high division of labor (fact checkers, researchers, editors, authors, external experts in local and national authorities, knowledge organizers (indexing, classifiers, layout, proof-reading, …)

5. Creating and presenting the solution of the problem to the appropriate audience

- Encyclopedias are and were used in text-production
- Their authoritative tone always invited to copy and paste

*Do you remember the critic of the "Eatanswill Gazette"? He had to review for that admirable journal a work on Chinese Metaphysics. Mr. Pott tells the story of the article. "He read up for the subject, at my desire, in the Encyclopædia Britannica ... he read for metaphysics under the letter M, and for China under the letter C, and combined his information!" (The Secret Glory. By Arthur Machen. 1922)*
5. Creating and presenting the solution of the problem to the appropriate audience

„An dieser Stelle stand ein Text, der so nicht auf SPIEGEL ONLINE hätte erscheinen dürfen. Er erläuterte die Hintergründe zum Völkermord in Ruanda und bestand in wesentlichen Teilen aus Passagen, die wörtlich dem Online-Lexikon Wikipedia entnommen wurden, ohne die Quelle zu nennen.“ Spiegel online 2005-02-24
Encyclopedias and information literacy

Prerequisite of information literacy - Access to adequate information resources

- Not mentioned in the concepts of information literacy
- However, prerequisite to become information literate

- Dictionaries and Encyclopedias allow a structured access to factual information.
- They offer storage and structure.
- In this respect they can always be seen as a contribution to make factual resources accessible to an increased audience

→ The discourse of new types of encyclopedias with new methods of making information accessible to (new) audience has always to be seen as a re(negotiation) how access to information should be controlled and funded
**Encyclopedias and information literacy**


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**Eine Bitte vom Wikipedia-Gründer**

Ich bin ein Freiwilliger.


Kommerz ist in Ordnung, Werbung ist nicht böse – aber sie gehört nicht hierher, nicht in die Wikipedia.


Jedem einzelnen Menschen.


Um dies ohne Werbung zu schaffen, brauchen wir Sie.

---

**Wenn jeder Leser nur einen kleinen Beitrag leistet, wäre unsere Spendenkampagne in einer Stunde vorüber.**

Ich spende
- [ ] einmalig
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/eine Beitrag von

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und bezahle per
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Jetzt spenden

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Jimmy Wales: Call for donations, Wikipedia 2012-11-06
The concept of 'informations literacy' could be applied as an analytical tool for analysis and periodization of encyclopedias revealing continuities as well as changes.
Agenda

Personal Background

What can you expect from this talk

Encyclopedias and information literacy

The changing role of the audience – alternating between consumer and prosumer

Summing up – the encyclopedic paradox

My Sources – Further reading …

Discussion
“[…] a book like this one ought to be shaped not only by a body of contributors but by a body of readers, ….”

Edward Blishen, educator, Radio moderator, editor of Junior Pears Encyclopedia, 1964  
The (changing) role of the audience

Fast motion: intended and real audiences of General Encyclopedias (1700 – 1880)

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<td>Encyclopedia authors came from social groups who never made it to the University</td>
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The (changing) role of the audience

Fast motion: intended and real audiences of General Encyclopedias (1890 – 2010)

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of general encyclopedias

| Educated reader |
| Consulting reader |
| Learned reader |

BUT

Spree 2012-11-08
The reader is in various aspects part of the encyclopedic process

- Social nearness between producers and readers
- Readers contributed as external experts (academics, diplomats, military people, travellers, …)
- New reading audiences provoked new ideas for lexicographic products (Zeitungslexika, Konversationslexikon, factual information)
- … and as diligent writer of letters to the editor
„Anerkannte Autoritäten der Geschichtswissenschaft haben es wiederholt ausgesprochen, daß keine Geschichtsdarstellung auch entlegener Zeiten durchaus objektiv und unparteiisch sein könne und auch nicht sein solle, …“

(Transl. Respected authorities repeatedly confirmed that no historical presentation can be objective and unbiased.)


„Einen Artikel über die „Problemkunst“ finden Sie im Register- und Supplementband, Korrespondenzblatt zum 15. Band)
The (swaying) role of the audience

Wikipedia, Version History + Discussion lemma „Kartoffel“ (Potato)

391 changes between 2003-11-4 and 2012-10-3

„Ich find schon, dass die Kartoffelgerichte in der einen oder anderen Form reingehören - immerhin ist es eine "typisch" mitteleuropäische Küche“ (2003)

„Ich kenn zwar das Buch nicht, aber die Annahme "wissenschaftliches Buch = richtig" muss nicht unbedingt stimmen. (2007)

The (swaying) role of the audience

Wikipedia, Version History „Kartoffel“ (Potato)
391 changes between 2003-11-4 and 2012-10-3

Topics:
- Content: recipes with potatoes, poisonousness, cultural history (origin, geographical dissemination)
- Fact checking: historical facts, statistics on dissemination
- Article structure: ‘outsourcing‘ of content in new articles
- Deleting typos and grammatical mistakes
- Small talk e.g. on health issues
How do readers communicate with an encyclopedia?
- adding details (e.g. on foreign countries),
- making suggestions for improvement (layout, pronunciation),
- negotiating what content should be included and excluded,
- demanding more information / updated information,
- claiming a (neutral) point of view
The (swaying) role of the audience

Encyclopedias and their users are mutually dependent – this can either cause a downwards or upwards spiral.
The (swaying) role of the audience

Figure: Information-cycle (Satirical magazine Titanic 2008)
The (swaying) role of the audience

Readers feel responsible for an encyclopedia and
- develop a common practice (e.g. for verification – facts need to be verified by bibliographic resources)
- learn and accept common rules
- Identify with the product and report mistakes
Outlook: From consumer to prosumer

Experiences from 2 seminars at HAW-Hamburg

Writing a Wikipedia article

Foto: Paula Markert.
Experiences with writing the article:
- students underestimated the effort for research and verification and the writing of good definitions,
- guidelines – although difficult to find – were perceived as helpful,
- felt greatly motivated by immediate response on their article,
- were slightly disappointed that most responses dealt with formal questions like quotations,
- had expected more discussion of the content itself,
- most students modelled their article against a similar example,
- experience boosted respect for Wikipedia.

Isabelle: „Sollte mir allerdings ein Fehler bei der Recherche in einem Wikipediaartikel auffallen, so werde ich in Zukunft darauf hinweisen bzw. eine Änderung vornehmen.“
Agenda

Personal Background

What you can expect from this talk

Encyclopedias and information literacy

The changing role of the audience – alternating between consumer and prosumer

Summing up – the encyclopedic paradox

My Sources – Further reading …

Discussion
1. Every improvement in accessibility and usability bears the danger of decreased attention on the user’s side.
2. General encyclopedias are directed towards ‘the general reader’, however central lexicographic tasks like selection of content, providing the appropriate depth of information, deciding on methods to ensure objectivity and verification are impossible without defining types of usage and user roles.
3. The quality debate on encyclopedias needs to be complemented by a debate on the amount of transparency and agency an encyclopedia grants and offers their users.
4. Information literacy needs to be actively practiced.

Suggestion for the discussion: **Encyclopedias get the audience they deserve versus audiences get the encyclopedia they ask for**
Agenda

Personal Background
What you can expect from this talk
The changing role of the audience – alternating between consumer and prosumer
Encyclopedias and information literacy
Summing up – the encyclopedic paradox
My Sources – Further reading …
Discussion
Many thanks to:

My students from my master courses „Online Encyclopedias“ in 2011/2012

The website and publication of the Swiss Research-project »Allgemeinwissen und Gesellschaft«, URL: www.enzyklopaedie.ch, Retrieved: 2012-11-08


Numerous consultations of Wikipedia
Agenda

Personal Background
What you can expect from this talk
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Discussion