Senior Czechs refine Wikipedia as retirement hobby

February 20 2024, by Jan FLEMR

Unlike most Wikipedia contributors, Kadnerova is an 80-year-old retiree.

A frail 80-year-old retiree does not fit everyone's idea of a tech-savvy Wikipedia writer, but Jirina Kadnerova is a devoted contributor to the online encyclopedia.

On a sunny Sunday morning, Kadnerova, a former librarian and bibliographer, snaps away with her cell phone in the village of Sobehrdy south of Prague.

She is gathering material on a local Protestant church for her next article, scuttering around the building with a curious look and talking to locals leaving a morning mass.

That's quite a difference from the average Czech Wikipedia contributor, whom Klara Joklova, chief executive at the Czech unit of the Wikimedia Foundation, describes as "a man aged 15-35 with a tech background"—exactly what Jirina Kadnerova is not.

Kadnerova has been writing articles for the open-source encyclopedia since taking a course training elderly people under the "Seniors Write Wikipedia" project, a Czech initiative launched in 2013.

"Of course I used Wikipedia for many years, because librarians work with it, but I never thought I would like to contribute," she told AFP.

After retiring as the head of a scientific library, Kadnerova never became a typical pensioner—a label she insists she hates.

Instead, she started attending university courses, took a bibliographer's job at the Czech Academy of Sciences and does occasional stints as a tourist guide.
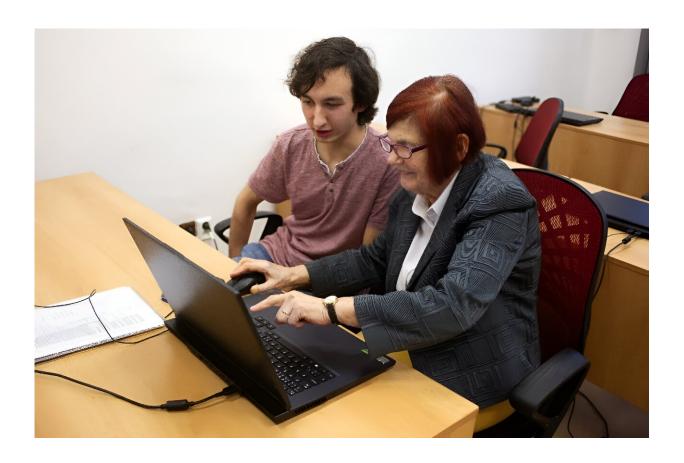
Seven years ago, her grandson suggested she might contribute to Wikipedia.

"He said I had a decent expertise, that I can formulate pretty well, that I have written a few things and above all that I can find my way in databases and catalogues."

'A promising group'

Her first entry focused on a Gothic church in the small southern town where she is a tourist guide, one of around 100 articles focused mostly on historic sites that she has published since.

Czech Wikipedia launched the "Seniors Write Wikipedia" project in 2013.

She has also edited more than 1,500 existing articles, often adding information about libraries in the region around her home city of Prague.

The Czech Wikipedia has over half a million entries and registers about

600 regular and thousands of occasional contributors—comprising an ever-growing group of Czech seniors.

Leading a workshop at a senior centre in Prague, university student Jan Mysak said elderly contributors were "a promising group".

"They have the time in the first place," he told AFP after guiding Jirina Kadnerova through the tricks of inserting an infobox in an article.

"But they also have the life experience and they know what they want to write about," he added.

So far, around 700 have passed the free courses for seniors, according to the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation managing the encyclopedia.

Wikipedia attracts over a billion users each month, offering more than 62 million articles in over 300 languages.

'Lay my hands on it'

A passionate tourist, Kadnerova relishes the opportunity to travel out of Prague and learn new things.

"When I write about something, I want to lay my hands on it," Kadnerova added in her elegant Czech.

She has recently recruited a friend—another retired head librarian—to write for Wikipedia and share the passion.

"I'm happy when I can take a look at a piece of history and find out someone has praised the entry or even added something. That's what makes me happy," Kadnerova said.

"A friend of mine once told me I wasn't doing enough for mankind. So I finally am."

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