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Conference Abstract

Wikipedia, a Tool for Knowledge Dissemination on Invasive Species

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Abstract

One of the most important issues for controlling the spread of invasive species is public awareness (Dehnen-Schmutz et al. 2018). Passively, the public are responsible for the spread of invasive species, for example by moving dirty boats from one water body to another. But they also actively spread invasive species by releasing them in the wild. The spread of some invasive species could be slowed or even halted if the general public were more aware of the risks. Furthermore, this is a global issue, not restricted to one country or language, and hence needs to be tackled at an international level. The Convention on Biological Diversity has a specific target to identify pathways of introduction and manage invasive species (Convention on Biological Diversity 2014). As part of this awareness-raising, the public needs information on how to identify invasive species, as well as how to know their regulatory status, distribution and transmission. They also need to be aware of how invasive species impact biodiversity, ecosystem services and health. This information needs to be up-to-date, reliable and unbiased, but also supported by evidence.

Many information platforms exist on invasive species and new information is being generated all the time on this dynamic issue. However, pre-eminent among information sources on the internet is Wikipedia. Consistently ranked in the top ten of most visited websites, with more than 15 billion page views a month across 300 language editions, it is the go-to website on many subjects (Wikimedia 2019). Invasive species such as the zebra

mussel and water hyacinth receive over 500 daily page views, just on the English edition alone. Wikipedia is arguably one of the largest citizen science projects, containing information on every area of science and connecting, through its citations, scientific literature with the general public.

Wikipedia has been criticized about many aspects of its content and editorship, including its quality and neutrality (Kumar et al. 2016, Wagner et al. 2016, Hargittai and Shaw 2014). Nevertheless, its dominance in the provision of information cannot be ignored and addressing Wikipedia's problems by direct engagement might be more productive than ignoring it. Increasingly, different disciplines are engaging with Wikipedia for communication, recognizing that it can be a productive communication channel (Murray 2018).

Invasive species are a global problem and tackling them is a global issue. We have been investigating the current status of invasive species information on Wikipedia, whether it contains relevant information on impacts and control, and whether the information is consistent across different language versions. We will present what we have found and make recommendations on what to improve and how we can engage with Wikipedia.

Keywords

citizen science, communication, international, multilingual, public awareness,

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