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German Research Foundation supports Living Handbook project

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Three-year grant awarded to joint project involving ZB MED and Bonn University's Cold Chain Management working group

ZB MED – Leibniz Information Centre for Life Sciences created the Living Handbooks platform to promote open access to scientific and scholarly information. The platform, which is currently still in a beta phase, enables researchers and academics working in the life sciences to publish handbooks in a dynamic format. Now the Cold Chain Management working group from the University of Bonn is working on a new handbook called the “Living Handbook of Perishable Food Supply Chains”. The German Research Foundation (DFG) has agreed to provide approximately 350,000 euros of funding for this handbook and for the ongoing development of the platform, some 242,000 euros of which has been earmarked for ZB MED.

“Scientific and scholarly handbooks often become outdated in certain areas as soon as they’re published,” says Dr. Ursula Arning, who heads up open access publishing and consulting at ZB MED. “Our ‘Living Handbooks’ don’t have this problem. Because they are digital, they can be constantly updated to reflect the latest research findings,” Arning adds.

ZB MED launched the Living Handbooks platform in 2014 with a pilot project called the “Living Textbook of Hand Surgery“ which was developed in collaboration with the hand surgeon Dr. Richarda Böttcher. Now the platform – which can be found at www.gms-books.de – is set to be improved further as part of the DFG-funded project. Part of the project involves creating a new handbook called the “Living Handbook of Perishable Food Supply Chains” in cooperation with the Cold Chain Management working group at the University of Bonn. This handbook fills an important gap in the list of standard works published in this very specialist subject area. “The new handbook has a very interdisciplinary focus, and that makes it the perfect choice to put our Living Handbooks publishing platform to the test and develop it further,” says Arning.

The platform is based on the open source software Drupal, which has been tailored to the specific requirements of researchers in the life sciences arena. It enables authors to publish and update individual chapters without having to wait until the entire book has been finished. A persistent identifier known as a DOI is assigned to each version of a chapter. This system of versioning – i.e. assigning unique version numbers to each new incarnation of a chapter – makes it easy for readers to keep track of how the research is progressing. In addition, each chapter of a handbook undergoes a review process to ensure that the quality of the publication is maintained.

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Plans have already been made to integrate a number of new features in the platform as part of the DFG project. These include responsive design, the integration of social media, an option to display items in 3D, the inclusion of statistics, and much, much more. “To give just one example, we’ll be creating an interface to conventional e-book readers to make it easier for people to read and comment on the handbooks while they’re out and about,” says Arning.

At the end of the project the Living Handbooks platform will be switched into full-scale operation. It will become part of the ZB MED’s publishing portal PUBLISSO at <http://www.publisso.de/en/>. “In the future we want to make the system available to all scientific and scholarly disciplines that wish to publish in open access,” says Arning, highlighting the platform’s long-term goals.

Background information: ZB MED – Leibniz Information Centre for Life Sciences

ZB MED – Leibniz Information Centre for Life Sciences is Germany’s central service centre for specialist information and research support in the field of life sciences. It evolved from the world’s largest library in the subject combination of medicine, health, and nutritional, environmental and agricultural science. ZB MED’s primary goal is to support researchers, students and key disseminators and multipliers working in these disciplines. To achieve that goal, ZB MED offers literature and specialist information in both digital and print formats, both on-site and through its semantic-based search portal LIVIVO. ZB MED also offers its own open access portal known as PUBLISSO, and its registration service assigns Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) to ensure articles and research data are kept permanently available online. ZB MED has two sites, one in Cologne and one in Bonn. As a member of the Leibniz Association, ZB MED helps provide the information infrastructure required for scientific research and plays a major part in maintaining Germany’s status as a key player in the world of science and research.

Find out more by visiting the following website: www.zbmed.de.

Background information: Cold Chain Management Group

The Cold Chain Management group was set up in 2003 by PD Dr. Judith Kreyenschmidt and is run under the umbrella of the Institute of Nutritional and Food Sciences in the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Bonn. Research areas tackled by the group include the creation of simulation models to forecast food quality and safety, the development of optimised solutions in the fields of packaging, hygiene and temperature monitoring, and the product and process-specific development of innovative methods for improving food quality and safety while simultaneously promoting sustainable concepts of food production.

Find out more at: https://www.ccm.uni-bonn.de/pgm-en/ccm-en?set_language=en