
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Dr. Piet Kommers is Associate Professor at the University of Twente and part time Lector at the Fontys Academy in The Netherlands. His specialties are advanced learning tools like Concept Mapping, Virtual Reality and Mobile Learning. His research and teaching stretches from teacher education via European Joint Research Projects to international projects under the auspices of UNESCO. His recent publications are on learner's preconceptions and representations that express pre-intuitive ideas before actual learning may start: *Cognitive Support for Learning; Imagining the Unknown*. He is Editor in several research journals and organises conferences in Mobile Learning *IADIS International Conference on Mobile Learning 2005* and E-societies *IADIS International Conference e-Society 2005*.

This special issue brings back your attention to the human actor as the key in community development, even if the media are omnipresent; It is the relationship that is of importance, not the communication medium. At this moment, many communities exist both off line and on line. Will this change in the coming years?

This issue of the *International Journal of Web-Based Communities* discusses topics around social interaction, social intelligence, hidden knowledge and use of narrative structures. Contributions to new challenges in the domain of public libraries, the cooperation between children at school and in the hospital and the football community are discussed. Research on the attempts through which ICT can support democracy shows a perspective of the challenges for the coming years.

Wright, Varey and Chesney report the results of an investigation into measurements of the sociability of online communities; in other words, how well they support social interaction rather than in terms of their usability, which tends to focus on task issues and user satisfaction. The results show that sociability is best measured by a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Mustapha and Nishida show that recent advances in information retrieval, data storage, knowledge capture, ontology modelling and semantic web have been significant to internet applications. Their paper describes the main factors which impede liberalisation in communication among communities in the context of knowledge sharing. As a solution to these problems, Communicative Social Intelligence built on three main technological concepts is and how it solves the communication impediments that exist among communities on the web are discussed.

Chu examines through critical lens how the IADIS international conference 2004 provided a platform for exchange between the participants and how the inspiration and new ideas are available to those who did not participate in the event itself.

Her paper concludes with new possibilities to enhance the coverage and process of future web-based communities' scholarly exchange and production through dialogue.

Weakly and Edmonds consider the opportunities presented by web-based systems for the support of groups involved in work of a creative nature. In particular, their paper is concerned with the sharing of knowledge that might otherwise remain unspoken, or tacit, amongst those engaged in design tasks. A prototype system that has been developed and this system, together with its evaluation is described. Drawing on the results of the evaluation, pointers for further development are presented.

Curry describes an analysis of the URLs from transaction logs obtained from the public access terminals in four Canadian cities, which revealed that customers accessed a wide variety of web-based communities devoted to diverse subjects. Her paper argues that public library reference librarians should include more web-based communities in the sources that they recommend to customers.

Skog argues that the supporting technology (i.e., software environment) influences the way interaction occurs in a virtual community. The empirical part of the study comprises interviews with visitors at LunarStorm, which is the most popular online community among young people in Sweden. The study highlights a specific feature within the software environment of LunarStorm and the empirical data show that this feature strongly influences community life. While acknowledging other crucial research approaches within this subject area, based on the empirical findings of this study, it is argued that there is also a need for further studies that aim to increase knowledge about the role of the technology when designing for social interaction and community development. For individuals, narrative provides structure and enhances engagement with content. For communities, narrative is a means of encapsulating communal culture and identity.

Newman discusses the use of narrative structures in the ComeRideWithMe project, an online community of hospitals and schools sharing the adventures of a world motorbike tour, using non-linear narrative devices such as character breakdown, multiple points of view and macro-narrative.

McMenemy, Poulter and O'Loan present a robust methodology for investigating Old-Firm-related sectarianism online. They discuss a methodology for investigating sectarianism on the internet as evidenced primarily through the support of two football clubs, Glasgow Celtic and Glasgow Rangers, better known as the Old Firm. Historical background to sectarianism and theoretical background to online hate are discussed, and a robust methodology for investigation is proposed.

Garcia, Pinto and Ferraz present 'Electronic participatory budgeting' (e-PPB): increasing people participation in the decision-making process. It exemplifies the concept of democracy and has been an ideal way of citizenry coexistence for centuries. This paper discusses three unsuccessful attempts to revive Athenian democracy using ICT to deal with participation scalability. Their point is that ICT has created greater expectations. If we do not use the necessary layers of technology, this omission can lead to worse results than without ICT altogether.

In this fourth issue of the *International Journal of Web-Based Communities*, ‘the human actor in community development’ is the central theme. We hope this issue contributes to new research and developments, and will inspire those who are involved in web-based communities to consider the relationships between people and take advantage of this important factor, when taking a next step in the research and development of web-based communities.