Editorial

Piet Kommers

University of Twente
P.O. Box 217
7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands
E-mail: Kommers@edte.utwente.nl

Biographical notes: Dr. Piet Kommers is Associate Professor at the University of Twente and part time Lecturer at the Fontys Academy in The Netherlands. His specialties are advanced learning tools such as 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 learners' preconceptions and representations that express pre-intuitive ideas before actual learning may start: *Cognitive Support for Learning; Imagining the Unknown*. He is editor of several research journals and organizes conferences in Mobile Learning (IADIS International Conference on Mobile Learning 2005) and E-societies (IADIS International Conference e-Society 2005).

Communities are both causes and results of social processes. As in many human activities, only a small part of the social process is planned as we normally do in architecture and urbanisation. Jon Dron's metaphor of termites is a catchy one as we admire its sophistication and beauty. However, the actual design in evolution is driven mainly by external constraints. Similar is self-organisation in human communities; its leadership can only work if individual members can find optima without central control. Discourse elements as brought in by Miikka Miettinen and her colleagues refer to the same rational: culture can only be manifest if members experience transparency so that anyone can reward or disqualify those who challenge the basic trust. 'Projects' like those announced by Ann Heylighen *et al.* may augment the global awareness in communities as prior positions can be retrieved as long as at least one of its members has a vague association with an earlier situation. Episodic memory is traditionally amplified through story-telling; Knowing what others 'see as important', is crucial in community cultures. In terms of topology, since ancient times the villager and the cosmopolitan has had an excellent sense of 'centre' and 'actuality'; It is the natural law by which radials in plants develop that is also manifest around market squares so that on average there is an equal effort to 'keep in touch' and share a common experience.

　　Petra Luck and Bill Norton bring the notion of collaborative management and online learning communities. The key question is if and how attitudes for face-to-face meetings can be emulated by threaded discussions and as we have now in the era of asynchronous collaboration. It seems to recognise that real-time exchange between persons has already

proven superior to asynchronous proximity as we perceive in observing co-patients in the same doctor's waiting room.

The contribution by Veijo Meisalo and his co-authors shows that the real benefit and the perceived benefit need not converge per se. Especially the community awareness of teacher students seems highly critical for the successful propagation of web-based community formation in our secondary schools. Already the objective feedback of actual fluctuation in communication is a point for further actions: How can we help community members optimise the ratio between time-on-chat and return-on-expertise? 'Qualification' is a new term for learning effects. It seems that curricular elements are needed to lead learners to sufficient communication awareness. Clara Chu's and Jose Rodolfo Hernandez-Carrion's reference to wikis and anthills has the same message: How can we build communication cultures in the storms of media development, without falling in spasms of process managers as we believed to supplant by 'autonomous citizens' in the humanistic era of the last 50 years?

Hans G.K. Hummel *et al.* investigate conditions for increasing active participation in online communities. They reveal first (positive) findings while introducing such a reward mechanism in the network. They share their 'lessons learned' phrased in terms of recommendations which can be used to guide subsequent Learning Network implementations.

How can members of a web-based community benefit from classic 'offline' creative techniques? Woerndl *et al*. investigate the existing software and describe the application they built themselves: Web Innovation Portal.

The article by Ioannis Antonellis *et al.* focuses on the benefits that mobile services bring to specific communities, like The SIG-GLUE, a web-based community for people who are concerned about game-based learning in universities and lifelong learning. This article is already an appetiser for one of the special issues on Mobile Virtual Communities.

The last three articles articulate extra-spontaneous actions for nurturing community building: the 'real' learning still needs special attention. Authentic and creative factors do play a pervasive role; however, only a very few WWW-based community systems give importance to that. Still more is the contrast between genuine human empathy and the modalities in mobile communication – two persons talking and listening to each other, while all other senses are fully submissive to the cacophony of surrounding reality. Is it still affordable to close one's eyes and feel as if you are sitting beside or opposite the conversational partner?