Editorial

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Biographical notes: Dr. Piet Kommers is an Associate Professor at the University of Twente and a part-time Professor at the Fontys University of Applied Sciences 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 the 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 the actual learning may start: *Cognitive Support for Learning* and *Imagining the Unknown*. He is the Editor of several research journals and organises conferences in mobile learning, e-society and web-based communities.

Margriet Simmerling is a Peer Consultant/Senior Manager in R&D projects in the area of e-society and web-based communities. She participates in the Advisory Board for the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and is active as an expert and reviewer for the European Commission. She designs and moderates e-learning modules and workshops in the domain of education technology and psychology at the PhD level.

This issue of the IJWBC is dedicated to design issues: The initiation and the endurance of web-based communities rely on different factors. This is the overall outcome of the underlying issue. Design elements that contribute to community building focus on engagement, loyalty, service and two-way communication. The authors in this issue introduce specific elements within web-based communities that can stimulate the community aspects. Their expertise comes from different domains: education, youth culture, local government, banking and legal issues in the gaming industry. They report findings that are useful for those who design, develop or manage web-based communities.

The notions of 'situated cognition' and 'sharing common perceptions' go very well together. Their combination builds the needed mechanisms for the evolvement and survival of communities. Traditionally, proximity in time, location and social attachment in f2f (face-to-face) communities have been major factors. Web-based and networked contacts tend to rely more on members' referential status, *e.g.*, in reviewed publications; What is essential is that a large number of group members build their impression on a new member's status and quality through a single or a small number of prior members, so that the spread of opinions is decreased compared to the larger variety of mutual impressions in a f2f community.

The uniqueness of web-based as opposed to f2f communities is hard to see as computer applications penetrate almost every aspect of our society: The presence of computer applications is reflected in systems for formally tracking procedures, statuses, *etc*. Even more drastic is the effect of ICT penetrating the existential and artistic domains. A good example is the inevitable impact of digital graphics, animations and lately the 3D virtual worlds that can be seen in TV programmes, newspapers, *etc*. There is substantial support for the hypothesis that it is 'youth culture' that embodies the trend in mobile and web-based communication. 'Ubiquity' is the term that refers one's awareness to keep the same connection to personal assets, connections and facilities, regardless of one's location. Its ultimate consequence is that despite mobility, members of web-based communities stay in contact with each other.

The pervasive underlying dimension is alienation in extreme urban conditions; the last two decades are characterised by a continuous trend towards individualism, diversity and a growing multicultural factor. 'To be or not to be online' is the overtone. 'Identity' was almost shrunk down into an epiphenomenon in the 1980s; 'Access' was the key factor. Nowadays it is evident that web-based 'participation' has supplanted the priority of 'information access'; 'Privacy' in web-based communities has been polarised into 'social presence' and 'anonymity' and 'security'.

Combined with the urgency of new elements in economy and lifestyle, we may expect a high demand for 'virtual presence' in 'game-like scenarios' in the coming years. As the overall notion of 'knowledge economies' articulates the need for 'authentic-' rather than 'main stream expertise', it is clear that traditional schooling models will fail to bridge the gap between industrial- and existential economies; Professional learning is becoming 'personal development' rather than 'being trained on the job'. In this respect it is the web-based community that has the highest potential for promoting 'interest', 'awareness' and 'mentality'. So far, schooling and training have been the ultimate metaphors for creating intellect and migration in one's social stratification. It is likely that citizens will be more strongly oriented to web-based communities than to schooling institutes. Innovation will rely more and more on personal views, etiquette, ethics and mentality rather than on knowledge and skills. The step of keying 'competence' rather than skills and knowledge as critical is a first step towards accepting the defeat of schooling by 'transferring'. The supremacy of knowledge over skills has been stressed in the last half century. Since the introduction of computers and the web, a fast acceptance in the horizon can be seen; even the dominance of communication is in decline. Grounding one's beliefs, emotions and ideology become the paradigm for sharing human values and extending social consciousness. These inherent trends can be seen in the subsequent contributions to this journal issue.

Schmitz-Justen and Wilhelm report on an interesting analysis and discussion on the identification of factors contributing to the knowledge creation and knowledge transfer processes. The empirical part of the research described in this article is based on an in-depth single case study of the users of the electronic communication forums at the International University of Bremen. Future research in this field is announced.

In the next article, a position paper by Sanders addresses substantial questions of what should constitute learning and instruction. He shares with us the type of constructivist learning environments that he envisions. The article is an open invitation to the community to develop research for a better understanding of how learning occurs in a virtual world.

ten Thij and van de Wijngaert make the contributing factors for success in dance communities explicit. Dance has been a crucial factor in establishing enculturation between the sexes all over communities and cultures for as long back as we can imagine nowadays. Provocatively, the authors claim that from the beginning, dance was related to the internet. And indeed in their article they succeed in promoting the sense that dance communities have entered an entirely new genre in youth culture as its dynamics and volatility may have even superseded the quick evolution in dance style and musical genre itself.

Kawai reports about an e-community platform in a specific part of Japan. The article describes quantitative and qualitative verification experiments using the e-community SHIMADA. The results of the experiments are the input of new functions to be included in the platform.

The article of Kardaras and Karakostas reports on the results of an exploratory study carried out in the financial sector in the UK. The purpose of the study was to investigate which Virtual Communities (VC) features should be developed and offered to customers in an attempt to increase their perceived benefits.

Gaming in a virtual world becomes more and more important. Volanis examines the issue of virtual property and underlines in this article the importance of End User Licence Agreements (EULAs) to stimulate the players' drive for creativity and collaboration.

Is there a community within a blog? How can this be measured? Chin and Chignell describe a method for identifying communities in blogs, and apply this framework to a blog on Canadian independent music. The article outlines interesting directions for further research.

Eleven authors coming from eight different countries in Europe, Asia and the USA, do present their findings on building, managing and designing web-based communities.

We would like to thank the members of our editorial board for their input, comments and suggestions for improvements.