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## Editorial

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**Biographical notes:** Margriet Simmerling is a Peer Consultant/Senior Manager in R&D projects in the areas 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 domains of education technology and psychology at the PhD level.

Dr. Piet Kommers is an Associate Professor at the University of Twente. His specialties are educational technologies, WWW-based communities and mobile learning. His research and teaching stretch 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 he organises conferences under the auspices of IADIS.

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Now that you have the third issue of Volume 4 before you, it can be stated without any scruple that already Web-based Communities (WBCs) have manifested much more than emulations of face-to-face (f2f) affiliations, though it is also clear that the immediacy of the real f2f 'meeting' will not soon be surpassed by mediated communication. It is also clear that without a web-based pre- and post-stage, the traditional communities would finally suffer substantially as well.

Already it can be seen that matching agendas for groups larger than three have virtually become impossible without the help of web-based programs like [www.doodle.ch](http://www.doodle.ch) and <http://www.schedulebook.com/>. So we may conclude that already web-based social support is indispensable for our f2f social life. The <http://www.shotcode.com/> service allows citizens to easily capture a barcode by camera

in a mobile phone and thus launch a web application for determining its background, find associated persons, *etc.* It is an example that exceeds the location reference by GPS in case the item is a transportable object, vehicle, product in a shop, *etc.*

Even more intriguing is to see an extreme increase in social software like Twitter, Hyves and Places. They invite new members to announce their interests and soon immerse them in large communities which are already aware that knowledge is *between* rather than *in* persons. The scale of web users and applications has convinced us that our preconceived ways of thinking and communication were unnecessarily contrived by the media and their representations at that time. We will soon start accepting that even in the social and the emotional domain; we will rely on artefacts like agent-driven agendas and metadata for linking up new with earlier associations.

As the media have intensified communication etiquette, it is inevitable that similar to education and healthcare, their explicit agenda will erode and more predominant needs will take over their main position.

A significant trend towards embedding rather than articulating communication can be seen in the recent move towards ideological bases for the ever-more compact world. Benkler's book, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (Benkler, 2006), provides a quick understanding that liberal market mechanisms and tailored mass production will not solve current world needs at all.

This issue of the *International Journal of Web Based Communities* gives an overview of how working together via WBCs becomes part of a new economic model (Tapscoff and Williams, 2006): new ways of 'working together' offer new challenges in many domains. Seventeen experts from seven different countries in three continents share their ideas in the following nine articles. The domains are widespread and indicate the variety of research environments: blogging, gaming, learning, consumer, agriculture and governmental environments.

Blogging has changed the way people communicate, work together and share information. In the first article, Dennen and Pashnyak present an overview of the world of blogs, as well as its characteristics. The article, 'Finding community in the comments: the role of reader and blogger responses in a web log community of practice', presents a case study where bloggers from a variety of academic institutions within the USA and Canada were followed. They share with us a content analysis of both blog posts and their corresponding comments. It seems that a high level of storytelling and reflection is an indicator of the trust that has developed within the community and that blogs are the glue that binds a community.

The article of Pollach focuses on WBCs in a specific domain: the digital camera's reviews. The results of the analysis have implications for the design of online consumer communities and, in particular, product-review websites, and in her conclusions she indicates the measures that could improve the websites.

We are used to the internet and its benefits, but there is also a dark side: does the use of the internet stimulate behavioural disorders such as depression, anxiety, loneliness and stress? Takahira and Ando, from the National Institute of Multimedia Education, collected data measuring the perceptions of teenagers. In the article, the authors discuss the limitations of such research and put the results in a broader perspective.

What about the future trends in internet government? Knahl and Cox discuss the results of research and the alternative forms that are emerging at this moment within the network culture: the 'non-representational democracy'.

For those who are interested in WBC research, the article of Puig-Centelles *et al.* is definitely recommended. The article is an overview of the state of the art of community detection and surveys its different aspects, including identification algorithms, overlapping approaches and cluster validation metrics.

Do you recognise the situation that sometimes unimportant developments turn out to be the basis of a major turnaround? Olsevicova and Mikulecky provides us with a look into the future. In the article 'Learning management systems as an ambient intelligence playground', they present a list of reasons why and how Learning Management Systems (LMSs) and software ambient intelligent solutions can be realised.

Cuthell shares with us case studies that illustrate the effectiveness of online forums as a vehicle for local e-learning activities in school. The conclusion is that the teachers need to use an environment that can be customised for their specific projects. Centrally imposed and managed 'learning platforms' seem to be less effective.

Developing an Organic Agriculture (OA) is an actual issue for many countries. Karetos concludes that especially for farmers, the use of SMS appears to be a promising solution. He presents the development of a web portal and the development of the GOAL system. The system has been implemented for the Greek OA community, but it can fit other communities of other countries.

Gaming is fun but is also serious business. Contributing to a livable city via game technology is a challenge for the future. The benefits of the application of the serious games industry to support online technology are discussed by Doughty and O'Coill from the University of Lincoln. They discuss examples of serious games and the usage of a game development environment to undertake community consultation and the design of a targeted residential street.

The overall conclusion is that the element of web support increases our awareness of social urgencies rather than just improving the comfort of new communication modes.

## References

- Benkler, Y. (2006) *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, Yale University Press.
- Tapscott, D. and Williams, A. (2006) *Wikinomics, How Mass Changes Everything*, New York: Penguin.