
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Piet Kommers is an Associate Professor at the University of Twente, The Netherlands. His specialty is social media for communication and organisation. As conference co-chair of the IADIS multi-conference he initiated the conferences of web-based communities and social media, e-society, mobile learning and international higher education. He is a Professor at the UNESCO Institute for Eastern European Studies in Educational Technology and an Adjunct Professor at Curtin University in Perth, Australia.

Margriet Simmerling is a Peer Consultant/Senior Manager for R&D projects in the area of e-society and web-based communities. She participated in the advisory board for the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and is active as a 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.

1 Introduction

In the opening issue of this year, we celebrated the 10th volume of this journal's life. We listed dominant themes that evolved during the past 10 years and predicted new directions.

Because of its first decennium existence of this journal, we invite some of the renowned authors to bring a special retrospect. These letters of Caroline Haythornthwaite, Petter Bae Brandtzaeg and Birgit Hertzberg Kaare, Jonathan Bishop, OveJobring, Adam Acar and Urban Carlen are included at the end of this editorial; they share with us their vision on the new directions in their field of research. In their 'letter to the editors' interesting observations are shared. Caroline Haythornthwaite writes that both online and offline worlds are intersecting and shares with us her thoughts about the consequences. Petter Bae Brandtzaeg and Birgit Hertzberg Kaare detect changing patterns of social interactions in social media: Towards less intergenerational contact. Jonathan Bishop emphasis that social networking services should not be seen to be synonymous with 'online communities' or web-based communities, OveJobring shares

his thoughts around an alternative to established education and training in the form of a supportive system. Adam Acar published research results about the usage of Twitter during the Tsunami in Japan, and shares with us his opinion about cyber security and privacy. Urban Carlen addresses the issue of digital competences for the future.

Building on the retrospect in the first issue of 2014, we may question again if and why the community metaphor is a legitimate one.

2 Articles in this issue

Eighteen authors from nine countries (Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Norway, Sweden, Taiwan, The Netherlands, and the UK) inform us about the latest research and developments in online forums, Webcam networks, Facebook participation, location-based social networks, virtual communities of practise and discussion boards.

When is a forum successful? A lot of the effectiveness depends on the individual and social processes. Simon Lindgren presents the analysis of a domestic violence forum in the article 'Giving online support: individual and social processes in a domestic violence forum'.

Webcam networks in urban environments, we all are aware of this situation. A threat or a blessing?

In 'Reconfiguring space: the collective autonomy of digital technology', Linda Matthews and Gavin Perin conclude that 'communities' require negotiation between the social and the individual, the power of authorities versus the curbing the power of authorities.

Ruey-Ming Chao, Chen-Chi Chang and Wen-Yu Chang present the result of a study that investigates Facebook user behaviour in relation to media richness. The article 'Exploring the antecedents of trust from the perspectives of uncertainty and media richness in virtual community' enhances the findings of previous studies' by providing a more detailed examination on the effects of trust.

The article 'Revising TAM for hedonic location-based social networks: the influence of TAM, perceived enjoyment, innovativeness and extraversion' presents a study that explains the critical factors underlying the use of a location based social network. Mariëlle E. Bouwman, Piet A.M. Kommers and Alexander J.A.M. van Deursen conclude that developers must make the service pleasant, enjoyable and fun to use.

In the article 'Emergent dialogue as a prerequisite of learning and innovation in professional virtual communities', Helena Kantanen, Jyri Manninen and Jani Kontkanen address the issue of that virtual communities of practise provide a real forum for networked learning and innovation.

Jose van den Akker discusses the communication process and the important role of the moderators of online discussion boards. In the article 'Communication, communities and shaping the future of education as online discussion board moderators', she discusses moral, ethical and spiritual issues and dimensions.

Now, we proceed with the celebration of its first decennium existence of this journal and present the letters we received from Caroline Haythornthwaite, Petter Bae Brandtzaeg and Birgit Hertzberg Kaare, Jonathan Bishop, OveJobring, Adam Acar and Urban Carlen. In order to demonstrate that we, authors and readers of this journal, really feel as a community, we are now happy to include the reactions some of you sent at the event of our first year decennium.

Letters to the Editors

Letter from Caroline Haythornthwaite

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I am very pleased to see the selection of my 2008 paper ‘Learning relations and networks in web-based communities’ in the 10-year anniversary edition of *IJWBC* (Haythornthwaite, 2008). In revisiting that paper I find much that has remained the same and resonates with contemporary issues about successful organising of online communities. In particular, the network perspective holds up well, and indeed has become very widely spread as we are constantly presented with network diagrams of connections among members of distributed groups, clustering of linkages between websites, twitter conversational networks, and the common interpretation of ‘social networking’. These analyses often claim to have identified ‘communities’. They may have, but as I have held since the beginning of my work, community is a hypothesis to be tested (Haythornthwaite et al., 2000). However, as we continue to work, learn and socialise online, it is also valid to reconsider what we mean by ‘community’ (Haythornthwaite, 2007). We have certainly done that as we have rather rapidly adopted the validity of ‘virtual communities’, and now even spend time comparing them to ‘geo-communities’ in terms of social network relations and ties, longevity and persistence, and social capital outcomes. What has changed is that the instances of purely online community are becoming increasingly difficult to find. Both online and offline worlds are intersecting with the rise of the net generation (Rainie, 2012), increasing mobile connectivity, technologies that connect the local and the virtual (e.g., QR codes, GPS, Foursquare). Promoting community is now more likely to entail managing the interaction between online and offline that perfecting on or offline connection (Haythornthwaite and Kendall, 2010).

A major change that has happened since my 2008 paper has been the rise in peer production, best demonstrated in *open source computing projects* such as Linux and Apache, *user-generated content*, best demonstrated in wiki projects such as Wikipedia or OpenStreetMap, and *open access movement*, best demonstrated in online open access journals such as the Public Library of Science (PloS) and the growing number of university institutional repositories for faculty publications. The latter movement is supported through software for journal hosting such as that developed by the Public Knowledge Project (<http://pkp.sfu.ca/>), with intellectual property rights as outlined in creative commons licensing. Together these initiatives, based on a ‘personal but shared

need' (Raymond, 1999; Benkler, 2006) have given rise to a participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2006) that represents a transformation in who creates and sustains online contributions and who controls content and its storage, preservation, display and use. This transformation extends further as we now consider the place of crowdsourcing in economic and knowledge structures.

As researchers into the nature of community online, our early challenge was to explore and develop social and technical means to authenticate online relationships and to build sufficient richness into interactions to gain commitment to a group purpose and to others in the online community. We have, in essence, put most of our attention to supporting strong tie activity. Now, however, as current attention is turning to how to encourage contribution from large numbers of people online, we are looking at weak tie activity.

In considering the turn to crowdsourcing, I started thinking about how peer production and participatory culture relate to what we have learned about online community. In doing so, I started to see similar structures associated with participation in crowds and in communities. In work since the 2008 *IJWBC* paper, I argue that contributory behaviour falls on a continuum. At one end is 'lightweight' contributory behaviour, characterised by low interpersonal commitment yet strong coorientation to a common interest or purpose; at the other end is 'heavyweight' behaviour with commitment to the common interest but also strong interpersonal connections with community members and engagement with the way the community pursues its purpose. As well as indicating ways of organising crowd- or community-sourced initiatives, this light- and heavyweight distinction also applies to individual participation in a forum. Thus, we may be lightweight contributors in one forum (e.g., reading and submitting the occasional comment) and heavyweight in another (e.g., fully engaged in developing the rules and norms of operation, paying attention to others and their roles). These ideas have found support in a study of motivations to participate in the online mapping wiki OpenStreetMap (see Budhathoki and Haythornthwaite, 2013).

Even with the attention to crowds, we all remain fascinated with the nuances of online community. Recent trends include greater analytic power in examining whole web structures and rapidly generated texts (e.g., Twitter). Hand-in-hand with this analytic power is greater consideration of the computational models for analysis, particularly for text analysis (Gruzd and Haythornthwaite, 2011), and of visualisation techniques that promote understanding across vast quantities of data. Further, we are learning how to tie these analytic capabilities to social science questions. In my own work, this now includes being a founding member of the Society for Learning Analytics Research (<http://www.solaresearch.org/>); 'learning analytics' aims to consider how data from online interaction, academic records, etc., can be used to help advance learning research and practice (Haythornthwaite et al., 2013).

Once again, I am very pleased to have my paper included in this special issue and look forward to reading and discovering more about web-based communities through the research presented in this journal.



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Letter from Petter Bae Brandtzaeg and Birgit Hertzberg Kaare

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Young and old people are increasingly enjoying faster and easier access to their peers through social media. However, younger users are increasingly switching from big crowds to more discrete, separate communities and interactions, which imply less

youth-adult communication online. This editorial letter suggests that this development might push the on-going process of individualisation of the family.

In 2010, we published an article in the *IJWBC*, “Bridging and bonding in social network sites – investigating family-based capital” (Brandtzæg et al., 2010). Here, we explored what kinds of social relations that are sought by social networking sites (SNS) users and whether the usage of new SNSs contributes to family bonding. A representative sample of the Norwegian internet population showed that 25% use SNSs to communicate with family members once a week or more often, but peer bonding is significantly more frequent (53%). Answers to an open-ended question demonstrate a wish to strengthen relationships with friends and acquaintances in SNSs. Contact with family was only reported as a main motivation for using SNSs, by one percent of the sample, while other social relations account for 74% of the motivations. The results of this study indicated that the majority of the respondents experienced SNSs as a part of their daily communication routines, both to bridge new online contacts and to strengthen bonds with their existing offline ties. We concluded that these distinct dimensions of social interaction should further be supported by the design of future SNSs, where easier communication tools for family relations should be prioritised. In this letter, we discuss whether the trends we found in our last investigation still are valid, tracing in which direction the development of interactions in social media have gone since then and, quite hesitatingly, figure out what we might expect from the young users and their family bonding in social media in the future. Norway, which was the context of the 2010 study, is in the lead when it comes to use and adaption of new media and the development here might indicate where others countries are heading the next couple of years in this domain.

Since our study, a lot of changes have happened in the social media domain, in particular the change from local SNSs towards a greater Facebook dominance. Two out of four of the Norwegian SNSs we investigated in our 2010 article are shut down. This is likely to have occurred as a result of the increasing popularity of Facebook. Instability among local SNSs has been seen in many other national markets as a result of the spread of Facebook: users move to Facebook when a critical mass of their friends has relocated there (Comscore, 2011). This demonstrates the importance of not only social networks in general, but how important peer groups with similar age and background are as a driving motivation for users within these sites. Younger users in particular see sharing practices in social media as a way to express their identities and to keep in touch with friends. Likewise, a study entitled ‘Why do people use Facebook?’ by Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012) found that Facebook use or SNS use meets two primary human needs which are:

- 1 ‘the need to belong’
- 2 ‘the need for self-representation’.

However, a recent trend is that youth seem to avoid the large crowd on Facebook, but why?

Facebook in particular, is no longer populated by younger users only, 55 years and older represent the fastest growing segment in SNS usage worldwide (Madden and Zickuhr, 2011). Accordingly, the Facebook is now more demographically varied than ever before, including family members in almost all generations. One consequence of this development is not only changing user behaviours, but altering preferences and needs in regard to social interaction such as family-bonding. Family-bonding is happening on Facebook, actually user interactions in social media seem to develop more towards close

ties, such as family and close friends. This trend is confirmed by a recent longitudinal study (Brandtzæg, 2012), just as we predicted in our 2010 article. Facebook has been a tool to keep family members to stay in touch. Parents, brothers and sisters are able to follow each other and to connect, without actually being face to face.

However, relative to older generations, teens have started to use Facebook to a lesser degree in favour of more discrete services, such as Vine, Snapchat and Instagram, where they can find exclusively peer group communication and escape from their family and general adult surveillance. These new peer groups' communities are supported by mobile apps and organised around a shared purpose, that let users capture and share short looping videos or still pictures among their peers. The membership of these services is smaller and the age composition is a lot younger compared to the big crowd on Facebook, and as such youth hubs where different social ties across generations, as in Facebook, are more or less absent.

A reason for this changing social interaction pattern among youth is that many users of Facebook are simply looking for a more private alternative. In particular, younger users do not want everyone to have access to their personal data, history and sharing practices. Hence, they are turning away from Facebook or use it less public; as one young girl explained to us: *"I'm seventeen and notice that our generation writes very little on Face, in fact nothing in the news updates or timeline"* (Norwegian girl 17, September, 2013). Teens are therefore still logging on to Facebook, most on a daily basis, but they are not highly engaged in the 'timeline' or the visible public zone anymore. They have more or less hidden themselves from the big crowd, including adults and family, by the use of secret Facebook groups, advanced privacy settings or chat functionality, and by fleeing to other and more discrete mobile services such as SnapChat. This shows that young people demonstrate an intense interest in controlling access to their personal information flow online, and express concerns about adults 'snooping' (e.g., Livingstone, 2008).

The mix of different generations and social ties, as well as transparency within Facebook appears to force younger users to exhibit a greater sense of self-awareness. Facebook as a hub for youth are not, anymore, in line with the playfulness and social experimentation associated with the youth culture. Youth find less room for trial and error in status updates and in the 'timeline' on Facebook. Similarly, a recent Pew Research study (Madden, 2013) suggested that teens' relationship with Facebook is complicated due to too many adults and too much drama. Youth experience their Facebook usage to be less open and private because of social pressure towards conformity, as well as adult surveillance, at least in the Facebook timeline. This is not the case in services like Instagram, Vine and SnapChat. SnapChat, for example, allows users to set a 1 second to 10 second expiration of the sharing photos. So, users can send time limited photos that might be embarrassing or just silly without a fear that it will find its way to parents or other adults, and is in that way a more fun and engaging app where younger users can experiment and play among their own peers, without interference from the adult society. Such peer groups are vital for the development of teenagers' identity and values (Lehdonvirta and Rasanen, 2010).

So while adults still are using their Facebook visible for their crowd, younger users are to a greater degree interacting with their peers on more discrete social platforms, escaping from their family and other adults. Younger people have, of course, constantly found their way to their own hang outs, but these separate groups are in our increasingly

mediated society present and accessible anytime and everywhere, also in the living room. This development might suggest that family members are living ever more separate and parallel lives within the framework of the family. ‘Alone together’, as Turkle (2012) would have argued. Hence, an important question is whether or not new more sparse usage of Facebook and mobile services like SnapChat, Instagram and Vine reinforce and speed up the ongoing process of individualisation of the family. Facebook have over the last couple of years been an important vehicle for family interactions but a new trend is that this is to a lesser degree important across generations. A future trend seems to be less youth-adult communication in social media. Future research should provide further evidence for this trend.

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Letter from Jonathan Bishop

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Dear Editor,

It has been a pleasure to have been associated with the *International Journal of Web-Based Communities* since my first publication in 2009 ('Enhancing the understanding of genres of web-based communities: the role of the ecological cognition framework', Vol. 5, No. 1, pp.4–17).

In that paper, I devised a method and model for classifying web-based communities. This paper, I hope, has been fundamental in distinguishing the study of web-based community from other similar terms, like online communities and social networking services.

Internet applications change in their design and use, but web-based communities have remained persistent. They are characterised according to whether only one person or group can start a thread, or whether many can. And also whether the users can reply or whether they can edit. In addition, there are particular signs as to the differences between web-based community, including mise en scene and montage.

Social networking services should not be seen to be synonymous with 'online communities' or web-based communities. Consisting of specific groups, pages and feeds, Facebook for instance can be seen as having as many online communities as there are users. Each of these users will have likely chosen many web-based communities to be part of through their web browser, which will not appear the same on their mobile phone, tablet computer or any other multimodal interface connected to the social networking service. They will have like a systems operator of an online community based on a single web-based community reduced the members of their own personal online community to those whom they most want to associate with – via a buddylist.

With HTML5 becoming the multiplatform coding language of choice, web-based communities will be facing a challenge in terms of maintaining the usability that comes from having clearly defined formats that give rise to their genres, whilst platforms that do not rely on a traditional web browser are deviating from what users have been used to for some time.

Yours faithfully,

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Letter from OveJobring

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11/8/2013

Dear author Dr. Kommers

Thank you for inviting me to present some reflections in connection with the 10th Anniversary of the *IJWBC*.

Since some years I have argued that in the extension of communities, in all its forms, can be considered as a kind of system that supports a continuous, ongoing learning (Jobring and Svensson, 2010). Our previous research has focused on management issues as well as forms of learning within communities. Mostly, the phenomenon has been studied as such and not to the same extent the societal impact they contribute to and which are highly relevant. To a lesser degree, there has been a contextualisation of communities. In a context, a community constitutes a support for individual learning. Researchers now point to the link and the iterative process that actually takes place between the personal individual learning environment and communities and learning network:

As Jane Hart highlights in her blog on April 29 this year. “We can now approach the concept of ‘continuous learning’ very differently, and this is due to the proliferation and widespread use of social technologies. The social web has changed the way that individuals learn from a constant stream of knowledge and information. And, in a similar way now, enterprise social tools are changing how team members can learn from one another inside their organisation. And what’s more, they can do that as they carry out their daily work – *not as a separate activity nor on a separate ‘learning platform’*– in order to continuously improve their performance. One might even refer to this as *constant learning* rather than continuous learning” (Hart, 2013).

Communities and online environment as support system of continuous learning

Due to the development of social media and online environments, the content and form of educational systems is changing. At the same time, demands on the individual professional to ensure that he or she is continually updated and employable are increasing. This places demands on the co-workers’ supply of competence being adapted to today’s ways of organising business operations. Traditional competence development and e-learning whereby all participants receive the same offering through training is not suitable to match such needs.

Forthcoming research and development is to developing an alternative to established education and forms of training in the shape of a supportive system. The challenge is how to develop a support system-based on contemporary media that continuously strengthens the individual’s qualifications. Supportive systems online will then be different from

educational and training systems in that they assist adults with pathways for improving their knowledge and competence, including both professionals and vulnerable groups across borders and nations. System of support is intended to contribute towards solving companies' and organisations' need for a flexible supply of competence as well as the individual professional's need for support.

Background

Stiff competition and globalisation are making flexible adaptability and customer-adapted offerings important factors in the competitiveness of companies and organisations. This places demands on the co-workers' supply of competence being adapted to today's ways of organising business operations. Traditional competence development, whereby all participants receive the same offering through training, is unable to match such a trend in all respects.

At the same time, demands on the individual professional to be constantly updated and employable are increasing. Previously, organisations/employers and society bore this responsibility, creating clear guidelines for the professional's knowledge and competence development. This has changed and the individual is now becoming increasingly responsible for his or her own competence development. This trend has been described using the 'individualisation thesis' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) which entails people's life space expanding to include more as well as freer options. In consequence, the individual is responsible for his or her choices and thus his or her own qualification development.

This particularly applies to situations where organisations, employees, and society were responsible, previously supplying guidance and road maps for professional knowledge and skill. This change brings the need for continuous and constantly existing support for the individual's personal development, which assists the individual in navigating through his or her learning, work, and life environment. This does not happen today and that is a problem.

Contribution towards a solution

The development of modern online environment and communities is to be where the qualifications of professionals are continuously being developed qualitatively, enduringly and with progression. This will guide and facilitate professionally active individuals who are consciously aspiring to enhance their competence and skills through informal ways of working. This will lead to increased operational effectiveness which will in turn lead to increased competitiveness.

It has to be a developed, through method development, an alternative to established forms of education and training in the shape of an online supportive system which continuously supports professionals in their development. Even today, new forms of social media and online environments constitute, to a certain extent, such supportive systems for the development of individuals – but could be developed using institutional input.

There is rapid development within online-based informal environments, such as online communities but now also called personal learning networks (PLN). Here, learning and individual development take place through a range of different forms; e.g.,

stories, self-reflection, and various forms of mutual exchange between participants. Well documented and researched over the years through the *IJWBC*.

Examples are communities like LinkedIn, blogs, and micro blogs like Twitter as well as social media like Facebook. As a consequence of increasing participation on the net, a need for coordination has been created for the individual user. The solution is called the *personal learning environment* (PLE) and this is a grouping together of the individual's various sources of information. The latter is pointed out, for instance, in the Horizon report (New Media Consortium, 2010) as one of four important future development trends on the net. In parallel with the development of online environments, there is also active development online in fields such as free educational resources and free courses.

The European Commission points out that "an increasing share of learning occurs at the workplace, in non-formal contexts and in leisure time – often through new ICT-based learning tools and methods" (European Commission, 2008b). In practice, consequently, modern media development thus partly constitutes a supportive system which continuously supports the individual participant's improvement.

What does a supportive system entail?

A supportive system may entail the structured and planned development of qualifications online in accordance with an EQF (or similar framework) schedule (European Commission, 2008a).

The interwoven, individual development processes that take place in an online environment have a special characteristic which constitutes an essential pre-requirement in the development of a supportive system. Four differences between formal educational systems and supportive systems, which must be taken into account when designing a system, can be distinguished. From a traditional educational situation to a supportive system, these four are:

- 1 from pre-produced to user-generated content
- 2 from individual subject motives to joint qualification interests
- 3 from limited duration to continuous and enduring activity
- 4 from subjects and thematic areas to a broad perspective on the participants' skills (Jobring and Svensson, 2010).

These four differences mean that a content subject cannot be taken as a departure point – a supportive system is neither a course nor an education. It requires a broader perspective and is based, in that case, on the participants' *shared interest* instead of a specific subject. It will then be more suited to purpose to use *professional qualification* for the development of individuals. Through the European Qualification Framework, the EU has prescribed a definition: qualification entails, on eight different levels:

- *Results of learning* expressed in knowledge, skill, and competence.
- *Knowledge* which is the result of assimilating information through learning.
- *Skill* is the ability to apply knowledge in order to carry out tasks and solve problems.

- *Competence* is the exhibited capacity to use knowledge and skill in occupationally-related development. Expressed in terms of responsibility and independence.

A supportive system may then entail a structured and planned qualification development in accordance with an 'EQF schedule', or similar method, where the participants' qualification is consciously reconciled and enhanced. The system adds its principle to existing forms of online environments, but which are being further developed and supported methodically and systematically.

Process support and progression constitute the other principal part of a supportive system and have the purpose of bringing together the individuals' PLEs within the shared OLC/PLN. The issue of supervision is key. In many social media and similar online environments, there is no direct supervision – examples of such media being Twitter and Facebook. Possibly, there is some control of activities, but this is not supported by an expert or an outsider.

The purpose of system of support is to methodically and systematically support and advance the progressive development of the participants' qualifications. In this case, supervisors are required but the difficulty of supervising such a learning process is apparent. Supporting the process is an advanced task for one person – a process facilitator – but there is also need for a subject expert – professional expert – to support the development of the participants' knowledge, competencies, and skills. This leadership duo forms an important component of the development and implementation of a system.

A supportive system can consist of a combination of different units. Personal learning environments constitute the foundation, however. They constitute the source of the system.

The process of the circular method generally consists of a continuous interplay between the participant's user generated *input* and episodes of *sequences* of informal learning and formal qualification development. The combination of input and informal/formal episodes in sequences pre-requires and places demands concerning structure, support, and management.

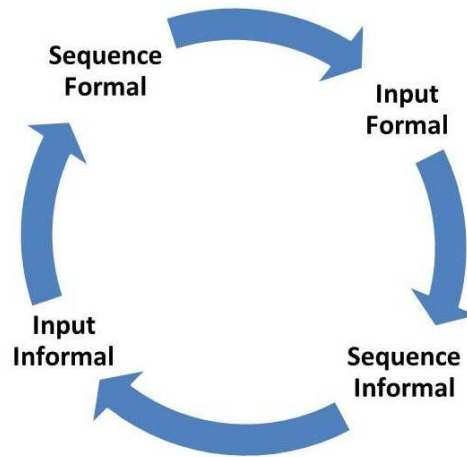
Through his or her work, through monitoring the wider world and contacts, the individual generates the *input* for the system. This input is passed on to a shared platform where it creates *sequences* and a process in the form of discussions or stream of messages and events which are processed in a shared community. Input becomes the object of processing and provides feedback to the individual participant – it is a circular course of events that is described in Figure 1.

In order for this to bring progression and reconciliation with a methodology is required, as well as planning, structure, and management. The method is named in accordance with the circular course of events as a circular method – CM. To develop this method knowledge could be gained from research on online learning communities (OLCs), learning networks, computer-supported collaborative learning and similar as well as the Japanese corporate study groups Shoshudankatsudo, the Swedish adult education study circle methodology and from European Learning Circles.

A supportive online system for ongoing and continuous professional development as a method of qualification development departs, both in form and content, from the traditional competence development concept. The system's benefits and its implications is a faster adaptive process based on continuous involvement and a higher degree of customisation through circular way of working. It implies a faster and more efficient

individual development process. Its basis is the group's common interest and the system can therefore not replace traditional approaches but is an urgent option along with existing educational system.

Figure 1 Basics of a circular method (see online version for colours)



The importance of web-based communities and future research.

Primarily support system it is about building and creating trust in a vision of a long-term, continuous and largely self-governed learning which is superior to traditional further education models and which strengthens the organisation, the occupational group, and the participating individual. Such vision-creating work takes time and requires great openness to new or complementary ideas originating from both organisational management and from the occupational group in question.

Knowledge of WBC is a key foundation for the understanding and development of programs and systems that support continuous learning. When we began the research on Community's as phenomenon it was new and exciting. Today in the connected society, it's for many obvious. In the meanwhile, the phenomenon has differentiated with new forms and variants such as <http://www.learn.st> which Dr. Kommers recently kindly invited me and drew my attention to. The differentiation, the obviousness and the increased diversity leads to a much more complex situation than the one we had 10 years ago. The improvement means that users can choose different sites for different purposes in different contexts. The degree and frequency of changes increases. From the community provider, it can be considered that the members have become more unfaithful and more difficult to tie to a specific 'all-inclusive' community. In a social perspective, we have reached a transfer of power from those who provides, to the users.

It is in this perspective that future research on the WBC should be considered – where the complexity and the diversity puts the individual at the centre and where the interactive relationship between the community and the individual will be come increasingly important to understand. In these efforts, *IJWBC* will have an important future role.

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Writing a paper about how people used Twitter during one of the greatest disasters in Japanese history was an emotional roller-coaster for us. We were about to burst into tears when we read tweets posted by people who were trapped after the tsunami. We realised that Twitter can be used both to help those who are in a difficult situation but also those who are safe as it gives them opportunities to maintain their sense of community and share their emotional support with their loved ones. On the other hand, many people complained about rumours and hoaxes on Twitter: an issue that is still not solved.

The problem is, strictly regulating any communication platform would go against ‘freedom of speech’ but at the same time some people may always use new technologies and new communication channels to invade others’ privacy and threaten public security (e.g., using Google Glass to take a picture of strangers, using 3D printers to distribute hand guns, and using Facebook photos’ geotags to determine people’s actual location). Obviously cyber security and privacy will be way important topics in the near future. Regardless, we should never support any censorship activity and we should never ignore any technological innovation just because it has security issues.

Letter from Urban Carlen

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OLC revisited: a critique of ‘the rationale of OLC’ as creating a future vision of web-based communities – looking back on the research of web-based communities (WBC), which has been published in *IJWBC* for a period of ten years, it provides an impressive compilation of both depth and extent of scientific knowledge, and a fascinating rapid and exceptional development of web-based tools, and not least, a deepened understanding of the increasing digital competencies among people in networked societies. In my capacity as one of many researchers who have followed the progress of the journal, I am honored to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of *International Journal of Web Based Communities (IJWBC)* by writing a letter to you about my vision of the future research field. My vision of WBC takes its departure in a socio-cultural perspective that deals with three intertwined areas; the research approach, the development of tools, and themes of digital competence that concern online participation. My suggestions of future research of WBC are founded within the interplay between individuals and collectives of people communicating and using various tools situated in social practices, which I consider requires further examination. But first, I would like to take the opportunity to briefly reflect upon the article ‘The rationale of online learning communities’, published in 2005, volume 1 number 3 (Carlén and Jobring, 2005). We used the term *online* as it offered a mix of communication forms rather than exploring web-based environments only. However, in this letter, I intend to revisit the text and give some critique that will generate ideas for the research carried out in the future.

Revisiting the rationale of OLC

Back in 2005, the ambitious research approach was to cover the total phenomenon of OLCs in one article. This became a limitation in itself, mainly because most social constellations over the net seemed to fit into the rationale. In the beginning of a research project, researchers aim at grasping the essence of what they are going to explore. As I already had accomplished the publication of my research in conference proceedings, regarding a typology and constituents of OLCs, presented at the International Conference of Web Based Communities in Lisbon (i.e., 2004) and Algarve (i.e., 2005) in Portugal, the research work continued to connect all the ideas into the complete rationale of OLC. However, I still consider that the research article gives an insight for examining what types of OLCs that exist, and points directly at issues for constructing essential research questions worth exploring within each type. The idea was not only to guide other researchers ahead, it also aimed at creating a comprehensive picture of what empirical objects could be defined as OLC, and therefore, I needed a frame of reference from which I could later select empirical objects for further scientific examinations.

The work in the former research project also made us define OLCs “as learning atmospheres, a context providing a supportive system from which sustainable learning processes are gained through a dialogue and collaborative construction of knowledge by acquiring, generating, analysing and structuring information” [Carlén and Jobring, (2005), p.274]. We concluded that the basic foundation of an OLC is characterised by the mediation of knowledge between the learners, as they are the ones who create the content themselves, rather than the exchange of information between members being provided with ready-made study materials (ibid.). As we struggled to understand OLCs in depth by investigating a huge array of empirical objects, we became more and more knowledgeable as to making discoveries in methodology that also made us realise the somehow impossible mission to provide a complete picture of the research field. The subsequent solution was that the empirical objects needed to be explored *as if* these were OLCs. This approach implied that my forthcoming studies took an inductive approach rather than being carried out on preconceptions of what was under examination. This proved more fruitful for my research as I could then choose an empirical object within the rationale, as derived from the type of *online professional community* in which actors, activities and tools were explored in terms of how participants in the professional domain of general medicine were organised and worked as an arena for learning, collaboration and interaction.

A professional community goes online

One conclusion derived from my thesis was a deepened understanding of what is considered to be social in online participation (Carlén, 2010). They exclusively talked about the specialist subject, which in a sense goes against the concept of community that is founded on trust between people based on personal issues that describe who you are as a social being. Rather, online participation in the professional community concerns your knowledge regarding the subject and in what way you can contribute with knowledge to the collective in distributed learning. Their shared concern for the specialist subject also made them omit personal details in professional conversations since issues related to their daily lives jeopardised their participation as such postings foster smaller social networks that tend to marginalise others from contributing in the debate. Together they created strict rules for participation that was constantly updated by the collective as they shared responsibility for moderating participation (Carlén, 2010).

Dr. Piet Kommers understands the potential for exploring the social aspects when researching WBCs, which he also expressed in the editorial of the actual issue of *IJWBC* back in 2005. These social aspects in question concern how humans use and develop psychological and physical tools, and how communication between human beings emerges through collaboration when using technological devices (Säljö, 1999, 2009). Below, I continue to explore three intertwined areas concerning my vision of the research field.

An accurate research approach

In order to understand participation, researchers need to consider the whole social practice, that is, not merely the WBC under study. Jaldemark (2012) takes on an intersectional methodology for understanding the complexity of participation. In

research, analyses of participation involve various environments, such as the geographical environment, the social environment or even the learning environment. “Intersectional analysis of participation suits well with discussing participation in terms of being a transactional process of human action”, Jaldemark argues (2012, p.404). Understanding the transactional approach implies that actions of human beings are inseparable from both the surrounding environment as well as the features involved in their actions. This requires a non-dualistic point of departure in analyses and discussions that also affects how researchers are able to explain essential ideas of participation. For example, the term *environment* becomes irrelevant and needs to be replaced by technology or tools within a transactional approach (see Jaldemark, 2012). These rhetorical changes also challenge our preconceptions of methodology as well as how we view ourselves as either internet researchers or just researchers, or even designers for participation.

Development of tools for participation in social practice

In carrying out design-based research, the design for participation acquires a greater importance than merely the development of tools. Haythornthwaite (2008) claims that researchers who explore relations between the community members will provide a way of finding out what matters to a particular collective, which in turn will generate an increased understanding of learning and community processes, enabling social and technical support for such processes. In the future vision of development, researchers of WBC become designers for participation, rather than providing theories of what happens in online mode. In forthcoming research, iterative examinations of participation need to generate theories to be tested in practical explorations together with participants. We will design for learning that assures the actual outcome of knowledge sharing, and exchange of experiences will be fulfilled as goals in participation. This also requires an explicit plan for generating evidence in order to clarify the actual knowledge derived in research (Barab et al., 2007). One characteristic concern in my research is the focus on learning by participation. However, learning is often conceptualised as an activity merely taking place in school settings. Säljö (1999) asserts that learning within an institutional setting can be seen as a complement to all forms of learning. Independent of whether WBCs are situated in educational settings, at work, or in everyday life, people create meaning when participating in web-based communities. They generate information and communicate by means of tools that are not particularly text-based. More often participants of WBC will generate visual images to explain what they do in social practices which require researchers to adopt new skills for analysing extended forms of empirical material.

Digital competences for the future

One contemporary challenge that people meet is the collision of social contexts in which participation takes place. People have to adopt communicative skills that allow them to avoid mistakes in providing private details in professional contexts and vice versa. Recently, participation has tended to result in great complications for those who do not fully understand the consequences of their online actions. In terms of digital competence, people will become more capable of creating and analysing texts and pictures that are published online as we aim to understand the collective outcomes in communication and use of social media. As people take part in online local geographical social networks,

they create meanings of relationships that reflect their use of digital tools. Haythornthwaite (2002, p.183) found that “the more that pairs communicate, the more media they use for those communications” as people intend to maintain their social relationships. In such an approach, it becomes essential for researchers to consider the idea of meaning-making when examining what makes participants engage online. In the future, we no longer discuss *online* or *offline* modes as we understand participation in terms of carrying out our daily lives as being citizens in networked societies. Taking a socio-cultural perspective, people’s mistakes when going online lead to learning and experiences, and by adopting new skills based on these mistakes they will manage to communicate under conditions together in a more appropriate way. Therefore, researchers need to continue to explore the incentives that make participants create rules, and under what conditions they engage in WBC and other social media. Most web-based communities are still facilitated by a single enthusiast that holds the existence of the WBC alive. However, we often see the failure in online participation as threads die in asynchronous computer conferences (see Hewitt, 2005; Hara and Hew, 2007). In order to create sustainability, a shared responsibility for moderating participation becomes necessary to design (Carlén and Lindström, 2012). In work-life practices, co-moderation can support how participants talk about work-related subjects and how they can take part in a continual construction of rules for participation within the WBC. As people develop communicative skills together they learn how to talk about work in social media. New job descriptions include moderating tasks are embedded in work-life to support knowledge sharing. According to Lindberg and Olofsson (2008), participants in OLCs are *being-for-the-other*, rather than merely *being-together*, that expresses the ideas of learning through participation, which also nurture the lively discussions.

Over the years, I have also had the opportunity to take part in research events that foster scientific skills in discussions with other researchers. The Swedish ‘LearnIT’ international seminar ‘OLC in context’ was held in the autumn of 2006 in Gothenburg, Sweden with Piet Kommers as the guest speaker. We particularly invited researchers and practitioners in the research field who we knew had contributed with complementary knowledge related to the empirical phenomenon under study. As a result of our discussions in Gothenburg, articles were then compiled in *IJWBC* volume 4, number 2 in 2008. One personal experience from that seminar was the deepened understanding of the challenges in methodology. I can now connect to the three intertwined areas above, which in a sense also concerns us as researchers, as we carry out work in use of social media and for improvement of our digital competence as we intend to grow as researchers.

The collaborations with Dr. Piet Kommers over the years show the importance of associating in a research community based on good leadership. As I have been given the opportunity to thank Piet Kommers for offering a viable learning arena for scientific discussions, I also thank Margriet Simmerling who, over the years, has facilitated our publications with good care and guidance. Her contributions, together with Piet Kommers, are important for creating successful international journal and nurturing the research community for the future.

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