

EDITORIAL PREFACE

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In your hands you have another issue of IJWP, which we have organized as a valuable means to disseminate the evolving theory and practice related to Web portals, providing a comprehensive coverage and understanding in its technological, business, organizational, and social dimensions.

Inside this issue readers will find five contributions to the discussion of developments and applications of web portals in research, finance, web-based Geographical Information Systems, learning and virtual worlds. Authors' geographical dispersion translates our concern of a globally distributed community of contributors. In this issue, contributions come from Germany, Portugal, Italy, Hawaii and Belgium.

The five contributions are briefly described below.

Research portals have been proposed as a means of managing knowledge and fostering collaboration in research communities. However, implementing and maintaining a research portal is costly and involves a lot of technical knowledge. The purpose of "Supporting Knowledge Management and Collaboration in Research Communities Using Automatically Created Research Portals", by Becker, Heide, Knackstedt and Steinhorst, is to introduce a research portal generator designed to automatically create such portals. The generator provides a configurable set of knowledge management and collaboration features. The generator envis-

ages easing the process of setting up and using a research portal. The paper contributes to promoting research portals as a means of sharing knowledge and facilitating collaboration in research communities. Following a design science research process, the authors derive objectives for a research portal generator, iteratively implement these objectives, and evaluate the functionality of the created portals against the current state of the art of 813 research portals. Authors demonstrate that portals created by the generator exhibit a consistently higher level of maturity than research portals currently present on the Internet.

According to Martinho and Reis, in "Web Portal for Matching Loan Requests and Investment Offers in Peer-To-Peer Lending", although online Peer-To-Peer lending has seen some growing media attention since its recent creation, the systems which provide deal brokerage in this context have yet to be given significant consideration within the scientific community. The second paper of this issue is part of a broader effort to setup a Peer-to-Peer lending community in Portugal. This work focuses on solving the infrastructural problem of combining investment offers from potential lenders with loan requests from potential borrowers. The combination process must strive for an optimal result, which pleases lenders and borrowers alike, despite their opposing agendas. Simultaneously the combination result should

also benefit the platform's business model, so as to keep it sustainable and profitable. Several optimization metaheuristics, powered by a constraint programming module, were applied to efficiently explore the problem's solution space and to find optimal solutions. The results achieved with this approach show how metaheuristic-driven optimization can be successfully applied to Peer-to-Peer lending combination problems.

The best tools to manage the exchange of information and services between heterogeneous subjects through new technological tools with particular reference to information systems are certainly the Web-based information systems. Leveraging the infrastructure of the Web, these systems may be able to handle multimedia data, to perform distributed and cooperative applications based on service, in addition to customizing applications and related data. In "Web Information System Platforms for Publishing Spatial Data", Gallo, Malatacca and Fratello provide an overview on Web Information Systems with particular reference to GIS, presenting a description of the usage scenarios and a comparison between two significant platforms for publishing spatial data.

Nahl and James authored the fourth paper, "Gamification in Instruction and the Management of Intersubjectivity in Online University Courses", where the authors present an experiment of technology integration with twelve online undergraduate and graduate courses over four semesters, on the effective ways of managing student learning at a distance. Students had online access to the publicly available applications used for communicating and coordinating activities with each other. Gamification principles guided some of the course procedures, such as a point system, feedback, awards and penalties, social networking, team tasks, individual options. A theoretical framework is proposed for understanding how to manage instructional intersubjectivity for students meeting online. Student thinking and motivation is observed to be higher under conditions of intersubjectivity in comparison to doing the same tasks alone. Learning from each other through participation promotes intersubjectivity when

the instructional strategy installs technological affordances that keep each student informed of what the others are doing in context, and how they are reacting or responding to each other.

The paper "The Un/Acceptability of Virtual Moral Practices: An Empirical and Ethical Inquiry" by Katleen Gabriels conjoins a foundation in moral philosophy with an empirical study on the un/acceptability of moral practices in 'Second Life' (SL). In this study, SL-residents were asked to rank morally charged SL-scenarios in a classification from '(most) unacceptable' to '(most) acceptable' and, while doing so, to reason out loud about their ranking. The analysis presented here focuses on their converging and diverging arguments. Regarding converging arguments, there was consensus on the unacceptability of six scenarios. Research participants believed these scenarios transcend the merely virtual and they subsequently grounded their argumentation in actual principles. They further agreed upon seven scenarios as acceptable; these scenarios were considered as typical features of SL and subsequently were not morally problematized. Regarding other scenarios, no consensus was reached. Katleen Gabriels discusses these findings in terms of their ethical implications and in light of current approaches in the field of 'computer ethics'.

Before finishing this editorial preface, we would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to IGI Global for the excellent support of their team of professionals. We would like also to thank all the members of the Editorial Board, for their commitment and for sharing their knowledge and experience in the support of the decision-making process. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to all the authors who submitted their work, for their visions and excellent contributions.

We hope you will find here an interesting and a valuable source of knowledge and ideas. Enjoy your reading!

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