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EDITORIAL

Introduction: culturally motivated virtual characters and Connect-Universum

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This volume includes papers from two events, the first on the theme of "Culturally Motivated Virtual characters" and the second on "Connect-Universum". The conference on the theme of "Culturally Motivated Virtual characters" was organised by Asad Nazir and Sandy Louchart, School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. It argued that in present day world, there is an increased interaction between people belonging to different cultures, this results not only in knowledge transfer but also to escalate misunderstandings into outright conflicts. The first six papers in this volume are selected from presentations at this conference, and focus on using virtual characters in their many different manifestations to recognise, express or even replicate cultural cues and to make user understand the importance of not only differences in cultures but also different modes of verbal and non-verbal interactions.

Virtual characters can be used to enhance cultural understanding by making them culturally aware, in order to do this we can promote cultural influence to cognitive processes of perception, planning and the ability to react in a virtual world. In doing so the relationship between emotions and cultures is of significant importance. Theories related to emotional modulation, cultural differences and personality, become the basis of modelling such virtual characters. This gives rise to number of issues to be looked at, e.g. how to model intelligent virtual characters so that they are culturally aware, making the interaction with these characters culturally motivated and to evaluate what are the effects of using cultures in virtual characters.

This collection of the six papers and discussions discovers both the theoretical coordination between the state of the art and cultural theories devised in cultural psychology, anthropology and human behaviour. It also involves discussions on interaction modalities and perception of cultural cues.

The main themes all these papers contribute to are virtual characters in cultural context, the human perception of culture in artificial characters, impacts of a culturally motivated virtual character and implementation of theories of culture from social sciences and psychology into the virtual characters. As culture is a complex concept, it is not very easy to keep this special issue focussed on just one theme. The papers involved though relevant to cultures and virtual characters explore wide areas in both state of the art technology and implementation of wide range of applications in real-life and virtual reality.

The paper entitled "The Cultural Influence Model: When Accented Natural Language Spoken by Virtual Characters Matters" talks about cultural concepts of accent recognition and expression, whereas the paper entitled "Eloquence of Eyes and Mouth of Virtual Agents: Cultural Study of Facial Expression Perception" presents a very interesting evaluation of non-verbal facial cues in virtual characters across cultures. The online communication aspect of cultural characters is discussed in the paper "Real-time Translation of Non-verbal Communication in Cross-Cultural Online Encounters", which focuses on the real-time non-verbal cues, while the paper entitled "What I see is not what you get': Why culture-specific behaviours for virtual characters should be user-tested across cultures" presents the importance of involving user into the

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development of intelligent cultural character. Also the paper "Culture-specific models of negotiation for virtual characters: multi-attribute decision-making based on culture-specific values" focuses on the implementation of cultural theories into practice for different uses of the culturally motivated virtual characters. The paper entitled "Speak to me and I tell you who you are! A language-attitude study in a cultural-heritage application" discusses an application of different concepts in cultural characters in a heritage-based scenario.

The second set of six papers in this volume are based on the presentations at the International Research and Practical Web-conference "Connect-Universum—2014" (http://connect-universum.com) which was held by the Department of Social Communication, Faculty of Psychology, Tomsk State University (http://tsu.ru).

The topic of the conference was "Visual Communications in New Media: Effects, Opportunities, Risks (Interdisciplinary Approach)". The conference was held in two languages: Russian and English. The general partners of the conference were EUPRIO—European Universities PR and Information Officers (http://euprio.eu), the Chair of Architectural Theory, Institute of Architecture, Technical University of Berlin (TUB) (http://www.architekturtheorie.tu-berlin.de), Berlin Research Center for Semiotics (http://www.semiotik.tu-berlin.de), International Study Choice portal "StudyPortals" (http://www.studyportals.eu). The honorary experts of the conference included Eduard Galazhinsky (Russia), Joerg Gleiter (Germany), Irina Kuzheleva-Sagan (Russia), Roland Posner (Germany) and Christo N. Kaftandjiev (Bulgaria) (http://connect-universum.com/page/people/en/experts14/).