

Creativity and intelligence in brains and machines: from individuals to societies

Post-event report about the GK sponsored Interdisciplinary College 2017 (IK2017)

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Introduction

In March 2017 I had the chance to visit the Interdisciplinary College (IK) -the K stands for the German word Kolleg- a 1-week spring school in Günne. Now you may ask yourself (as I did), “Where is Günne?”. Günne is a small village in Northern Germany. It is famous for the lake Möhnesee, formed by the damming of two rivers (very imposing to see). The IK is sponsored by the German Society for Cognitive Science (GK—Gesellschaft für Kognitionswissenschaft). I am glad that the GK asked me to give you an impression of the IK. The keywords of the last IK title: “Creativity”, “Intelligence”, “Individuals” and “Societies” are perfect to describe the things which make the IK special.

Individuals at Günne

“Interdisciplinary” speaks for itself: Different people from different scientific fields (Computer Scientists, Psychologists (as I am), Linguists, Neuroscientists, Biologists, Philosophers and many more) are meeting in Günne—more than 200 people at IK 2017. I met students, Phd students, post-docs, professors and researchers from 14 nations. A great opportunity to improve your foreign language skills and expand your network.

Intelligence at Günne

During the IK, I felt “surrounded by knowledge”. The IK offers many workshops, evening talks and lectures. The programme of the IK is as interdisciplinary as are the participants. It is a unique chance to hear from many different fields, discover differences and similarities between them and get an integrated impression of the IK focus theme. I visited for example the lectures “Deep Learning to Deep Reinforcement Learning” (Razvan Pascanu, Google Deep Mind), “Animal social dynamics - an evolutionary perspective” (Jennifer Fewell, Arizona State University) and “AI at the Movies” (Tony Veale, UCD Dublin). Additionally, the IK gives students the opportunity to present their actual research project or final thesis at the poster presentation. I used this chance and got helpful and diverse feedback.

Societies at Günne

Different people from different fields come together in Günne. The special spirit of Günne is that in the 1 week when all these people are together, a new group, a kind of “Günne family” is formed. Beside the lectures and workshops, there is plenty of time to talk to each other: during the meals and in the free time. Günne is a small village and the house in which the IK takes place is surrounded by forests and meadows. In the free time, you can do a lot of things: playing table tennis, go swimming or sauna (yes, there is a swimming pool and a sauna in the basement), riding a bike, hiking, bowling, jogging, playing board games, visiting the pub (also in the basement) or participate in discussion rounds to special topics (I visited, for example, a discussion round with the topic artificial intelligence and ethics).

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Creativity at Günne

During the week, the IK involves its own creativity flow. You can see people sit together, creating new ideas, discussing about different topics, playing, singing, making music together or starting a project. The peak of this creativity is reached at the conference dinner. A colourful programme features songs, poems, power point karaoke and much more.

Next year at Günne

If you now have the feeling of “Oh no, I missed the IK”, I have good news for you: The next IK will be from 9-16 March 2018, with the focus theme “Me, my Self, and I”. The focus theme addresses questions such as: Who am I? Where is my self? What is it like to be me? In doing so, different aspects of self-models, self-perception, and self-consciousness will be approached using different epistemic

and theoretical approaches in a truly interdisciplinary fashion. IK2018 aims to provide an open space for debate and a framework of courses that should enable participants to extend their knowledge in various disciplines. They will help to establish informed opinions about questions pertaining to the concept I, the self, and personhood. More precisely, we will use the perspectives of different disciplines to approach our focus theme: Biology to investigate the evolution and development self-models in animals and computer science to see if and how we can create artificial selves and what we can learn from them. Philosophy to discuss concepts of self-models, self-perception and ethics. Clinical disciplines to investigate what happens when our self-models are altered or disrupted by pathologies or unusual states of mind. And finally, Arts as a form of self-expression and source of self-reflection. You can find more information on www.interdisciplinary-college.de. Maybe we will see each other in Günne!