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Towards Autonomous Robotic Systems

12th Annual Conference, TAROS 2011 Sheffield, UK, August 31 – September 2, 2011 Proceedings



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Preface

These proceedings contain the papers presented at TAROS 2011, the 12th edition of the conference Towards Autonomous Robotic Systems, held in Sheffield, UK, from August 31 to September 2, 2011.

The TAROS series was initiated by Ulrich Nehmzow in 1997 in Manchester, when the conference was known as "Towards Intelligent Mobile Robots" (TIMR). In 1999, Chris Melhuish joined Ulrich to form a conference Steering Committee, which was also joined by Mark Witkowski in 2003; at that time the name of the conference was also changed to "Towards Autonomous Robotic Systems" to better reflect the full breadth of UK research activities in robotics. The Steering Committee has provided continuity of vision as the conference has evolved to become the UK's premier annual conference on autonomous robots, whilst also achieving an increasingly international attendance. Sadly, Ulrich Nehmzow died in 2010 after a long period of illness—a very great loss to UK robotics. To honor Ulrich's contributions throughout the years, the TAROS best paper award has therefore been named the "Ulrich Nehmzow Best Paper Award."

For the 2011 edition, TAROS received 94 paper submissions. We offered two submission categories—full-length papers, of which 74 submissions were received, and extended abstracts, of which we received 20 submissions. Most papers were reviewed by three members of our International Programme Committee. Of the full-length paper submissions, 32 were accepted as full-length papers, corresponding to an acceptance rate of 43%. Also included in this volume are 30 extended abstracts which were selected from the remaining 62 submissions. Of the full-length papers, 20 of the most highly ranked were selected for oral presentation at the conference. All other contributions, including extended abstracts, were presented in poster format. The publication of the collected papers from TAROS 2011 by Springer, in the Lecture Notes in Artificial Intelligence (LNAI) series, testifies to the high standard of the research efforts reported here. Following the conference, the journal Robotics and Autonomous Systems will publish extended and revised versions of some of the best papers presented at the meeting. This theme issue will also be dedicated to the memory of Ulrich Nehmzow.

TAROS was originally intended as a forum enabling PhD students to have their first conference experience. Whilst the conference has become larger and now attracts a wide range of papers, from both senior and junior scientists, the ethos of providing an event that encourages new researchers has been retained. TAROS 2011 was therefore a single-track event with many of the platform talks presented by postgraduates—for some their first public talk. The conference also featured three distinguished plenary presentations: "Approaches to Autonomous

Behavior with Simple Neural Networks" by Joseph Ayers, "Robot Navigating, Mapping and Understanding with Laser and Vision" by Paul Newman, and "Bioinspired Assistive Robotics for Children and Adults with Special Needs" by Yiannis Demiris.

Worldwide robotics is evolving quickly, and whilst the UK has a strong research community in robotics (evidenced, for instance, by our leading contribution to the EU Challenge 2 programme for robotics and cognitive systems), it is essential that this community becomes better organized and more effective in recognizing and exploiting commercial opportunities. In recent years the aims of TAROS have therefore expanded to include the goal of forging links with UK companies and commercial organizations that build or use robots. To encourage these interactions, TAROS 2011 hosted an Industry-Academia day, featuring a plenary talk from Simon Blackmore on agricultural robots, a platform discussion with representatives from UK and European funding organizations, and a public exhibition with live demonstrations of robotic systems. The Industry-Academia day also included the launch of a new forum for UK robotics researchers which was established with the support of the British Automation and Robot Association (BARA) and will be known as the BARA Academic Forum (BARA-AFR). The forum will provide a direct link between robotics researchers and the UK robotics industry facilitating technology transfer and improving the focus of robotics research toward commercial and industrial needs.

Finally, TAROS 2011 provided the opportunity for the local hosts—Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield—to launch their new city-wide initiative for robotics research. The Sheffield Centre for Robotics (SCentRo) will bring together five existing research groups across the two universities with the aim of enhancing inter-disciplinary research and raising the profile of robotics research in Sheffield.

We take this opportunity to thank the many people that were involved in making TAROS 2011 possible. On the organizational side this included Amir Naghsh, Alan Holloway, Georgios Chliveros, Charles Fox, Tony Dodd, Kevin Gurney, Gillian Hill, Jane Wright and Gill Ryder. We would also like to thank the authors who contributed their work, and the members of the International Programme Committee, and the additional referees, for their detailed and considered reviews. We are grateful to the four keynote speakers who shared with us their vision of the future.

Finally, we wish to thank the sponsors of TAROS 2011: Sheffield Hallam University, The University of Sheffield, The British Automation and Robot Association, The Institution of Engineering and Technology (sponsor of a public talk), Springer (Ulrich Nehmzow Best Paper Award), and the IEEE Robotics and Automation Society UKRI Chapter (co-sponsor).

We hope the reader will find this volume useful both as a reference to current research in autonomous robotic systems and as a starting point for their own future work. If you are inspired by this research we would encourage you to submit to future editions of TAROS!

June 2011

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