PhD in BIOINGEGNERIA / BIOENGINEERING - 40th cycle

THEMATIC Research Field: DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING OF VIRTUAL REALITY ENVIRONMENTS FOR IMPROVING PERFORMANCE AND PSYCHOPHYSICAL WELL-BEING IN PAEDIATRIC AND ADULT SUBJECTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly net income of PhDscholarship (max 36 months)</th>
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<tr>
<td>€ 1400.0</td>
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In case of a change of the welfare rates during the three-year period, the amount could be modified.

Context of the research activity

Motivation and objectives of the research in this field

Recently, digital technologies have increasingly spread in the health and rehabilitation sectors for both cognitive and motor training. The reasons behind this phenomenon are different. First of all, many of the devices that allow eXtended Reality (XR) experiences have good quality and are lowering in costs, which allow their use even outside research laboratories. Secondly, digital technologies are able to recreate ecological and safe scenarios, in which to test participant’s skills, without the potential risks present in the real world. Furthermore, thanks to the possibility of involving the user in the immersive experience and generating the so-called "sense of presence", these technologies promote motivation and adherence to treatment, also improving results from a clinical point of view. Particularly, embodiment is crucial during rehabilitation, and it can be obtained with different methods according to the literature. However, there is a lack of clear understanding of the factors influencing engagement and embodiment particularly in people with disabilities and in the developmental age. The aim of this PhD project will be

1) To design and test virtual environments to support engagement in the rehabilitation context posing particular attention to different techniques to improve embodiment and engagement
2) To assess engagement and embodiment in trials involving participants with disabilities (both minors and...
adults) with objective parameters (e.g. physiological signals) and subjective variables (questionnaires).

The virtual environments will be designed by means of Unity 3D and different viewer will be used to deliver the visual stimulation (e.g. oculus Quest and HTC VIVE pro eye). Haptic data gloves will also be used for haptic feedback. Particular attention in the design and trials will be paid on improving the subject's engagement and embodiment, which will be studied considering factors such as the immersiveness of the simulation, the presence of haptic stimuli, the interaction mode, the realism and the characteristics of the avatar. Engagement assessment will be performed with both objective parameters (e.g. physiological signals) and subjective variables (engagement, sense of presence, emotions, cognitive workload, usability and acceptability of the system, etc.). The research will be performed at ASTROLab (IRCCS Eugenio Medea) in collaboration with CNR-STIIMA under a grant funded by INAIL (Rientr@Returns-PR23-SV-P2).

Study and development of gamification strategies and methodologies to support engagement in rehabilitation. Study and analysis of physiological parameters for the evaluation of the psycho-emotional state during neurorehabilitation exercises in VR, with and without haptic stimulation.

The opportunities of professional careers are in research structures and scientific institutes like IRCCS E. Medea where the combination of professional (clinical/biomedical) activity and research is needed. Other relevant opportunities are in the R&D dept. of biomedical companies, as previous candidate exploited their careers.

| Composition of the research group | 1 Full Professors  
| | 1 Associated Professors  
| | 4 Assistant Professors  
| | 0 PhD Students  |

Name of the research directors  
PROFF. GIUSEPPE ANDREONI - EMILIA BIFFI
Contacts

Prof. Giuseppe Andreoni
Giuseppe.andreoni@polimi.it
Tel. 02 2399.5860

Prof. Emilia Biffi
Emilia.biffi@lanostrafamiglia.it
Tel 031 877862

Additional support - Financial aid per PhD student per year (gross amount)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>Housing - Foreign Students</td>
<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>Housing - Out-of-town residents</td>
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Scholarship Increase for a period abroad

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount monthly</th>
<th>By number of months</th>
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<tr>
<td>Scholarship Increase</td>
<td>700.0 €</td>
<td>6</td>
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Additional information: educational activity, teaching assistantship, computer availability, desk availability, any other information

At E.Medea, the research team is composed as follows
3 senior researchers
4 researchers
3 PhD students

https://emedea.it/medea/it/per-i-pazienti-it/attivita-e-servizi/27-istituto/polito-bosisi-parini/astrolab

Educational activity: The student will be encouraged to attend to courses at POLIMI or abroad 2 / 3 in International Schools. Teaching assistantship: There are various forms of financial aid for activities of support to the teaching practice. The PhD student is encouraged to take part in these activities, within the limits allowed by the regulations. Computer and desk availability: the student will be allowed to access facilities of the DEIB.