

The Challenges for Participatory Design in the Developing World

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ABSTRACT

Participatory design within the context of developing countries is an emerging area of interest in the Participatory Design community. This workshop will provide a unique forum for participants to exchange their experiences, consider the different approaches needed in developing country's context, encourage new partnerships and learn from each others past difficulties and how these were solved.

Keywords

International development, culture, ICT design methods, requirements gathering

RELEVANCE

One of the main premises of the participatory design (PD) is that the success of information and communication technologies (ICT) is dependent on user participation in the design process [2, 3]. PD concepts were first proposed and evolved in the developing world and, as a result, have been confined within this context. In addition, it has also been recognized that little attention has been placed on using PD methods in developing countries [4].

This issue was also discussed in the PD conference 2002, where it was stressed that participation should be viewed outside Western organisations and that it should be analysed within a larger process perspective that emphasizes its dynamic and political nature [1]. Research results presented at the PD conference 2006 furthermore suggested that "Participatory design in a cross-cultural context goes beyond the involvement of users in the design of the product but should include an appropriation of the design process itself." [5]

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There are unique issues that arise within the context of a developing country that need to be considered when carrying out participatory design. These include:

- Power distance: this is the perceived status between the host communities and the designers.
- Cultural/language barriers: there are normally language and cultural barriers between the host communities and the visiting designers.
- Incompatibilities of PD techniques with host community values and communication codes.
- Uncertainty about appropriate methods/techniques when participant users and developers are from different national and organizational cultures
- Dispersed geographical distances mean that travelling costs are high and time zone differences make remote synchronous communications difficult.
- Low literacy levels: the host communities may have low literacy level thus hindering collaborative activities between them and the designers.
- Poor telecommunication infrastructure: this means that activities that could be followed-up from a distance or meaningful communication between the two dispersed groups may prove to be a challenge.

OBJECTIVES

This workshop is intended to generate discussion on how these and other issues affect participatory design in developing countries. It is expected that the outcome of this knowledge exchange will raise a series of research challenges and questions that will need to be considered when engaging with PD in developing countries.

WORKSHOP DYNAMICS

It is planned that the workshop will last one day and will have up to 30 attendees made of presenters and participants. Presenters will be invited to submit a 2 page proposal on their experience with PD in the developing world, or in similar settings within the developed world.

Proposals should report on presenters' experience of PD and ideally touch on some of the issues identified above. Emphasis should be placed on the successful and challenging elements of working in a development context. Presentations will be followed by an interactive session where key themes will be identified by presenters and participants, who will work in groups to discuss lessons learnt and opportunities for successful PD. The workshop will close with a round-table session bringing together all the main points identified in the interactive session into a list of learning outcomes and challenges for PD in the developing world.

INTENDED PARTICIPANTS

It is hoped this workshop will foster dialogue between practitioners and academics in different disciplines (e.g. HCI, CSCW, International Development, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Software Engineering, Ergonomics, Education, and Information Systems, among others) interested in the challenges presented by conducting PD in the developing world.

The workshop website, <https://itcentre.tvu.ac.uk/pd4d>, will be used as a main point of promotion and information to recruit participants. Call for papers will be issued in relevant e-mail distribution lists and circulated in the professional and academic networks of organizers and members of the program committee. Some of these include BGDD (Bridging the Global Digital Divide) and HCI4D (Human-Computer Interaction for Development).

The program committee will participate in the process of review and selection of the proposals, making sure that the material discussed at the workshop is of good quality and relevant for the workshop and PD community in general.

DISSEMINATION

The proceedings from the workshop will be made available online through an open journal system hosted by Thames Valley University. It is expected that the best submissions will be developed into special issue in a renowned journal for the PD community.

SCHEDULE

- 1st of June, 2008: Call for papers issued
- 15th of July, 2008: Submission deadline
- 15th of August, 2008: Notification of Acceptance
- 15th of September, 2008: camera-ready copies of accepted papers due.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE

Andy Dearden, Sheffield Hallam University, UK
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