Editorial: Design Versus design: A Nordic Perspective

Ann Lantz
Centre for User Oriented IT-Design (CID)
Royal Institute of Technology

Jan Gulliksen
Department of HCI, Information Technolog
Uppsala University

The theme of the first NordiCHI conference was “Design Versus design,” see Figure 1. Researchers and practitioners were invited to write about their view on design in human–computer interaction (HCI) and discuss whether there still is such a thing as a “Scandinavian approach” within HCI. If there is, they were asked to address how it has developed since the sixties, when it was first introduced. Over 100 submissions were received and from these 21 were selected, based on peer review, for presentation at NordiCHI. More than 400 delegates participated at the conference, representing all the Nordic countries as well as non-Scandinavian countries, such as South Africa, Pakistan, and Canada. Most of the delegates came from Sweden, Finland, and Denmark.

This special issue includes elaborated versions of the seven top-ranked papers from the conference and an introduction to the conference topic written by the organizers of the conference, Jan Gulliksen and Ann Lantz. These articles provide ideas on how to understand, share, and involve a wider range of users in information technology (IT) design. They also stress the importance of developing HCI by looking at the history of creating artifacts and the history of building a “common ground” among groups of peoples. We hope you will enjoy this special issue and would also like to invite you to further explore the new Scandinavian tradition by visiting the NordiCHI website at http://www.nordiCHI.org.

1. THE ARTICLES APPEARING IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

The discussions in the eight contributions that constitute this special issue involve different aspects of design. The introduction takes on a broad perspective on HCI,
the Scandinavian tradition, and establishes common ground via communication and design. Some of the contributions are thematic, and ideas of building a common understanding among different groups of people are included in the majority of articles.

Gulliksen and Lantz (this issue) discuss different perspectives on design and emphasize the need to establish a common ground for design, as well as the necessity of using facilitators for improving human-to-human communication in the design process. The discussion is based on a Nordic tradition (often referred to as the Scandinavian approach), and early discussions about user-centered design and ideas about common ground are provided. Nielsen, Dirckinck-Holmfeld, and Danielsen (this issue) suggest that common ground can be established in the dialogue design process. Their examples are taken from international research and development projects involving participants from several disciplines.

Different methodological approaches are presented in the articles. Ethnography, including various aspects of user involvement, or rather working together with users in the field, is described in Sperschneider and Bagger (this issue). A number of different ways of cooperating to get a good understanding of work in the field are presented. This article discusses how ethnography can influence design via "co-design." Co-design means designing together by, for example, learning "How do you do it?" "Can you show me," and by cooperative design in a given context. This is an extension of the more traditional way to work with ethnography, the latter of which is described in Sánchez Svensson and Tap (this issue). Here, ethnographic studies in a hospital clinic are presented. During several visits and observations at the clinic, the functionality of an alarm system and the effect this has on the hospital staff, as well as their understanding of the situation, were investigated. This study is also an example of how hard and time consuming it is to gain, or at least share, a part of the domain knowledge of expert users.

The involvement of "ordinary people" in design is discussed in Øritsland and Buur (this issue), as well as Junestrand, Keijer, Molin, and Tollmar (this issue). They argue that the needs of ordinary people, rather than the intellectually and physically capable elite, need to be addressed. Øritsland and Buur's study involves architecture but extends the discussion into interaction design, visual design, and industrial design. The authors highlight the concept of style. It is an old concept and used with different meanings, depending on which tradition is being represented. According to Øritsland and Buur, style involves aspects of artifacts, characteristics of the designer, and aspects of technology. They suggest that
the experience of style arises from comparing encountered experiences with previous experiences. If a design team wants to benefit from interaction and style thinking, it needs to identify common systems concerning technology and action. A first step toward this goal is presented in Junestrånd, Keijer, Molin, and Tollmar. They describe how they worked in trials with mildly intellectually disabled persons to understand their needs and experiences of video-mediated communication in an artificial home environment. Here, the perspective was “design for all” applied to architecture and IT.

Experiments are performed in the studies presented both by Hedman (this issue) and Leponiemi (this issue). In the contribution by Hedman, the design of three-dimensional worlds are based on the results from trials with visitors. The focus is on accommodating interaction through effective design of such aspects as navigation, distance, teleporters (i.e., fast transportation of avatars to another place in a virtual world), paths, overviews, or elements to make the environments less sterile. Hedman argues for an introduction of the concept of a “visitor” rather than the user, due to the fact that a three-dimensional environment is a virtual space that is visited rather than used. The traditional aspects of HCI, such as user’s view, tasks, work, and efficiency, are extended to incorporate visitors, exploration, spare time, and experience.

2. CONCLUSION

This special issue will give the reader an overview of some of the best ongoing research in HCI from Nordic countries. The Nordic contribution to HCI has in the past been to stress the importance of a tight focus on users throughout the development of IT design. The Nordic contribution is not in any way complete by this summary of ongoing research. An orientation toward users and a focus on usability in the development process are essential to argue for in every new project.

Usability is like democracy—it must be “won” every day.

REFERENCES


