

Meta-Design and Social Creativity: Making All Voices Heard

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Summary Statement. This panel will explore the two innovative and interrelated HCI themes “*meta-design*” (design for designer) and “*social creativity*” (transcending the individual human mind). It will focus on the contribution of these two themes to *socially-responsible interaction* by bringing together researchers from *different* backgrounds to explore the *controversial* issues associated with this objective.

Meta-design defines and creates socio-technical environments as living entities by extending existing design methodologies to allow users to become co-designers. It creates conditions to facilitate social creativity by supporting users as active contributors who can transcend the functionality and content of existing systems.

Much human creativity arises from activities that take place in a social context in which interaction with other people and the artifacts that embody group knowledge are important contributors to the process. Creativity happens not inside a person’s head, but in the interaction between a person’s thoughts and a socio-cultural context. *Social creativity* shifts from the idea of a tool—or set of tools—to the notion of a socio-technical environment in which all stakeholders have a voice. To sow the seeds of a more creative society, it is necessary to promote research methods and identify the unique challenges in developing assessment methods for creativity research.

Social creativity needs the “synergy of many,” and this kind of synergy is facilitated by meta-design. However, a tension exists between creativity and organization [Florida, 2002]. A defining characteristic of social creativity is that it transcends individual creativity and thus requires some form of organization thereby possibly stifling creativity.

Relationship of the Panel to the Conference Theme “Socially Responsible Interaction”. Meta-design and social creativity contribute to socially responsible design [CPSR, 2007] in the following dimensions:

- *Democratizing innovation:* meta-design allows owners of problems to engage in activities as a process of creating new possibilities and new artifacts, eliminating the constraint that users are restricted to what is given to them [von Hippel, 2005].
- *Making all voices heard:* Complex design problems seldom fall within the boundaries of one specific domain; they require the participation and contributions of different stakeholders with various backgrounds [Schön et al., 1999].

- *Changing professional practice*: Meta-design contributes to the creation of convivial tools which give each person the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his or her vision [Illich, 1973].
- *Revolutionizing the creation of systems*: Open source software systems and collaborative content creation harness the possibilities of Web 2.0 architectures [Benkler, 2006; Tapscott & Williams, 2006].

Controversial Issues and Open Questions:

- Can an emphasis on meta-design and creativity lead to *economic growth* and *social transformation* and help communities benefit from *local knowledge* and engage their members in more meaningful and rewarding activities?
- Will meta-design and social creativity lead to *new divisions of labor*?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of available meta-design environments and creativity tools? When are they most needed, and why?
- How can we *assess* and *evaluate* meta-design and social creativity?
- While meta-design as well as creativity tools are critical so as to democratize access, they may not be sufficient to promote active participation. What kinds of socio-cultural-political conditions need to be in place to effectuate the kinds of social relations conducive to active participations?

Participants:

- *Gerhard Fischer* (primary contact), University of Colorado, Boulder, USA, gerhard@colorado.edu; *unique perspective*: social creativity
- *Jennifer J. Preece*, College of Information Studies, University of Maryland, preece@umd.edu; *unique perspective*: communities
- *Piero Mussio*, University of Milan, Italy; *unique perspective*: meta-design
- *John Thomas*; IBM Yorktown Heights, USA; *unique perspective*: socially-responsible interaction
- *Rogério dePaula*: Intel Sao Paulo, Brasil; *unique perspective*: computer use in underdeveloped countries and digital divide
- *Ben Shneiderman*: University of Maryland, USA; ben@cs.umd.edu; *unique perspective*: creativity support tools

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