

Ethics, Roles and Relationships in Interaction Design in Developing Regions

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Abstract. A workshop to explore ethical and organisational issues associated with interaction design efforts conducted in developing regions of the world. The workshop will discuss the challenges of conducting this type of work in a way that can bring sustainable benefits to people living in developing regions.

Keywords: International development, ethics, capacity-building, cross-cultural design.

1 Workshop Overview

Recent years have seen a growing interest in the contribution that effective interaction design might make in improving the lives, livelihoods, and life opportunities of people in developing regions (Dray et al, 2003). General workshops on interaction design in developing regions have been held at: CHI 2007, HCI 2007, CHI 2008, DIS 2008, PDC 2008. A panel (Dearden et al., 2007) and two special interest group meetings (Best, et al., 2007, Smith et al., 2007) were held at Interact 2007. These general discussions have raised a variety of important questions, with organisational and ethical issues being particularly salient.

The contribution of interaction design researchers is typically in the context of projects where novel interactive products, systems or services that are designed for (and with) people and organisations in these regions. Participants in such projects hope that their efforts will lead to long term benefits both for the particular communities that they work with, and for other similar groups. However, development is a complex social and political process. Previous eras of technological intervention have had mixed consequences, often generating unexpected side-effects, sometimes disadvantaging the supposed beneficiaries, and occasionally including exploitation. Current debates emphasise the need for external actors to partner with local organisations, to build capacity.

In Interaction Design for Developing Regions, authors have repeatedly stressed the need for researchers who are based in other countries to work with local partners. This raises many issues and questions:

- How do we ensure that interaction design for developing regions is sustainable in local contexts?
- How do projects select partners to work with? How can roles be negotiated to create successful systems and to build local capability?
- Participatory approaches are widely regarded as necessary. However, authors have critiqued both the reality of participation and the evidence for its effectiveness (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). What kinds of participation should be supported, and is participatory design always the right approach?
- Projects involve interactions between organizations with very different purposes, principles, cultures and interests. What are the challenges of relationships between local, commercial, and research organisations?
- How does the environment of funding, commercial, personal and institutional interests impact on our ability to make meaningful contributions? What are appropriate roles for individuals, institutions, government, commercial companies and NGOs in this setting?
- Development practices in other fields have much longer traditions and have developed their own ethical frameworks. What can we draw from existing debates about partnership working in development to inform future practice?

In this workshop we shall bring together field experience of interaction design and reflections from development studies to examine these complex issues.

2 Who should attend?

The workshop will attract interaction designers working on projects in developing regions, researchers and practitioners based in developing regions, and researchers working in the field development studies, particularly those examining development informatics. We shall be inviting participation particularly from members of IFIP Working Group 9.4 on the Impact of Computers in Developing Countries. We shall be seeking funds from external sources to enable researchers and practitioners from developing regions to attend the workshop.

References

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