Participation – basic concepts and research challenges

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ABSTRACT
Nearly four decades ago, Participatory Design emerged as an area of research with a strong focus on the political dimension, emphasizing people’s democratic rights to influence their own working conditions. During recent years the context of use for information technology has spread from the workplace to our homes, urban settings, rural areas, art, culture and almost all aspect of everyday life.

The goal of this workshop is to shed light on the basic concept of ‘participation’ in relation to other core concepts (such as democracy, emancipation and power) in order to address the challenges in the new domains. At a more general level, the goal of the workshop is to identify some of urgent research question the PD community is facing today and in the near future.

Author Keywords
Participation, research

ACM Classification Keywords
H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation: Miscellaneous.

THEME
According to Greenbaum and Kyng (1991) participatory or cooperative design revolve around a set of ideals: 1) the need for designing with full participation from the users, 2) the goal of enhancing workplace skills, 3) computer systems as tools, 4) computer systems as means to increase quality, 5) the design process as political process with conflicts, 6) the use situation as fundamental starting point for the design process.

The terms ‘cooperative design’ and ‘the Scandinavian approach to systems design’ were the original terms used for design activities emphasizing designers and users working actively together. Nonetheless, ‘participatory design’ became a label for such activities as cooperative design came into focus in North America and other parts of the world. The first PD Conference established the foundation of Participatory Design as a unique field of research (Namioka & Schuler 1990; Schuler and Namioka 1993). Schuler and Namioka (1993) highlight the basic idea of ‘People who are affected by a decision or event should have an opportunity to influence it’ (ibid p xii) and that participation is essential to good design. This new approach was emphasising (Namioka & Schuler 1990):

• Providing workers better tools to support their work
• Users as experts in how to improve their own work and work life
• Viewing users perceptions of technology as important to success
• The importance of viewing computer-based applications in context

In their version, Clement and van den Besselar (1993) state the overarching core elements of PD as “the empowerment of workers so that they can codetermine the development of information systems and their workplace” (ibid p 29).

In what has been identified as the third wave of HCI (Bødker 2006), the use context and application types are broadened from the first wave ‘human factors’ research, via the second wave where the focus was on ‘human actors’ at the workplace (Bannon 1991), to the third wave where use situations move from the workplace to the private and public spheres including our homes and everyday lives and culture. Bødker discusses how methodologically, this third wave has partly moved away from a commitment to users towards a more exploratory take-it-or-leave-it approach where designers seek inspiration from use, e.g. through cultural probes, rather than collaborating actively with users.

This opens new challenges for PD as do possible new domains such as the public sector (Shapiro, 2005), where the role of democracy, hence citizen participation, is different from that of workplaces.

Kyng (2010) has argued that what is needed for PD in order to lead to ICT design practices that are more attuned to its users, is a decreased focus on politics and an increased focus on a level between politics and techniques where the roles of the stakeholders in the project, funding, etc. is addressed, and where participation may take new forms.

GOAL AND ACTIVITIES
The goal of the workshop is to shed light on how the basic concept of ‘participation’ in relation to other core concepts (like for instance democracy, emancipation, power) in order to address the challenges in new domains beyond work. At a more general level, the goal of the workshop is to identify some of urgent research question the PD community is facing today and in the near future.
The format of the workshop is as follows: The first half of the workshop is dedicated to the presentation, by participants, and the discussion of the above mentioned basic concepts and research challenges. During the second half, workshop participants will discuss how to address specific PD research challenges by drafting a plan for a research proposal in contemporary domains of PD research.

**HOW TO PARTICIPATE**

Participants must submit a 2-page position statement, based on either empirical experience or a theoretical position.

Workshop organizers will select some of these position statements for presentation in plenary. Other position statements will be activated in discussions in groups.

All position statements will be reviewed by the organizers, before acceptance to the workshop.

Position statements must be mailed to Halskov@CAVI.dk before June 1, 2012.

**BACKGROUND OF THE ORGANIZERS**

Susanne Bødker helped organize the very first Participatory Design conference, and has been active in this research area since the early 1980s. She is currently doing research in the area of public services and citizen participation.

Kim Halskov has been active in the area of participatory design for the past 25 years and is currently the director of CAVI and Center for Digital Urban Living.

**DURATION**

One day.

**PARTICIPANTS ETC.**

Maximum number of participants: 20

Participants will be selected on the basis of position papers.

**REFERENCES**


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