

People and Computers XIV - Usability or Else!

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and Gilbert Cockton (Eds)

People and Computers XIV – Usability or Else!

Proceedings of HCI 2000



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Preface: HCI 2000 — Usability or Else!

... or else we meet at the next year's HCI conferences of course! Still, it is heartening as the People and Computers conference series edges past unlucky XIII that usability is a cornerstone of the emerging digital economy and the information society. When Wall Street and European finance centres demand due diligence checks on dotcom usability (with financial service consultancy rates to match), we know that someone somewhere is now taking HCI really seriously. Maybe this really will be the decade when HCI comes of age. Fingers crossed!

Next year's British HCI Conference will be in France, joint with the Francophone IHM conference (<http://www.shu.ac.uk/hci2001>). This marks a major step towards a regular truly European HCI Conference. For many years, the British HCI Conference series has filled this role, and we have moved towards more international conference committees in preparation for truly European HCI Conferences. For the second HCI conference in succession, a papers and proceedings co-chair comes from outside the UK. With typically British caution towards the 'continent' we have written this preface in two parts from opposite sides of the North and Baltic Seas. With due British manners, we let Yvonne Waern start with her Scandinavian view of HCI 2000.

Yvonne's Bit

It is a particular favour to serve in a conference committee, and particularly to serve as a papers and proceedings co-chair. It is like following a child from conception to birth. First, we have the proud father, who conceived the conference as "Usability, or Else!" Who would that be if not a young, energetic man, i.e. Gilbert Cockton? He has been a leader in all our efforts, particularly when Sharon McDonald, who serves as the real mother of the conference, broke her arm in an accident. Imagine all the pain that she went through, as well as everybody around who were concerned about her as well as about the conference baby.

One of our ideas had been to make this one of the first HCI conferences that was concerned with e-business. Plenaries apart, there were few e-business papers proposed. Isn't e-business relevant to HCI researchers?

What did we get instead? Well, something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue! To the ‘old’ and ever valuable belong papers on formal modelling (see Process, Methodology and Design Methods). We should never forget that this is an issue that may have to be resolved repeatedly, as new challenges arrive for HCI. The ‘new’ papers include ideas about home terminals (see The Context of Interaction: People, Places and Actions) — home electronics and ‘invisible’ computers will certainly be issues for HCI in the future! The ‘borrowed’ are — well every living research community has to relate to its own work as well as to others. The borrowing is a part of research growth and we see it everywhere (see Process, Methodology and Design Methods)! The ‘blue’ shocks the traditionally minded — maybe the challenging title of “Are user studies harmful?” is a sign from the Nordic cold blue sky, where one’s sight may be clearer than in more Southerly places?

We are proud to say that the quality of the papers is, as always, extremely high. This is due primarily to the papers, of course, but also to our most competent committee of reviewers. The reviews alone would fill up a book and that would be interesting reading! We hope that all paper proposers benefit from their reviews. This is a learning process for everyone who submits and reviews — maybe we should consider having our HCI students reading not only the papers but also their reviews! To compare the final papers with the paper submissions would be a challenge.

The only thing I regret is that we could not create an even more international proceedings. There are papers from around the world (Japan, New Zealand, USA, Brazil, Finland and the Netherlands) and only two papers sessions at the conference contain only UK papers, but overall most authors are from the UK. Volume 2 of the proceedings extends this with contributions from South Africa, Italy, Denmark, and Sweden. With HCI 2001 joint with IHM 2001 in France, we hope that future HCI conferences can extend their international balance as well as reach.

Now, with the date of publication/birth soon due, we all feel filled with happiness as well as apprehension. Will everything be alright? Will the proceedings be received as we hope? How will audiences and readers react to our selection of accepted papers? Time will tell — in the meantime I can only say that everybody has done her and his best!

Yvonne Waern

Linköping University, Sweden

A papers and proceedings chair and a fly on the back of the working ox
of Sharon and Gilbert.

Oxtail Soup as Desert

Yvonne’s kind yet somewhat unjustified comment (she did work hard, don’t let her deceive you!) left Sharon and I with the dilemma of which of us was the front and which the back of the Ox. The British artist Damien Hirst could cut us both down the middle from skull to loin, but we’d rather avoid ending up in London’s Tate Art Gallery as “General and Technical Chairs Divided”. Still, our financial worth as underpaid academics would clearly multiply considerably if we sacrificed ourselves to the services of contemporary art!

As with many British HCI Group conference proceedings, we have not imported the artificial constraints imposed by three paper conference sessions into the proceedings' structure. The proceedings begin with invited papers from two of plenary speakers who miraculously found time to prepare papers within the demands of their busy working lives. We are grateful to all our distinguished plenary speakers, but extra thanks are due to Jerry and Jim for their extended efforts on behalf of HCI 2000. Summaries of the other plenary presentations can be found in Volume 2 of the proceedings (available from the British HCI Group, <http://www.bcs-hci.org.uk/>).

The remainder of the proceedings groups papers under the three broad HCI headings of Context, Design and Evaluation, reflecting the key activities underlying the design of interactive systems that demonstrably fit their context of use. Such systems need to be designed using the best interactive technologies to fit known contexts of use and then evaluated to demonstrate this fit. As we accepted 11 papers on design, we have separated general papers on design methods and process from specific design innovations. The remaining papers divide almost equally between studies of the context of use and the evaluation of interactive systems.

As with previous British HCI Group conferences, we see a continuing diversification of HCI methods and application areas, demonstrating yet again that HCI as a field continues to expand both in terms of its own knowledge and methods and in terms of the application domains in which these are applied. At the same time, previous HCI 'knowledge' is not ignored, but is returned to with a critical eye to ensure that developments in HCI are built on the strongest possible foundations.

So there you are, for Yvonne it was a question of marriage and childbirth, for Sharon and I it is one of food and expensive contemporary art — demonstrating no doubt a Scandinavian focus on people versus a Northern English focus on stomachs and wallets. Until next year when IHM-HCI in Lille will hopefully deliver promising Gallic romance, gourmet French food and expensive merchandise in equal measure, we'll do our best for European integration at Sunderland by letting Yvonne pay the bill for taking the conference committee people out to dinner.

Sharon McDonald

Gilbert Cockton

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Sunderland, UK*

The other papers and proceedings chairs, forever undecided on their
Ox-endedness.

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