Co-design: Practices, Challenges and Lessons Learned

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ABSTRACT
This paper is a proposal to organize a workshop about co-design during the during MobileHCI 2008 Conference. Main goals of the workshop are to discuss co-design practices and to articulate challenges and lessons learned.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
H.5.m Miscellaneous

General Terms
Management, Design, Human Factors, Theory.

Keywords
Co-design, User involvement, Human-centred design, Reflection, in-context research, mobile applications.

1. TOPIC
The topic of this workshop is co-design. We are interested in all sorts of efforts of researchers and designers to interact and cooperate constructively with end-users – to provide them an active role and influence in their project. Ideally, end-users are involved throughout a project and have active and diverse roles. The ultimate goal of user involvement is to deliver system requirements, which can lead to a system which better matches end-users’ needs and preferences [2]. We define co-design in the broadest sense to include all aspects of user involvement and human-centred design.

User involvement means that, ideally, end-users are involved in the entire innovation project, e.g. also at the beginning, during the articulation of scope and goal of the project, during the processes of design and evaluation, and also at the end of the project, during evaluation of the designed product or service in end-users’ daily life and work contexts [2].

Human-centred design (HCD) is characterized by four principles: 1) active involvement of users for a clear understanding of user and task requirements; 2) appropriate allocation of functions between users and technology; 3) iteration of design and evaluation processes; and 4) multi-disciplinary approach [1]. Co-design can be applied within different HCD approaches: in approaches which are meant to enable end-users to participate in research and design activities, such as participatory design, the lead user approach or generative tools, and in approaches which are meant to enable researchers or designers to understand end-users and their contexts and experiences, such as ethnographic fieldwork, contextual design and empathic design. If these approaches are conducted with high levels of user involvement they can be considered as co-design practices [4]. We use the word co-design to cover all sorts of user involvement or HCD.

We propose that co-design is not only about interacting and cooperating constructively with customers, but also with people with technical backgrounds and with other stakeholders. Ideally, co-design is about people with different backgrounds and skills who interact and cooperate constructively with each other – in such a way that their different interests and goals are served simultaneously. A designer knows how to organise a design process and brings her visualization skills. An end-user brings his daily life or work experiences and also ideas for a solution. A developer brings technical know-how and may question the project scope. The power of co-design is that it can prevent many of the communication problems that occur in traditional development teams when the work is organised sequentially or in parallel, but not simultaneously.

Within line of the scope of the MobileHCI 2008 conference the workshop will focus on co-design for developing mobile products or services. Practicing co-design for mobile applications is especially challenging because people use these in different and unpredictable contexts and for communication and cooperation. As a consequence, researchers and designers will have to take into account all sorts of experiences which people will have in different contexts and all sorts of social-cultural aspects related to communication and cooperation.

Moreover, we propose to pay attention to contexts – contexts on several levels: e.g. the context in which a co-design project is organized and conducted, including different stakeholders, or the context in which end-users live or work and their experiences, or the practical context of using a mobile product or service in a specific context.
2. GOALS
We propose to focus on practices and on the relation between theory (or prescription) and practice (or description). We invite practitioners to write and talk about their practices and about challenges and limitations which they encounter in their practices. Goals of the workshop are to make explicit, share and discuss experiences from practices and to critically reflect on these practices and to jointly articulate lessons learned.

3. POSITIONING PAPERS
Candidate participants are invited to write positioning papers, in which they address the topic outlined above and in which they describe their practice (one or more cases or projects) and in which they focus on the process, on what they did and on how they did that, and on reflection, a critical look on their practice. We are interested in diverse approaches, and especially in how they work out differently in practice and in comparisons between different approaches or in combinations of different approaches.

Here is a tentative and incomplete list of issues which one can write about in these positioning papers and which can be discussed during the workshop:

- Approach – Describe your practice, e.g. projects, cases, approaches or combinations of approaches, describe the methods which you applied or the tradition in which your practice fits;
- Results – Describe the results of a project in terms of how co-design helped to create these results and discuss what the project could or would have delivered without co-design or with different co-design approaches;
- Reflection – Unpack assumptions underneath co-design which normally stay implicit or unproblematic: reflect critically upon or rethink concepts that are central to co-design; articulate critical questions.

4. PLAN FOR WORKSHOP

Before the workshop
Candidate participants are invited to write positioning papers and to submit these. The organizers then make a selection, based on the fit of the paper to the topic and the contribution of the paper. Furthermore, the organizers will propose several themes, based on the accepted positioning papers. These themes will be used in two ways: 1) Participants will be asked to create a short poster presentation which summarizes their paper in relation to these themes; and 2) Organizers create one or several exercises for during the workshop in which these themes are key.

During the workshop
During the first hour the participants introduce themselves while they stand and walk along their posters (which summarize their positioning paper in relation to several themes, articulated by the organizers). This will be followed by one hour of discussion about these themes. We expect that after this discussion these themes have evolved and are elaborated upon. We aim to make the co-design practices and experiences more tangible by working hands-on with some design cases.

The workshop will be closed with a discussion in which participants bring together their common understanding of the co-design practices. The common themes with be further elaborated and the hands-on learning experiences assembled. The workshop is closed with the articulation of lessons learned and recommendations for practice.

After the workshop
After the workshop, we may articulate plans for follow-up activities, such as writing a (popular or scientific) article about the main findings from the workshop, or follow-up meetings.

5. BACKGROUND OF ORGANIZERS
Jenny de Boer works at TNO ICT as innovator for innovation through user research, product development and contextual research. She graduated at Delft University of Technology in the master direction of Design for Interaction. This was a specialisation in Industrial Design engineering and focuses on human-product interaction. She currently works, together with Liliane Kuiper-Hoyng in the European project called CitizenMedia (see below).

Liliane Kuiper-Hoyng has been working as a user experience expert for TNO since 1995. Much of her work focuses on conceptualizing and optimizing innovative end-user services. Liliane believes in involving the end user in the total process of service design – from generating concepts based on user needs to service design and testing of mock-ups and end-products. She was involved in the launch of several new services for Dutch operators. She currently works, together with Jenny de Boer in the European project CitizenMedia in which they explore co-design methods for mobile storytelling.

Froukje Sleeswijk Visser writes a PhD about communicating user experience in the design process. She is interested in designing human centered products and in supporting students who are interested in studying real users’ experiences for their designs. Furthermore, she does freelance projects as well.

Marc Steen works at TNO ICT as a consultant and project leader for user research, product development and marketing strategy. He specializes in human-centred design and has over ten years of experience in diverse methods and approaches. He is currently writing a PhD/DBA thesis on human-centred design. Before that, he worked at Delft University of Technology, at Philips Consumer Electronics and at KPN Research. He received training in Industrial Design (MSc and PDEng) and Marketing Strategy (NIMA-B and NIMA-C). More info on http://www.marcsteen.nl.

6. REFERENCES