Preface

The Workgroup Human–Computer Interaction & Usability Engineering (Arbeitskreis HCI&UE) of the Austrian Computer Society (Österreichische Computer Gesellschaft, OCG) has been serving as a platform for interdisciplinary exchange, research and development since February 2005. While human–computer interaction (HCI) traditionally brings psychologists and computer scientists together, the inclusion of usability engineering (UE), which is a software engineering discipline and ensures the appropriate implementation of applications, has become indispensable.

Our 2009 topic was therefore Human–Computer Interaction & Usability for e-Inclusion (HCI4e-I), culminating in the 5th annual Usability Symposium USAB 2009 held during November 9–10, 2009 in Linz, Austria (http://usab.icchp.org), organized together with the Workgroup Information Technology for People with Special Needs (OCG Arbeitskreis IT für Menschen mit besonderen Bedürfnissen).

The term e-inclusion, also known as digital inclusion, is used within the European Union to encompass all activities related to the achievement of an inclusive information society.

New information technologies always bring the risk of a digital divide, and consequently e-Inclusion wants to put emphasis on a digital cohesion and on enhancing opportunities with IT into all segments of the European population, including disadvantaged people, e.g., due to lack of education (e-Competences, e-Learning), age (e-Ageing), gender apartheid (equality=e-Quality), disabilities (e-Accessibility), ill health (e-Health) etc. At the European level, e-Inclusion is part of the third pillar of the 2010 policy initiative, managed by the Directorate General for Information Society and Media of the European Commission.

We are convinced that the solution to these challenges can be found at the intersection of the disciplines pedagogy, psychology and computer science (informatics).

The interface of this trinity encompasses thinking, concepts and methods from the humanities, from natural science and from engineering science. Engineering science carries the most responsibility and ethical demands since engineers are the ones who ensure the appropriate development.

The daily actions of the end users must be the central concern, supporting them with newly available and rapidly emerging, ubiquitous and pervasive technologies.

Obviously, an interdisciplinary view produces specific problems. On the one hand government, universities and industry require interdisciplinary work. However, younger researchers especially, being new to their field and not yet firmly anchored in one single discipline, are still in danger of “falling between two seats.”

It is certainly easier for researchers to gain depth and acknowledgement in a narrow scientific community by remaining within one single field. Everybody accepts the necessity for interdisciplinary work; however, it is difficult to gain honor.

We are of the firm opinion that innovation and new insights often take place at the junction of two or more disciplines; consequently, this requires a much broader basis of knowledge, openness for other fields and more acceptance.
This is challenging, but also laborious, because working in any interdisciplinary area necessitates the ability to communicate with professionals in other disciplines and most of all a high willingness to accept and incorporate their points of view.

USAB 2009 was again organized in order to promote this closer collaboration between software engineers, psychology researchers and educational professionals.

USAB 2009 received a total of 60 submissions. We followed a careful and rigorous two-level, double-blind review process, assigning each paper to a minimum of three and maximum of six reviewers. On the basis of the reviewers’ results, 12 full papers (> 14 pages) and 26 short papers were accepted.

USAB 2009 can be seen as a bridge within the scientific community, between computer science, psychology and education.

Everybody who gathered together to work for this symposium displayed great enthusiasm and dedication.

We cordially thank each and every person who contributed toward making USAB 2009 a big success, for their participation and commitment: the authors, reviewers, sponsors, organizations, supporters, all of the organization team, and all the volunteers, without whose help this bridge would never have been built.

November 2009

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Klaus Miesenberger
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