Participation for Development

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ABSTRACT
Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is more and more promoted as a driver and facilitator of economic growth and development in low and middle income countries. ICT for Development (ICT4D) though has mixed successes. Sustainability of solutions and usability respectively usefulness for the intended beneficiaries have been reported as causes. Participatory approaches to development have been proposed to address these causes. Participatory Design (PD) seems like a perfect fit. However, at the Participatory Design Conferences, research that addresses PD in low and middle income countries is rare. The workshop aims at bringing together the PD researchers working with under-privileged communities and attracting researchers from the ICT4D communities to the PD conference. The goal is to share experiences and start a discussion on how participation, ICT and development might relate.

Author Keywords
Participatory Design, Participative Development, ICT4D

ACM Classification Keywords
H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

INTRODUCTION
With the title 'Participation for Development', we aim at opening up for a discussion on the premises of both Participatory Design and ICT4D. What is participation? How does it look like in different contexts? What is the rationale behind involving participation? What is development? Designing with underprivileged communities challenges the assumptions around the objective of participatory design processes. Technology is but a means in this context. What is at stake is the where to and how of the development of livelihood. Similarly, development is often understood as bringing underprivileged communities up to the living standard of the high income countries. Development researchers have however for decades argued that the Western development trajectory is not a sustainable and desirable one. Not only the goals of development in underprivileged communities, but also life standards and technology development in and for the privileged countries are up for discussion. However, not introducing technology will not improve the situation either: The fast technology advances leave more and more people without access to technologies excluded from the digital connected global world (Heeks, 2009). This includes imbalances in physical access to technology as well as the resources and skills needed to effectively participate as a digital citizen (Mechal & Searle, 2010:44). 'Participation for Development' points to a much-needed discussion in the so-called developed countries as well. The development in the currently low and middle income countries might point to alternatives that are valid in the high income countries as well, if the now as problematic recognised aspects of the privileged societies can be avoided. Understanding development as human development brings in unifying theories like the Capability Approach (Sen 1999) that can be applied similarly in countries of any level of income. It is then important to approach the co-design sessions as that of socially embedded action rather than transfer and diffusion, i.e. to acknowledge that something that already works somewhere cannot necessarily be transferred to work in the same way elsewhere (Avgerou, 2010).

With the broadening of the scope of design comes specific ethical accountabilities: The designer participates in the role of change agent and in developing contexts this should be with responsibility since the beneficiaries have to rely on the guidance of the designer. Identifying who represents the community and who could act as the spokesperson need to be careful considered before proceeding with the participatory design process.

Bringing participation and societal development together though is not a straightforward deployment of PD method and tools. Participatory design in resource-restricted contexts is more complex because the users of the envisaged technology solution may have limited access to technology as well as to the design process. Careful planning is necessary to adapt the design methods and design probes to ensure active participation by all. Winschiers-Theophilus (2006) indicated that not only the result of design needs to be considered, taking the different cultural con-

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text into account; also the design process and the tools and methods need to be designed and adapted to fit to different cultural contexts. Furthermore, the gap between current technologies and the usage of ICT is often much wider than in e.g. in Scandinavian countries with a rather equal, highly educated and technology savvy population. This in turn requires the development of more comprehensive socio-technical prototypes (Gonsalves et al. 2011), addressing not only the interfaces of the intended beneficiaries but also the wider organisational context and socio-technical infrastructures, addressing issues like connectivity, economic sustainability, training possibilities, policies and legal regulation. Sustainability and capacity development need to be thought into the development from the very beginning.

THE POSITION PAPERS

We received 14 position papers, most of them based on and reporting about past, current or future projects. The papers report from projects from the Indian subcontinent, several places in Africa, South America and Sweden. The reference to the Swedish project highlights the reciprocity of benefits in joined projects: Learning from the low and middle income countries can improve participatory practices in the privileged parts of the world.

The projects address health care provision and management, education, public administration, and including rural communities in the developing countries. Several themes become visible:

Different dimensions of development in relation to the PD projects. Development of agency and emancipation is discussed as goal for the use of ICT but also as both necessary for and a 'side effect' of the participatory process.

PD in socially and organisationally complex settings. Several papers highlight the need to relate to complex sets of actors. As projects are often not based on an established ICT infrastructures these have to be part of the design, which in turn increases the complexity of both the design object and the constituency, both developing as the project progresses. (See also Dittrich et al. (forthcoming).)

Sustainability. Many of the projects are based on designers and developers coming from outside of the country, the community or the organisation the technology is supposed to be used in. To result in permanent change for the community, sustainability needs to be addressed from the very beginning. This can be in terms of economic models, technical capacity or basic as well as ICT infrastructure provision.

PD and global Software Engineering. Some of the projects apply participatory approaches to customisation and organisational implementation of standardised software products. The participatory designer here needs to mediate between the local requirements and the international developers. The coordination of requirements and development rhythms is not addressed so far in software engineering.

We are looking forward to a lively discussion.

INTENDED OUTCOME

The workshop has been designed to be a discussion forum for researchers working with participatory approaches in the context of ICT4D. We aim at bringing together researchers working with participatory design in ICT4D projects and compare experiences with Participation for Development. During the workshop, we plan to discuss how to promote the theme of 'Participation for Development' in connection with the PD community and conference. This could e.g. be in the form of a special issue for one of the relevant journals or an edited volume.

THE ORGANISATION COMMITTEE

The organisers are themselves involved in ICT4D projects and come both from low and middle income countries and from Europe. For some of the organisers the engagement with ICT4D has started more than 25 years ago. All of us are engaged or supervising projects using ICT as a vehicle for development – personal, economic and organisational in low and middle income countries. About half of the organisers have been part of the Participatory Design Community and the Scandinavian Approach to Systems Development and thus have been bridging between Participatory Design and ICT4D in their research life.

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