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HCI in Brazil: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract: This work presents an overview of how HCI turned into an organised community in Brazil, the main activities that contributed to it, and the principal challenges we face now as an organised community.

Keywords: HCI, Organisations, Brazil

1 Inception

The first signs of HCI in Brazil appeared by the end of the nineties and several reports have been presented in international forums since then (Merkle et al 97; Almeida et al, 98, Prates et al 99, Souza 2000). The local community was born from the joint effort of Brazilian attendees of CHI'96 who first got people involved through a discussion list and was later consolidated by a series of Brazilian workshops in HCI.

2 The Brazilian IHC's

Taking advantage of the interdisciplinary nature of the field, the Brazilian workshops in HCI have been held, since the first one, in association with other national conferences in related fields. IHC'98, the first Brazilian workshop in HCI was held in Maringá (Paraná State) along with the annual Brazilian Symposium on Software Engineering. The second workshop (IHC'99) was held in Campinas (São Paulo State), in association with the annual Brazilian Symposium on Computer Graphics. The third workshop (IHC'2000) took place in Gramado (Rio Grande do Sul State), and the fourth workshop (IHC'2001) took place in Florianópolis (Santa Catarina State), both along with the Brazilian Symposium on Multimedia and Hypermedia Systems and the Virtual Reality Symposium. The fifth workshop (IHC2002) was held last October in Fortaleza (Ceará State), along with the former conferences.

The wide geographic dimensions of Brazil were considered in the different regions the workshop was located each year, reflecting a diversity in interests of the local groups. Semiotic approaches to HCI, Ergonomics, Usability, Learningware, Accessibility are some of the main topics reflecting the focus of different research groups.

The Brazilian HCI community has grown up along those five years of IHC's workshops also inspired by the invited keynote speakers, which included Jonathan Grudin, Tom Carey, Lucy Suchman, Mark Gross, Don Norman, Allen Cypher, Ben Shneiderman, Jenny Preece, Jean Vanderdonckt and Phillipe Palanque. Technical sessions for research work presentation, tutorials and discussion panels, have been organised reaching increasing standards in quality. Official community meetings have also occurred since the first event offering directions for action.

3 The Latin American IHC

This year, the IHC's forum is turning into reality an old dream, with a Latin American Conference in HCI, the CLIHC2003.

The First Latin American Conference on Human-Computer Interaction will be held in Rio de Janeiro (RJ State), on August, 17-20, 2003. The main goal of the conference is to foster communication and collaboration among HCI researchers and professionals from countries in Latin America and to consolidate the presence of the Latin American HCI community abroad.

CLIHC 2003 is organized by BR-CHI, CHI-Mexico and CHI-Chile (ACM SIGCHI Local SIGs).

4 The Brazilian HCI as an organized society

A first formal manifestation of the Brazilian HCI community as an organised group occurred with the creation of a Special Committee on HCI in the Brazilian Computing Society (SBC). The Brazilian Computing Society maintains a number of Special Committees for several sub-areas in Computing. A Special Committee is only created when the interested community is recognised to be sufficiently organized to maintain an agenda of activities, which include the organisation of annual conferences, and participation in educational and social policy-making committees.

In the international scenario, the recognition of the community came with the concretisation of an old aim of the Brazilian community at becoming a Local Chapter of ACM/SIGCHI. On March, 2001 BR-CHI turned into a Local Chapter of the ACM's Special Interest Group in Computer-Human Interaction.

The Local ACM SIGCHI Chapter in Brazil (Brazil SIGCHI or BR-CHI as it is known in the country) has received the support of sixteen members of ACM/SIGCHI, and its web site was inaugurated by an interview with John Karat on internationalisation and with Allen Cypher, from Stagecast Inc.

Also regarding the community's representativeness in international committees, since 2000 the Brazilian Computing Society has appointed an official representative of the Brazilian HCI community to be a member of IFIP TC13, the Technical Committee on Human-Computer Interaction of the International Federation for Information Processing

4.1Next Challenges

Besides becoming an internationally recognised community, researchers of our group are aware of the social responsibility and challenges we face regarding maintaining the cultural values of our country, while playing a role in facilitating the access to technology and education to all Brazilian citizens. As a Brazilian community involved in science, technology and education, there is a lot to be done yet, that we hope to achieve with organised behaviour.

A first effort was made regarding the official curricula of our College and University programs in Computer Science, which now include at least one regular discipline in User Interface and Interaction Design. A first HCI book in Portuguese language was published (Rocha and Baranauskas, 2000) and had the first edition completely out of print after few months. The book presents the foundations in the field and it was targeted to introduce undergraduate and graduate students to the subjects of human factors in computational systems, design and evaluation of user interfaces.

Education in HCI not only benefits the future professionals of the software industry, but lays the foundations for constructing better user interfaces and better systems, facilitating the access of ordinary people to that technology.

Still a challenge to be faced is to encourage the participation of professionals coming from industry in the community activities and to have them involved in research partnership. This kind of effort could foster the development of HCI methods lined with specificities and necessities which are particular of our work culture and software industry.

The academy-industry partnership could also be a move towards procuring financial support to activities for developing HCI technology and research. Funding for participation in international meetings is still a major difficulty considering the geographical and economic conditions of a country in South America.

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Biographical Note

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