

New Challenges for Participation in Participatory Design in Family, Clinical, and Other Asymmetrical Non-Work settings

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Abstract. Participatory design has taken as its point of view that designers and users should engage in an equal language game. It has been the ambition that by making certain conditions for the design activities equality in design was possible. Whether or not this ideal has ever been achieved is a big question, but when we take PD to operate in contexts where some of the involved users are weak, ill, or have disabilities, we are clearly confronted with a situation where this assumed equality is no longer an ideal that can be reached.

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1 About the Workshop

Participatory design has taken as its point of view that designers and users should engage in an equal language game. It has been the ambition that by making certain conditions for the design activities equality in design was possible. Whether or not this ideal has ever been achieved is a big question, but when we take PD to operate in contexts where some of the involved users are weak, ill, or have disabilities, we are clearly confronted with a situation where this assumed equality is no longer an ideal that can be reached. Examples of such contexts could be:

Prematurely born children. Grönvall et al. [1] have worked with the design of IT enhanced environments for prematurely born children. The doctors and nurses are at work and have clear perspectives on the therapeutic strategies they want the environment to support, the parents are in the middle of a severe life crisis that they probably do not have any previous experience with, the child is fighting for survival. They are all users but can be involved in design in very different ways.

Phobic patients. Bering [2] worked on a mobile device to support cognitive therapy for phobic patients. The fragility of the patients made it difficult to involve them, and furthermore any exposure to the triggers of phobic reaction would interfere with the therapeutic program.

Post surgery recovery. In a current project, researchers from Aarhus University are designing computer support for patients who are sent home the next day after hip

surgery. Patients and the nurses/doctors seemed to be the obvious users, but it turned out that the relatives assigned to be the helpers at home were important and in the need of a lot of support.

Families that have children with complex communication needs. Children with complex communication needs are often challenged with asymmetrical terms for communication and interaction in everyday family life [3]. This affects the whole of the family. Thus, even when the child might be the potential “user” of a design, the whole of the family have to be engaged in the design process.

In early participatory design it made sense to empower and make better computer support in a power struggle perspective, but as context changes other perspectives should be introduced to maintain participatory design as the realistic pragmatic design approach. Classical activities developed in participatory design, such as mock ups, organizational games and other activities that rely on the break downs in the flow of simulated action as a source of shared sense making may not be useful. Instead new activities such as diary studies, fictitious users, therapists as mediators, various forms of probing, and completely new forms of participation have to be invented.

In developing an understanding of participatory design in the mentioned contexts, new and old theoretical frameworks may be useful. Activity theory has been used in making sense of early participatory design [4] and may have potentials in this context, actor network theory, distributed cognition, communities of practice, are other examples that could be revisited in this context. This “new participatory design” is a challenge not only to participatory design but it is also a potentially transformative resource for some therapeutic, family and care oriented domains, as well as contributing to the fields of accessibility and disability.

The workshop seeks to approach the new participatory design by inviting position papers, informative design cases, techniques, methods and theoretical analyses. The workshop will be organized as a mix between presentations, discussions and various breakout activities depending on the number of participants and the submitted work. Proceedings from the workshop will be edited and published after the meeting.

References

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