

Opening SIGCHI to the World

Local SIGs are a real growth area for SIGCHI. Local SIGs started early in SIGCHI's history as local groups formed to help organize our early CHI conferences. BayCHI in the San Francisco area and Greater Boston SIGCHI are examples. Currently, SIGCHI has about 40 local SIGs that are either fully functioning or in the process of forming. We hesitate to state an exact number, since we write these columns three months in advance of when they appear and the number of local SIGs will very likely increase in this time!

While there were only a few local SIGs, defining the relationship between the local SIG and SIGCHI could be worked out on a case-by-case basis. As the number of local SIGs grows, however, we need to examine what that relationship should be. Within the ACM structure, there is currently no concept of a local SIG for a SIG. Technically, local SIGs were local ACM chapters, not groups associated with SIGCHI. Realistically, of course, local SIGs and SIGCHI see ties between them. Since there are no current guidelines as to what these ties should be, the EC is engaging in discussion with some local SIGs about what these ties should be. Yes, participatory design!

The EC has three face-to-face meetings a year, and we plan to have as many of these meetings as practical in sites where we can also engage in dialogue with a local SIG. Our first opportunity to meet with a local SIG was with SIGCHI Italy (See SIGCHI News in this Bulletin). This had the dual advantage of allowing us to focus on issues of how related professional societies reach across international boundaries as well as issues related to the ties between SIGCHI and local SIGs. The entire EC thanks SIGCHI Italy for meeting with us, sharing their ideas, and being a wonderful host!

The internationalization of SIGCHI has (at least!) two sub-issues. First, SIGCHI is becoming international by adding more and more people from more and more countries. Second, the local groups often seek the support of SIGCHI to promote HCI in their own countries. The EC and SIGCHI Italy discussed both issues and we would like to share that discussion with you.

A clear need emerged for starting action on the definition of a formal agreement between ACM and non-US ACM-SIGCHI-related organizations.

There are two types of non-US ACM-SIGCHI-related organizations – national HCI organizations and local SIGs. Both, of course, could exist in a given country and there could be great overlap in membership. However, the relationship that is appropriate differs as a function of the nature of the organization.

National HCI Associations

In some countries, there are national HCI organizations that handle national issues related to the field of HCI in that country. These organizations are required to be recognized nationally in order to have legal standing to operate. They provide value to their members, in part, by proving to other national organizations that the country is mature enough to receive funding and act as the national reference in the field. Some of these organizations want to be related to SIGCHI and a mechanism should be set up to enable these organizations to be part of the SIGCHI network world-wide. They recognize the scientific and technical leadership of SIGCHI, but they also want to retain their national identity.

Local SIGs

HCI specialists value local SIGs for several reasons. The principal reason is probably networking; it provides a forum for meeting and exchanging

ideas with people who have similar interests. In addition, the fact of being associated with SIGCHI helps promote local SIG activities, since the SIGCHI name is well recognized. For these (and other) reasons, many local SIGs have been formed and many other groups are in the process of forming into local SIGs. One major issue for non-US local SIGs is that they are not legal in the country where they have their activities. For example, these local SIGs cannot collect dues or fund programs since they lack a local legal status.

Two possible actions were discussed during the EC-SIGCHI Italy meeting. First, an ACM office ruled by European regulations could be chartered. This would formally be an ACM office, rather than a SIGCHI office, since ACM is the official legal body. This ACM presence in Europe would be able to charter local SIGs with European legal status. Of course, issues may come from the fact that Europe is a "puzzle in construction" and it will take a few years to obtain commonality among the various European countries. Under this approach, a standard formal agreement between ACM and non-US ACM-SIGCHI-related organizations would be needed.

The second possible action is more practical in the short term and should be implemented more quickly. The Executive Vice-Chair (Guy) offered to take action and discuss directly with the representatives of the non-US ACM-SIGCHI-related organizations that are willing to participate in the definition of a first standard formal

agreement. We will work with ACM Headquarters to finalize the agreement. The resulting agreement will be instantiated according to the needs of Italy, The Netherlands and France. More countries will follow when the agreements with these three countries have been concluded. The targeted deadline for completing this work is the beginning of 1999.

The local SIGs vary in size, needs, and perspectives. This means that there are local differences that SIGCHI needs to take into account. This is only possible if people participate in defining the

relationship between the local SIGs and SIGCHI. SIGCHI already provides some funds for local SIGs activities. The current mentoring programs that are implemented for submissions to the CHI conferences could be further developed and expanded to mentor local SIG leaders. How do you think we could best define the relationship between the local SIGs and SIGCHI? If you have ideas, please contact Richard Anderson the Adjunct Chair for Local SIGs or us (see inside front cover for contact information).

We hope that our current efforts to make SIGCHI a truly international community will spark projects and new initiatives that will contribute to the development of human-computer interaction. We are aware that our current success relies on the creativity and hard work of the volunteer members and the professional staff at ACM. To those of you who are SIGCHI volunteers – thanks! To those who are not yet volunteers and especially those interested in international issues – please contact us soon!

Mike and Guy