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The role of users in the intertwined changes of technology and practice

Helsinki, Finland, 19–20 August 2010

Call for Papers

How do users contribute to innovations, and how are they curbed from doing so? The road from initial invention, be that by a user, by a community, or by a manufacturer, to a more or less stabilised and widespread innovation tends to take years, even decades. Technology and the practices of the people who adopt it and of those who develop it tend to change during this time. The role of users in this intertwined change of technology, practices, and organisations is at the focus of a two-day workshop being held at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies.

The study of users in innovation has matured greatly over the last decade or so. Research on innovations by users has established that users innovate and modify a significant proportion of both industrial and consumer goods. Studies at homes and workplaces have revealed the importance of domestication and adjustment of new technology. User-centred and participatory approaches to design have demonstrated the various benefits to more close-knit engagement between users and developers. Open source development, peer content creation, and various management volumes for harnessing customers in value creation have spurred great enthusiasm.

Regrettably, however, most studies within these approaches still resort to somewhat truncated research designs: they study either design or use and/or focus either on details or on more broad-level descriptions of technology and practice change. This workshop aims to bring together empirical, theoretical, and methodological developments in the study of the interlacing of development and use activities. This includes but is not limited to longitudinal 'biographic' studies of the pathways of new technology and of changes in user practices, design approaches that extend to both development and use, and ways to map the varying constellations of design and use. The workshop welcomes research on a variety of areas and topics within the user-developer nexus as well as a variety of domains, to gain a more nuanced picture.

Topics we hope to see addressed include but are not limited to:

- Roles users play in innovation, ranging from innovation by users to everyday adaptation of technology to more long-term processes such as infrastructuring
- Different 'constellations' or 'ecologies' of actors in and between design and use of new technology
- The roles played by user-centred design, usability studies, marketing research, and other intermediary activities in longer-term innovation processes and practice change
- User representations in technology design
- Social imaginations of new technologies and practices, particularly in how they relate to development projects
- Path dependency, path creation, and trajectories of technology design and use
- Learning and interaction between developers and users
- Power and dominance structures between design and use
- Exclusions, silences, and design at the margins
- Community and 'lay' participatory design, open source activities, and other approaches wherein users are developing technology throughout its life cycle

Keynote speakers and discussants: Prof. Geoffrey Bowker, Dr Mark Hartswood, Dr Neil Pollock, Prof. Susan Leigh Star, Dr James Stewart, Prof. Robin Williams

Deadline for 500-word abstracts: 15.3.2010 (notification of acceptance by 15.4.2010)

Registration fee: €50

For further information and with any questions, please contact sampsa.hyysalo@helsinki.fi