

Refugees & Technology: Determining the Role of HCI Research

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ABSTRACT

Currently, over 22 million people are considered to be refugees. Many of them are looking for shelter in the surrounding countries of their home country. Technology can be a helpful tool in addressing the challenges of the so-called “refugee crisis”, facilitating initial orientation, information, as well as communication and networking support. This one-day workshop aims to (1) finalize the elaborated guidelines of the previous workshop and SIG meeting and to (2) formulate a manifesto for researchers who work with the vulnerable target group of refugees.

Author Keywords

Refugees; Research Agenda; Guidelines; Manifest; Ethics; Methods

ACM Classification Keywords

H.m MISCELLANEOUS;

BACKGROUND

Based on estimation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) there are around 22.5 million refugees [7]. In recent times, more and more researchers from the HCI community and related disciplines have focused on the “migration crisis” from various perspectives. Prominent among them is the focus on technology use among settled or settling refugees [2,3,8]. Another capacity building activity was conducted in Palestine [1,9], while other research focuses on improving access to antenatal care [6].

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PREVIOUS WORK

This workshop had preceded a Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting in 2016 and a workshop in 2017.

In the first SIG meeting at the Computer Human Interaction conference 2016 [5], the organizers broadly approached the topic of refugees and the role of HCI for this vulnerable population with the wider HCI community. The majority of the participants highlighted the important role of researchers in identifying and addressing the needs of refugees. There was consensus that this can only be achieved by engaging deeper with the refugee communities themselves.

Building up on this initial approach of the topic, a workshop proposal was accepted at the Communities & Technologies conference 2017 in France [4]. In a one-day workshop over 20 participants discussed the methodological challenges that researchers encountered when engaging with refugees. Based on a speculative design case study about a future crisis, a first set of guidelines was elaborated, specifying the sensitive aspects of research work with refugees. A publication about these results in the interactions magazine¹ should complete the workshop.

WORKSHOP GOALS

This workshop now builds upon the work of the previous SIG meeting and workshop. Participants, who are working with vulnerable groups such as refugees and migrants, will discuss and critically reflect on these previous results. The exchange of experiences during the workshop aims to (1) finalize a set of guidelines for young and inexperienced researchers and to (2) define cornerstones for a manifesto, which guides current and evolving HCI research with refugees.

ORGANIZERS

Konstantin Aal (main contact) is a PhD student and a research assistant at the Institute for Information Systems

¹ <http://interactions.acm.org/>

and New Media, University of Siegen. He is part of come_IN², a research project which founded several computer clubs for children and their relatives including refugees. Currently he is one of the project leader of the Nett.Werkzeug³ (which translates to “a tool to be nice”), a platform to provide orientation and information for newcomers in Germany especially refugees.

Anne Weibert is a PhD student and a research assistant at the Institute for Information Systems and New Media, University of Siegen. She is part of come_IN², and one of the project leaders of Nett.Werkzeug³. Her interest is in computer-based collaborative project work and inherent processes of technology appropriation, intercultural learning and community-building.

Reem Talhouk (main contact) is a doctoral trainee in Digital Civics at Open Lab, Newcastle University. Her research encompasses the use of technology to build refugee community resilience. One of her fields of application is Lebanon, where her research focus lies on health access and health issues for refugees.

Karen Fisher is a Professor of human information behavior, social innovation and design at the Information School, University of Washington. Karen works with Arab refugees to understand their information behavior, and building capacity through education, livelihoods, and social engagement.

Vasilis Vlachokyriakos is a research associate at Open Lab, Newcastle University and lead of OL:Athens. The OL:Athens initiative engages with local solidarity groups in Greece exploring the design of technology for the Solidarity Economy while exemplifying an alternative model of conducting Action Research.

Volker Wulf is a computer scientist with an interest in the area of IT system design in real-world contexts, This includes the development of innovative applications from the areas of cooperation systems, knowledge management and community support. One special focus lies on flexible software architecture which can be adapted by end-users. Further research focuses on methods of user-oriented software development and introduction processes. He is head of the Institute for Information Systems and New Media at the University of Siegen.

PRE-WORKSHOP PLANS

The workshop will be promoted through the already existing website (<https://openlab.ncl.ac.uk/refugeesandhci/>) and the new website (<http://displaced-hci.info>), that will present the results of the previous workshop and communicate the aims and structure of the upcoming workshop. The maximum number of participants is 15 persons, which will be selected based on extended abstracts

² <http://come-in.cc/>

³ <http://www.nett-werkzeug.de/>

in which they relate their current/previous work to refugee contexts and needs. The position papers of the previous workshops are available and will be extended with the new accepted position papers.

CURRENT TECHNOLOGIES

Nett.Werkzeug is a platform for refugees, migrants and everybody who is new in a city. It aides with the resettlement process by providing initial orientation, overview on language courses, information on cultural aspects, work, housing, and the structure of everyday life in general.

Refugee.Info aids refugees overcome language barriers that hinder them in navigating in their new environments in Europe

Arriving in Berlin is a OpenStreetMap, which shows activities and places that are important or might be interesting for refugees.

Konfetti is an app designed to support local community-building among refugees and local residents.

Kiron University is a digital platform aiding refugee students and researchers to pursue their academic education and career.

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

The workshop aims to be an interactive activity for the participants. The attending participants will work in small groups, based on the position papers, and utilize several interaction design methods. Their results will be presented to the other groups. A group discussion with all participants at the end of the workshop will ensure, that every opinion will be heard and included in the manifesto.

Timetable

09:00-09:15	Welcome
09:15-10:00	Icebreaker and short presentation of participants
10:00-10:30	Coffee break
10:30-12:00	Identifying and discussing methodological challenges
12:00-13:30	Lunch
13:30-15:00	Discussion of guidelines
15:00-15:30	Coffee break
15:30-17:00	Manifest cornerstones
17:00-17.15	Closing of the day and future plans

POST-WORKSHOP PLANS

After the workshop, the notes and documentation materials that were created during the discussion will be shared

among the workshop participants. A poster with the main results (such as the finalized guidelines and cornerstones of the manifesto) will be presented during the poster session of the main conference. Together with other groups, who address the topic of refugees and migration, a special journal issue will be prepared, which will include the manifesto, best practices and guidelines.

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

The different challenges faced by refugee communities and the humanitarian system in their support has instigated a call for technical innovation. This one-day workshop aims to provide a forum for researchers to discuss and extend the guidelines, which were elaborated in the previous workshop. More details regarding the previous workshop are available at [our website](#).

We invite researchers interested in participating to submit a four pages' position paper (ACM [Extended Abstract](#) format). Papers should critically reflect on how the researchers' research/interest addresses issues faced by refugee communities. Experience reflected upon does not have to be specifically concerned with working with refugees, however those interested should discuss how lessons learnt and methods used in their works can be adapted and applied to refugee contexts.

Submissions should be sent to konstantin.aal@uni-siegen.de and/or anne.weibert@uni-siegen.de in .pdf format. Position papers will be reviewed based on relevance to the workshop. At least one co-author of each accepted paper should attend the workshop.

Important Dates:

Final Submission Deadline: November 21st, 2017

Final Notification: December 1st, 2017

Workshop Day: January 7th, 2018

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