

## **HCI in Switzerland**

### **An overview of the current situation of the topic and prospects for the future**

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**Abstract:** An overview over the present situation in the domain of HCI in Switzerland is given. The history of our active group is provided, connections to related societies are shown and the activities are described. Current challenges are outlined, among them the need to support professionals in implementing basic concepts of user centred design, and the establishment of HCI in the Swiss academic and research curriculum. Because of these important challenges, the community is steadily growing, and the prospects are good.

**Keywords:** HCI, Switzerland, Organisation overview

#### **1 Scope**

An overview over the HCI situation in Switzerland is given, with a short history, the present situation and view into the possible future. This should enable a comparison with the situation in other countries, and hopefully help to strengthen the Swiss and other HCI communities.

#### **2 The Beginning**

In 1990 the special interest group "Software Ergonomics" of the Swiss Informaticians Society (SI) was initiated by 4 dedicated persons active in user interface design and HCI research. From inception, the members not only had an academic or research background, but also a strong industrial focus was present. 26 founding members celebrated the birth of our professional HCI organisation in Switzerland.

Sporadic but well attended activities took place, such as tutorials with invited HCI celebrities, or presentations by members.


After this successful start, the SIG had some hard times. In 1995 the group was revitalised, and activities started to become more regular. It was decided to hold a monthly meeting, and after some years of good experiences it was decided to set a fixed date (every last Thursday of the month) and a regular meeting location (the ETH Zurich), to simplify planning for our members and therefore to increase the attendance rate.

#### **3 Today's Situation**

Monthly meetings were held almost regularly each month. During the last 8 years, we were able to hold between eight and ten presentations per year, which were attended by 10 to 20 members and guests. The topics were well balanced: There were research themes as well as practitioners presentations. We are

very proud to have many guest speakers from the industry, who gave us insight into what is going on in the market. The number of members is steadily increasing, and has already exceeded 100. Our informal mailing list includes nearly 150 e-mail addresses.. This means that we are reaching a great number of persons involved or at least interested in HCI, with the majority from industry. Due to the lack of a professorship in HCI, the academic community is possibly less strong than in other countries.

In 1997, an ACM SIGCHI Swiss local chapter was formed. This chapter is lead in personal union by the board members of the SIG. This double charter enables the SIG to be the single focus of all Swiss HCI activities. The SIG also delegates the Swiss representative to the IFIP TC 13, and it is also loosely associated with the Swiss Society for Ergonomics *SwissErgo*.]

We keep administrative matters on a low level, and concentrate on services to our members. Occasional board meetings are used to plan activities, and regular s after a presentation ensure that members' views and wishes are known and can be taken into consideration. Our web site ([www.swissCHI.ch](http://www.swissCHI.ch)) is updated regularly and highlights our events. Our library contains many important books on topics of HCI, and a good number of tutorial notes and proceedings from conferences. Also video tapes from conferences, recordings from HCI-related broadcasts, and works from our members are available.

The interaction with other professional computer science, ergonomics and design communities is not very high, and could be improved.

## 4 Future Activities

Several subcommittees have been formed, namely education, SIG activities and standardisation. All are active, although to varying degrees. Implementing a curriculum in schools of higher education is one goal we would like to achieve. So far the teaching is however mostly done by dedicated and personally motivated persons with no or little co-ordination between the lecturers or schools. Nevertheless, the impact of HCI teaching can be felt by our consulting members: Awareness is rising, and HCI skills are more sought after by the industry. A course in Usability Engineering is no longer an oddity for a Swiss computer scientist, but is regarded as a valuable qualification, as feedback from former students and discussions with employers show.

The SIG activities group (all board members, supported by some other SIG members) successfully keeps the monthly meetings going.

Standardisation is a controversially discussed issue. Some members are of the opinion that we need a standardised and quality assured system to keep work in the area of user-centred design on a high level. The size of the Swiss HCI community, however, makes this difficult, as a standardisation body would embrace most active members and firms and would leave very few candidates for a certification process. Hence, for the moment, activities in this area have been frozen, to give all members time to rethink the issue.

Our goal is to increase the awareness of the topic of HCI in Switzerland, and especially to further improve the situation of HCI education. A recent rise in research and education activities is gladly noted. There is, however, an urgent need to co-ordinate these activities. Topics for research and curricula for education, matching the situation at our universities and schools, should be defined by our community. On the whole, more structured research and education activities are still needed.

Improving our international visibility is another important goal. The organisation of the INTERACT 2003 conference is one measure, which we gracefully took, to increase our national and international profile.