This special issue focuses on the crossroads of two different but related research disciplines, namely systems development and usability. While systems development methods originated from systems engineering and software economics in the late 1960s, usability was developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s from HCI research, cognitive psychology and phenomenology. In this Special Issue we ask, how can these two traditions enrich each other, in both research and practical settings?

We have chosen to focus on the Scandinavian tradition as an arena to analyse this crossroads, not because the disciplines were invented there, but because of the strong Scandinavian tradition of user oriented design. This tradition of systems development dates back to the 1960s, and was initially rooted in the labour movement for work-place democracy. During the last 30 years the research has developed into a rich and diverse body of knowledge (Iivari and Lyytinen, 1998). The Scandinavian research on usability is also quite diverse, and some researchers have found that there is a tension between traditional systems development and usability (Boivie et al., 2006).

In 2009 it is reasonable to say that the Scandinavian community has not lost its basic assumptions and beliefs about user oriented design, but it has been challenged in several ways the past decade.

- First, it has lost much of its political momentum, as the ties to the political discourse in general, and to the trade unions in particular, have been weakened (Bjerknes and Bratteteig, 1995). What is today an effective IS development/usability strategy for user participation and democracy?
- Second, the context of information systems development has changed; while the pioneers of the 1970s designed systems in close cooperation with the future users in an individual organisation, most companies today use commercial software. Where are the voices of users in this process?

However, as this Special Issue documents, these issues are addressed by a new generation of Scandinavian researchers, who present four fresh articles. Their point of departure is the tradition of participative design, but the emphasis is on usability, not on systems development methods. The first challenge is addressed by the articles of Gulliksen et al, and Kanstrup/Christensen. The second issue is addressed by the articles of Iivari/ Molin-Juustila and Ketola/Roto. In our opinion
these articles contribute to refocus and invigorate the discourse on the Scandinavian tradition.

**Strategies for User Participation, Innovation and Democracy**

The article by Kanstrup and Christensen, *User-driven Innovation as Mutual but Asymmetrical Learning*, investigates user-driven innovation related to participatory design and Scandinavian systems design. A case of design of feedback on electricity consumption for private households based on user-driven innovation serves to exemplify the core principles of user involvement and user engagement. With reference to a phenomenological understanding of what it means to be in an innovative state of mind, they explain how these principles of user-driven innovators contributed a positive outcome, and how this approach combine classic Scandinavian democracy values with new economy calls for innovation in systems design. The paper outlines fundamentals of user-drive in systems design, stressing designers’ open interest to learn from users, put users first, and follow users’ lead regarding their professional knowledge and give users the opportunity to learn about design.

The article of Gulliksen, Sandblad, Cajander, Eriksson and Kavathatzopoulos is titled *User-Centred Systems Design as Organizational Change: A Longitudinal Action Research Project to Improve Usability and the Computerized Work Environment in a Public Authority*. The article builds on a longitudinal action research project, conducted over four years in close cooperation with a public organisation. The purpose of the cooperation was to increase the focus on usability in the authority, and the main research question was how user centered systems design and increased awareness on work environment in relation to computer usage could promote organizational change. They conclude that it takes extensive management support, improved development methods, both for business and IT development and extensive development of skills and roles to be able to address these issues in a professional and sustainable manner. In addition integrating user-centred systems design in the development work requires a long-term commitment and several activities needs to be performed over a long period of time, or as one of the interviewees interprets it: “Usability is somewhat like democracy - it must be won every day.”

**The Voices of the Users in Commercial Software**

In their contribution, *Listening to the Voices of the Users’ in Product Based Software Development*, Iivari and Molin-Juustila examine how user inputs are taken into account in the context of product based software development. They undertake a case study involving three companies engaged in product business but with different degrees of productization. Their results reveal that the extent to which ‘user voices’ are listened to does not depend on the particular productivization level of the company. A set of challenges and implications for practitioners are provided in the conclusions of their thoughtful article.

The user is also the centre of Ketola and Roto’s paper, *On User Experience Measurement Needs – Case Nokia*. They focus on the implications of measuring User Experience (UX) needs. Their work spanned UX measurement needs across different levels and units at Nokia, with eight different themes being identified as a result of their research: Product experience lifecycle, Retention, User groups and use of features, Experience breakdowns, Accessibility, Perceived performance, Experiences with new technologies. In a similar vein to Iivari and Molin-Juustila’s article, the authors recognize the increasing importance of the product itself, as manifested through the product experience, and argue that for true value to be obtained for UX needs, there is a need for a migration of emphasis from the traditional User Centred Design cycle to the Product Experience Life Cycle. Practical implications and guidelines for identifying common UX measurement needs are then provided in the concluding sections of their paper.

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REFERENCES

