Chapter XIII

Guiding Design for Waiting

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Abstract

This chapter presents a number of suggestions for design of information technology (IT) to be used in public places. The design implications given are based on an exploratory field study conducted in public places where people wait to travel. The study shows that the use of technology must be negotiable and adaptable to support use in different ways, in different contexts and to produce a possibility for others to understand this use. The findings are arranged in three areas: creating privacy (how people act to establish privacy in the public place), adapting to change (how people adapt to social, spatial and temporal changes in the environment), and appearance and activity (how people make efforts to communicate activities to others present in the public place). Each of these areas has aspects that affect the use of IT. Thus they should also influence the design of IT. Based on these findings, we derive implications for design of IT to be used in public places.
Introduction

People live mobile lives, spending time in diverse places and moving between and through different settings, both for vocational and private purposes. One such public setting is places for waiting. We queue at the store, we wait for the bus, and we wait at the train station. This paper focuses upon that subset of public behavior, and investigates people’s activities and their relation to technology when waiting to travel.

Despite the amount of time that people spend in public places and the fact that IT is something that we find in most public environments nowadays, few studies have been concerned with what people do while waiting and how this potentially could guide the design of IT. Technologies such as wireless telecommunication networks, and small, powerful handheld devices give mobile people new possibilities to communicate and, by that, altering the availability for interaction with others and access data and information. This motivates research within this area.

Waiting to travel has characteristics that need to be explored in order to be able to create valid designs for use in this context. We are interested in behavior in public places and how this could give insights to the design of technology.

Waiting and Places for Waiting

In this section the basic characteristics of waiting and places created for people to wait are discussed. Places for waiting are generally designed for waiting and this frames people’s activity spatially and temporally in these spaces. These features interrelate with the social interaction among travelers within this space. This means that the social interaction shapes the spatial and temporal frames and vice versa, as we will show in this chapter.

People in these places are not a homogenous group; they have diverse reasons for being there. This is important because the reason for being present shapes the activities that they engage in. For example one issue that differentiates people is that we can assume that some people are traveling to, from or in their work, and hence waiting in close conjunction to their vocation, while others are about to, or just have, traveled for private reasons.
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