

# User Centered Design and International Development

- Position paper -

Dr. Christian Sturm

Universidad Tecnológica de la Mixteca

69000 Huajuapán de León

Oaxaca, Mexico

[www.christian-sturm.com](http://www.christian-sturm.com)

## **Experience and background**

- 7 years of experience in the field of international and cross-cultural HCI
- regional focus of work: Latin America, especially Mexico
- 3 years living in Mexico (Mexico City, Huajuapán de León)
- 5 years working as a freelance consultant for international usability mainly for multinational enterprises in the telecommunications industry, based in Germany
- undergraduate in computer science with focus on computer graphics and multimedia
- PhD in cognitive science (major), cultural anthropology (minor)
- since March/2006: Research Professor at the Universidad Tecnológica de la Mixteca

## **Issues, Questions, Findings & Interests**

- From my own research activities, the following factors are the most crucial ones when it comes to cross-cultural projects/research:
  - Trust
  - Cultural knowledge
  - Domain knowledge
  - Command of local language
  - Composition of research team
  - Consideration of relationship researcher-subject
  - Researcher's experiences in "going native" (second socialization)

- When it comes to cross-cultural usability, most of the people think in culture as a national characteristic due to the fact that companies operate within national boundaries. The results of my cross-cultural research, however, suggest that the nation is only one of many different components that culture is about. A German housewife of 50 years of age might have more in common with a Mexican construction worker when it comes to HCI than with her own son. For me, every user research activity is cross-cultural, independent from national differences, as the differences of the cultural background of a developer and a user is often immense. In this context I would be interested in a systematic categorization and collection of issues that different group of people worldwide have in common in spite of their nationality. Are there conclusions that can be drawn by comparing development projects in different nations?
- From the viewpoint of developed countries, people's attention is focused on the issue of the digital divide including the use of information technology for accessing the Internet. Which other technological areas should be explored that might be more helpful for a regional development? What about information technology for agricultural development?
- Negroponte has been criticized a lot for the OLPC-Project (One Laptop per Child). Does the pure distribution of information technology really help? Don't we need a much more contextualized approach?
- Do people around the world really like to have localized technology? Up to which extent other factors like "status" influence much more the use of certain technological products?
- Several researchers (Yeo, Apala, Dray etc.) have discussed in their articles and presentations the cultural adaptation of user research methodologies. They are, however, far away of being complete. A systematic identification of the issues that need to be taken into account might be interesting within the workshop.
- We do need to reflect deeply on our understanding of the concept of "development". What is our mental model? What means development for people around the world? Can someone be forced to be "developed"? Means "development" getting closer to the way of life in "developed" countries?