Book Review: "Playful User Interfaces"

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A book review on
Playful User Interfaces. Part of Springer Series on Gaming Media and Social Effects

by Nijholt, A. (Ed.). (2014). Springer, Singapore, Heidelberg, New York, Dordrecht, London. ISSN 2197-9685 and ISSN 2197-9693 (electronic), ISBN 978-981-4560-95-5 and ISBN 978-981-4560-96-2 (eBook)

Playful User Interfaces – the title refers to developments, which appear to be leading to a new generation of human–computer interaction (HCI) approaches, combining brand new and old ideas from computer science in general, artificial intelligence (AI) in particular, and design arts as well as psychology. In contrast to the traditional "serious" HCI, playful user interfaces allow the users to interact "playfully" with digitally provided content. The term "playful" does not necessarily mean to provide a "funny" context, or a game – the term is related to the goal of motivating interaction, as the interactivity itself is a source of fun. Thus, playful can also mean a certain form of inviting the user to interact, to try something new in a well-known or in a completely new context. Playful user interfaces can be used not only for games but also for educational content, for mobile devices used to personalize a museum context, for sport supporting software, or for something completely different.

The basic idea behind playful user interfaces is not new, as explained by Nijholt (2014) in the introductory part of this book, but can come in a brand new shape. A playful user interface can be realized in the design of a traditional HCI, where the user interacts directly with software, using an input device like the mouse. But it can also mean that users interact with the sensors hidden in the environment, or with special gadgets, which process interaction information. The playful user interface becomes a variation of smart environments, when the user interacts directly with the environment (i.e., with a place or with things), and leads to new demands regarding personalization, adaptivity, and interactivity of software.

Taking all these facets into account, it becomes obvious that it is a more than demanding task to cover all the potential aspects in one book. However, Nijholt and the authors of the chapters have succeeded in doing so. After a short introduction, where the editor takes the reader's hand and leads him into the broad field of history and research in playful user interfaces, the book offers a collection of high level scientific chapters written by different authors, and organized in five logically and scientifically coherent main parts. In the first part, three chapters discuss the aspects of public and mobile entertainment. The second part is a collection of chapters related to examples for indoor and outdoor playgrounds. In the third part, digital games are focused. Perspectives in this part are personalization, change, and teaching. The fourth part shows examples from the field of health and sports, and the fifth and last part are dedicated to examples from learning by creating.

Across all the chapters, interesting insights are provided into very different aspects of playful user interfaces: different technical equipment is investigated (ranging from classical mobile phones to special sensors, e.g., embedded in smart balls), new forms of interactivity in groups

are sketched, and interactivity between private and public devices are described (e.g., mobile devices and public screens). Naturally, not only games and new forms of interactions design in games play an important role in some of the chapters but also the non-game contexts are prominently addressed, e.g., museums, sport activities, health programs, and other special application scenarios. Some of the chapters provide insights in use-cases and offer the possibility to reuse the sketched approaches (e.g., using the Makey Makey in combination with Scratch for teaching game creation). Others offer brand new

aspects of future systems, which are in early development stages.

Summing up, the book can be used as a reference for the state of the art and the future vision of the field of playful user interfaces, especially for designers and researchers in the field of application. The reader gets a good overview over very different aspects of this modern and comparably broad field, and is potentially motivated to start his or her own project in playful user interfaces. Even if the book appears in the classical "book interface," it is not only very informative but also enjoyable to read.

Reference

Nijholt, A. (ed.) (2014). *Playful User Interfaces*. Singapore, Heidelberg, New York, Dordrecht, London: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-981-4560-96-2

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