

International workshop on Advanced Visual Interfaces: AVI '96 Gubbio, Italy

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It is well known that a program—to accomplish any task—is welcomed by new users as long as it is easy to use, to understand, to learn. In the recent past, programs were written first and a nice *ad hoc* interface was added later. The look and feel of this interface gradually became the convincing part of the whole system (program plus interface): in fact the way in which the screen presented the available commands, the possibility of on-line help, of undo operations, etc. were firstly greeted and then requested by the new users of complex programs.

For the above reasons and also due to the increasing importance of the “usability” factor, i.e. the set of features enabling non-expert users to quickly grasp the possibilities (and the limitations) of the programs they were learning, added to the increasingly central role played by the user, turned the interface component into a major one playing the leading role on the computer scenario.

As may be seen by the amount of articles appearing in scientific journals, the human-computer relationship is being studied not merely to improve the communication from humans to machines but also to better understand the user expectations, tastes and cultural biases. User models have been developed to try to accommodate classes of users to a particular kind of interface, typically visual with direct manipulation (but in a short time aural and gestural) which will substitute every other kind of interface (textual, menu driven).

For the above reasons, during 1992 a group of university researchers (M. F. Costabile, T. Catarci and myself, and then with G. Santucci) originated the Advanced Visual Interface Workshop which was firstly held in Rome, next in Bari (1994) and now in Gubbio (1996), to cover what the industry and academia were developing in control and communication strategies between humans and programs through sophisticated interfaces.

This year's program includes invited lectures on information visualisation and foraging, on querying and visualising the Internet, on modelling action, perception and information in the human-computer-human loop, a panel on multimedia user interfaces and seven scientific sessions on (1) data navigation, (2) database interfaces, (3) web interaction, interface tools, (4) augmenting the interface, (5) pictorial interfaces, (6) applications and (7) ten prototype demonstrations.

We expect about 100 attendants and have also organised, during the day after AVI '96 has terminated, two satellite events: FADIVA (Esprit Working Group 8422), and a workshop (with ten presentations) on the Theory of Visual Languages.

I believe the importance of the web, the availability of fast processors and the growing need of human-to-human communication via computers, will make the relevance of interface design even higher tomorrow than it is today.

For more information about AVI '96 or Gubbio, look at: <http://www.dsi.uniroma1.it/AVI96/info.html>