
Practice-based CSCW Research: ECSCW bridging across the Atlantic

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Abstract

Practice-based CSCW research is an orientation towards empirically-grounded research embracing particular methodological approaches with the aim of creating new theory about work, collaboration, and cooperative technologies. While practice-based CSCW research has several strong roots in both North America and Europe: ECSCW and Europe remain central to this tradition. In this panel we will discuss the practice-based research approach asking questions such as: What is the nature of Practice-based Computer Supported Cooperative Work research? How is it different from other CSCW research approaches? What is the relationship between these traditions in terms of conceptual approaches, methodologies and open questions for future research? This panel will discuss openly the diversity and commonalities between different CSCW traditions – and argue that practice-based CSCW research is not something that happens only at ECSCW. ECSCW is not a geographical boundary for a certain type of research – but rather a place for a specific research tradition and approach with links to many academic places in the world.

Author Keywords

ECSCW, CSCW, research traditions, practice-based CSCW research.

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FACTS about ECSCW

Did you know: Until recently articles published in ECSCW had a higher impact rate than ACM CSCW, and is currently largely on par with ACM CSCW (ECSCW: 31; ACM CSCW 36; CHI: 16)*

*The number of citations and articles are cumulative. (Source: Microsoft Academic Search).

Did you know: All ECSCW papers are free available online in the EUSSET library (eusset.eu), and on SpringerLink from 2012 and onwards.

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous;

Introduction

On numerous occasions during CSCW conferences a number of European researchers have been met with questions about what is this 'ECSCW' taking place in Europe? Is it true that you fight at the PC meetings, and that it's impossible to get a paper accepted if you are from the US? How can I make my paper ECSCW-like? How do CSCW and ECSCW really differ and what remains the same across the two conferences? Is it possible to talk about WORLD CSCW rather than ACM CSCW and ECSCW? Similar doubts and unclear perceptions were also expressed by many of the participants in a recent survey exploring the current view that CSCW researchers have of ECSCW and its approach.

While these questions are clearly based upon genuine interest and possible participation in ECSCW community, it is also clear for us that we lack clear communication and clarity for what the ECSCW research tradition stands for and where it is going in the future. These questions also underlie the fact that ECSCW has long championed a specific focus to CSCW research which is by no means exclusive to European institutions and researchers, but which tends to be more frequently presented at European venues.

The purpose of this panel is to create a space at ACM CSCW for people to ask these questions openly and where active members of the ECSCW community can

discuss the nature and perspective of ECSCW research, and its future directions. Our hope is to create stronger bonds and increased academic crossovers between the two communities, serving the greater aim of strengthening practice-based research within Computer Supported Cooperative Work.

The reason behind this panel

This panel proposes to discuss practice-based CSCW research traditions, its history and milestones, and possible future directions for the field in both Europe and the US.

Practice-based research has roots on both side of the Atlantic. Early CSCW work on situated action [1] and boundary objects [2] created important foundations for CSCW in general and practice-based research in particular. The European conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work (ECSCW) was first launched in 1989, and in the early days there was a strong relationship between the American and the European community, which was mainly circulating around the practice-based research traditions. The ECSCW academic tradition builds upon a strong tradition of in-depth workplace studies and a stance of understanding of practice as the basis for the design of cooperative technologies [3-7].

European approaches to CSCW had their roots in many earlier theoretical and design viewpoints that became central to early CSCW overall. Participatory Design ("Scandinavian Design tradition") approaches to information systems, the Manchester Socio-Technical School, and German work psychology informed much of CSCW and lay at the heart of ECSCW. Exemplary work in CSCW with a practice orientation, much from the

ECSCW tradition, includes studies on mutual awareness [8, 9], coordination mechanisms [10, 11], politics [12, 13], and design of basic support for cooperative work [14]. Examples of more recent ECSCW work include, for example, studies of collaborative practices in Palestine [15, 16], appropriation of ICT by non tech-savvy people [17], and how collaborators handle delay in real-time collaborative note-taking [18].

Furthermore, the practice-oriented approach to CSCW research has been extended beyond workplaces to encompass human practice in a variety of non-work settings, such as home care [19, 20], digital housekeeping [21-24], leisure activities [25, 26], and art and heritage [27-29].

This type of research is currently being conducted in many other cultural and geographical contexts and presented at other venues, notably including ACM CSCW. This work includes the work on, for example, coordinative actions [30], knowledge in organizations and other social settings [31], distributed meetings [32], and articulation work [33].

Therefore, while ECSCW remains the primary international venue devoted almost entirely to practice-centered CSCW research, the practice-focused approach to CSCW is not bound to one side of the Atlantic Ocean, but instead is an endeavor linking many CSCW researchers worldwide.

However, if we want to strengthen the practice-based CSCW research stream, it is important that we illustrate it clearly to the broader community and dispel some myths surrounding it [34], that we do not forget the historic background of the field, and that we move

forward on common ground. With this panel, we want to start a discussion about the nature of practice-based research, its foundations and its future.

Roles and Perspectives on ECSCW

To qualify the discussions, we have selected five researchers with a good knowledge of ECSCW and of the practice-focused tradition, albeit with different perspectives and experiences. Each participant will present his or hers view on “the ECSCW-way” to CSCW research, recount their historical role in the community, and discuss possible open issues and differences of views among the panel members, as well as discussing with and answering questions from the audience.

Mark Ackerman

One of the intellectual strengths of CSCW as a research area is its historical orientation towards empirically-grounded research using field-based methods, an emphasis on IT as would be used in its work context (and later social context) rather than just new products per se, and a push towards developing new socio-technical theory instead of merely technical or social theory. Coming from a relatively naive technical background, I remember being astonished and invigorated at finding people who wanted to consider not just the technology and not just the social impacts of computers but also how to design with social context in mind. I've continued to draw on this work in areas as diverse as medical settings [e.g. 35, 36], intercultural settings [e.g. 37], and knowledge sharing [e.g. 38, 39].

Despite early research in this tradition occurring in the ACM CSCW conference and still continuing in current CSCW conferences, it has always been more explicit in the ECSCW conferences and continues to be a stronger

tradition in Europe. Researchers with frequent participation at ECSCW hold on to the tradition and orientation fiercely. Europe in this regard is less a place than a state of mind, and ECSCW is one of its important intellectual homes.

"Practice-oriented research" sometimes seems to me to be a new buzzword for this old tradition. However, the term can also include a continuation of and a return to other, compatible intellectual traditions - primarily European historically - including participatory design where there is much to be learned from the design process in practice and in the field as well as implementation research where the details of getting systems designed and adopted matter. Research based in these intellectual traditions can be found at ECSCW, whereas they are much less strong in the ACM CSCW.

I firmly believe it is critically important to the entire CSCW community for practice-oriented research, broadly construed, to stay alive and well. Part of this is to see ECSCW remain a vibrant and welcome part of the larger CSCW community, and to see ECSCW as an important home for important work.

Pernille Bjørn

Having been 'raised' academically in the European tradition on Computer Supported Cooperative Work, ECSCW have always been an important venue for me. What makes ECSCW interesting and important for me is the continuous dedication to practice-based approaches to exploring collaborative practices in various contexts, combined with an interest in designing collaborative technologies [40]. What I find fascinating is the interest in understanding work place realities and how we, as CSCW researchers, have to comprehend and

understand how cooperative technologies (whether it is supporting coordination or awareness practices) should be created with humble appreciation of the articulation work that makes the work place function in the first place [41]. Collaborative practices in ECSCW amount to more than group work, and the collaborative technologies are more than groupware technologies. Collaborative work is the situations where multiple people are engaged in a common field of work, and when individual changes impact others, who must act accordingly [3]. Collaborative work exists in many settings around the world - in the hospital [42, 43], in the global organizations [44, 45] - and the ECSCW focus encourages us to include these work places into our analytical work. In short, ECSCW for me is dedicated practice-based research. What I want to present and argue in this panel is that I do not experience that the CSCW research I love only exist at the ECSCW conferences. Instead, I am experiencing that this kind of research has value also at the ACM CSCW conference, and is welcomed as such. In the last couple of years, I am seeing how the practice-based research approach for CSCW research is present at this venue, and I also experience a general interest in the approach and how it can move into new types of collaborative domain. You could argue that ECSCW traditions have been too focused on ethnomethodology approaches, where the researcher spends dedicated time at one field site, leaving the focus on design for later work. Looking at the practice-based approach published at ACM CSCW, we see a rise in multi-sited ethnography and design [46], and the growing interest in moving away from 'traditional' ethnography towards new types of CSCW sites of design [47]. In this panel, I would argue that CSCW practice-based research is not privileged territory for ECSCW, but instead is a raising

research paradigm across CSCW researchers internationally. Thus, to move it forward we need to engage across and learn from each other and together evolve the academic discipline.

Luigina Ciolfi

Having attended my first ECSCW conference as a doctoral student in 2001, I have had ample opportunity to experience the community and its contributions at various stages of my career as a researcher. My apprenticeship in research has been shaped since those early days by the deep commitment to understanding human practices in a rich way and to connect this knowledge to design, often by including end-users and stakeholders to collaborate in the design process itself. Having spent a significant time of my research to date focusing on and designing for a “non-work” domain – cultural heritage – I have often struggled with the conceptualization of what CSCW (and ECSCW!) is meant to study, and with how the European tradition of practice-focused research can benefit from and connect to other ways of examining collaborative systems and activities. In this panel, I would like to reflect on issues of legitimizing “non-work” (although even the label of “non-work” is questionable) into practice-focused CSCW research, and on issues of how such tradition can expand its views to the broader CSCW discourse on alternative ways of understanding and designing for different social interactions.

Geraldine Fitzpatrick

I first heard about the term ‘cscw’ on the day before PhD applications were due. It inspired me so much that I changed my proposal from a neural network to a (very hand-wavy) CSCW focus. This was in a traditional computer science department at an Australian

university (UQ) where no-one had even heard of HCI let alone CSCW. From the very beginning I have regarded both the ACM CSCW and ECSCW conferences as core home communities. Sitting in neither the US or Europe, I also recognized that, while overlapping, they had somewhat different ‘flavours’ and emphases, in part reflecting the particular socio-cultural and research-funding contexts in which they sat. I draw from and contribute to both. For my thesis work in the 1990s’, the seminal paper by Schmidt and Bannon (1992) on “Taking CSCW Seriously: Supporting Articulation Work” was particularly influential; but so too was my experience as a visiting PhD student with Simon Kaplan’s collaborative computing group at UIUC (he later moved to UQ) and interactions there with Leigh Star. My first ECSCW conference was ECSCW1993 in Milan and my first CSCW conference was CSCW1994 in Chapel Hill where I also had the privilege of attending the doctoral colloquium, with luminaries such as Saul Greenberg and John Hughes. My personal research preference is more aligned with practice-based research (as it is now being termed) but this practice-based research has grown out of the sum of all my experiences across ECSCW and ACM CSCW and has been published in both. In this panel, I’d like to argue for embracing diversity. It is about ‘cscw’, supporting people interacting and collaborating together in some way. I approach this in a particular practice-based way that I happen to find rich and exciting, but I also see the value in other approaches. The longer term success of the ‘cscw’ agenda depends on us being able to understand and embrace the contributions from across traditions, and to support all our key communities.

Volker Wulf

I enculturated into the European CSCW community during the 1990s, somehow slowly, developing an appropriated research stance and style. I was intrigued by the academic depth and brilliance of ECSCW's founding generation, their multidisciplinary discourses, and the societal relevancy of their empirical, conceptual and design-oriented work. Over the years ECSCW, understood as an intellectually rather than geographically defined community, has developed the foundation for a practice-turn in the academic field of computing – a turn which seems to be timely and absolutely essential. Over the past two decades, my group has elaborated upon concepts and methods for such a practice turn. We have developed an approach to IT design, which we call *Grounded Design* which suggests to conduct a portfolio of *Design Case Studies*, compare their results, and generate bottom-up concepts to ease the transfer of insights [48]. *Design Case Studies* cover three research perspectives and phases: (1) they analyze empirically the given practices in a specific field of application, (2) they come up with an innovative design for an ICT artifact related to the empirical findings, (3) they investigate into the appropriation of the technical artifact over a longer period of time [5].

Questions to discuss at the panel

The panel discussion will be structured by the moderator, who will ensure to support the panelists in engaging in conversations with each other and with the audience.

- What comprises the practice-based CSCW academic tradition?

- What are examples of main fundamental practice-based CSCW findings published in ECSCW?
- What does practice-based CSCW research entail?
- What are the differences between ECSCW and CSCW academic traditions?
- Why should an US academic go to ECSCW?

Panelists

Pernille Bjørn will act as moderator for the panel. She is Professor of Computer Supported Cooperative work at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Prior affiliations include Associate professor at the IT-University of Copenhagen, Visiting faculty at the University of California Irvine, Visiting faculty at the Indian institute of Management, Bangalore, India, and Post-doctoral fellow at Simon Fraser University, Canada. She has a long-term engagement with both the ECSCW and the CSCW community, where she has been publishing on topics such as healthcare [49] and global software development [50]. Pernille has served in various roles for both communities in the last couple of years, including serving as program-chair for ACM CSCW2016, program-chair for GROUP2014, sub-committee chair for the CSCW track at CHI in 2014/2015. She has been part of the ECSCW program committee since 2009, and served as proceedings chair for ECSCW2015. Currently, she is in the advisory board for the JCSCW and GROUP. Also she is part of the task force for ECSCW.

Luigina Ciolfi is Reader in Communication in the Communication and Computing Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University (UK). She was previously a lecturer and senior researcher at the University of Limerick (Ireland), a Visiting Professor at the University

of Rome-Tor Vergata, and a research assistant at the University of Siena (Italy). Her research focuses on the understanding of situated human practices and on the design of technologies to support them. She has done extensive work on cultural heritage technologies, mobility and nomadic work, participation in design and aspects of place and space in interaction design. She has had substantial involvement with both ECSCW (PC member since 2009; Proceedings Chair 2009-2013; General Chair of ECSCW 2017) and ACM CSCW (papers co-chair CSCW 2015; Doctoral Colloquium mentor CSCW 2012 & 2016; Demos Co-chair CSCW 2010 & 2012). She has also served on committee roles for COOP and ACM GROUP.

Mark Ackerman is the George Herbert Mead Collegiate Professor of Human-Computer Interaction and a Professor in the School of Information and the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His research areas include collaborative information access and expertise/knowledge sharing in online knowledge communities, medical settings, and pervasive environments. Mark is a member of the CHI Academy and an ACM Fellow.

Previously, Mark was a faculty member at the University of California, Irvine and a research scientist at MIT's Laboratory for Computer Science (now CSAIL). He has degrees from the University of Chicago, Ohio State, and MIT. He has been a member of the program committee for each E-CSCW since 2001 and is an associate editor of the CSCW Journal, among other roles in the CHI and CSCW community and conferences.

Geraldine Fitzpatrick is Professor of Design and Assessment of Technology and leads the Human

Computer Interaction group and the Institute for Technology Design and Assessment at Vienna University of Technology. She was previously Director of the Interact Lab at Uni of Sussex, User Experience consultant at Sapient London, and Snr Researcher at the Centre for Online Health/Distributed Systems Technology Centre in Australia. Her research is at the intersection of social and computer sciences to support social interaction using mobile, tangible and sensor-based technologies in everyday contexts. Particular interest areas include: collaboration and social interaction; smart spaces; social and emotional skills learning; health, selfcare and well-being; sustainability; and active engagement for older people.

Geraldine has served in various roles for both communities including: co-chair of ECSCW2013; Video co-chair CSCW2004; Showcase co-chair CSCW2011; Assoc Prog chair CSCW 02, 06, 13; Doctoral Colloquium co-chair CSCW2013; member of the ACM CSCW Steering Committee since 2012; and Associate Editor for JCSCW since 2003. She has also served in committee roles for GROUP, PDC, CHI, INTERACT, C&T, PervasiveHealth, and has participated in panels at CSCW2006 and CSCW2013.

Volker Wulf is Professor in Information Systems and New Media at the University of Siegen. He is also the Managing Director of the newly founded School of Media and Information (iSchool) at the University of Siegen. His research interests lie primarily in the area of IT design in real-world contexts. This includes the development of innovative applications from the areas of cooperation systems, knowledge management and community support. One special focus lies on flexible software architecture, which can be adapted by end-users. Volker has served as program chair ECSCW2011

and conference chair for ECSCW2001, as sub-committee chair for the CHI: Beyond the individual; Program chair for GROUP, Program chair for COOP, and several times as Associate Chair for ACM CSCW. He serves on several advisory boards and steering committees, and is a key figure in the CSCW research community situated in Europe.

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