HCI design and development as a form of social participation

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Abstract:
Semiotic Engineering is a semiotic theory of human-computer interaction. In it, the scope of HCI research and design is not limited to the users' interactions with systems. It extends to how user-system interactions enable and achieve designer-user communication about how, when, where, and why to use the systems they build. By assigning an active role to designers at interaction time, semiotic engineering gives us an opportunity to understand and explore the users' experience with computer-mediated human communication that carries values, beliefs and goals that transform individual and social life. This sort of communication is widely different from natural face-to-face communication and from online communication through email, chat, group discussion forums, and the like. It is supported by specialized interactive languages with textual, visual, accoustic and tangible signs.

In this talk, I propose that semiotic engineering allows us to frame software development per se as an activity pertaining to cultures of participation, especially when meta-design and end-user development is part of the process. I'll illustrate the idea with evidence collected during a case study with a free open-source system.