

Women-driven History of Human-Computer Interaction in Italy

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This paper is a tribute to the many women who, with their commitment and scientific work, since the early 90's have played a major role in the development of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) within the Italian communities of Computer Science and Computer Engineering. They work primarily under the umbrella of SIGCHI Italy, the Italian ACM SIGCHI Chapter, officially chartered on April 24, 1996 (<http://sigchitaly.eu/en/general-info/>). SIGCHI (pronounced 'sigkai') is the ACM's Special Interest Group on Computer-Human Interaction; it brings together people who study and work on the design, evaluation, and implementation of interactive computer systems for human use as well as the major phenomena surrounding such systems.

SIGCHI Italy was born thanks to the interest and the passion of two women, Tiziana Catarci and Maria Francesca Costabile, who already in 1992, in collaboration with Stefano Levialdi, conceived and organized in Rome the first international event on HCI in Italy, the conference on "Advanced Visual Interfaces" (AVI'92). It was so successful that they decided to organize it again in 1994 in Bari, this time in cooperation with ACM SIGCHI and publishing the proceedings with ACM Press. Since then, the AVI conferences have been held every two years, they are well appreciated by the international HCI community and the proceedings are available in the ACM Digital Library. Beside M. F. Costabile and T. Catarci, all the successive editions of AVI have involved Italian women as either program or paper chairs: Antonella De Angeli, Marilena De Marsico, Daniela Fogli, Franca Garzotto, Rosa Lanzilotti, Maristella Matera, Laura Tarantino, Genny Tortora, Giuliana Vitiello.

In 1995, M. F. Costabile managed with ACM SIGCHI the proposal of creating an Italian Chapter and, in 1996, she became the first Chair of SIGCHI Italy and served as such until year 2000. So far, SIGCHI Italy had other six Chairs and two of them are women: Franca Garzotto and Maristella Matera, who is the current chair. In Italy as well as in the world, the percentage of women in various disciplines of Computer Science and Computer Engineering was much lower than men, but what is reported in this paper shows that women had and keep having a driving role in HCI in Italy.

In February 1999, M. F. Costabile with Fabio Paternò chaired HCITALY'99, the first Italian conference organized by SIGCHI Italy. Since then, the conference (later called CHIItaly) has been held every 2 years, it is now an international event and several other women keep having top roles in its scientific organization: Liliana Ardissono, Tiziana Catarci, Antonella De Angeli, Marilena De Marsico, Daniela Fogli, Franca Garzotto, Anna Goy, Rosa

Lanzilotti, Patrizia Marti, Maristella Matera, Carmen Santoro, Anna Spagnolli, Laura Tarantino.

With the goal of spreading the HCI culture in Italy, other international conferences have been organized, always with the contribution of the Italian women who were active in the SIGCHI Italy association: INTERACT 2005 in Rome (M. F. Costabile was co-chair with F. Paternò), CHI 2008 in Florence, the world most important conference on HCI (M.F. Costabile was paper Co-Chair, T. Catarci was Short Paper Co-Chair), IDC 2009, whose program chair was F. Garzotto, two editions of Mobile HCI and EICS (Engineering Interactive Computing Systems), in which C. Santoro played important roles.

Considering education on HCI, in the first years of the 90s there were no courses on HCI in Italian Universities at undergraduate level. In 1995-1996, M. F. Costabile taught the "Human-Computer Interaction" course for the Computer Engineering Curriculum at the University of Lecce: it was the first time that an Italian University had offered an HCI course in a curriculum of Computer Science or Computer Engineering. In 1998, courses on HCI started to be offered in other Italian universities. Currently, several women teach courses on HCI topics. ACM acknowledged the value of the contribution to HCI by assigning to M. F. Costabile the 2018 SIGCHI Lifetime Service Award.

Why are women so much involved in HCI? One reason might be that HCI research has a significant impact on shaping technology in a way that can significantly affect several aspects of people's everyday lives in the future. Studies in literature show that women are in the HCI field because it allows them to be creative and promotes a sense of purpose that enables them to touch many lives [1][2]. Much more frequently they link their computer science interest to a larger societal framework and are concerned that their research on computer science would not detach them from people. The Italian women researchers have acted during the last years to sustain this women orientation, and they keep working to affirm that the HCI culture should be emphasized as one of the main components of the computer science discipline, able to incorporate the women's perspectives on creativity as well as on potential of technology for improving quality of life [2].

REFERENCES

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