EDITORIAL

Issue Editor

Pål Sørgaard

Our changing discipline

When I started to write this editorial, I immediately ran into a central difficulty: I wanted to write about our discipline, but I did not know what to call it. The members of the Nordic Information Systems community, as represented at the annual IRIS (Information systems Research seminar In Scandinavia) conferences, refer to their discipline(s) with different names, in English, and in their own languages. I think all of us agree that "computer science" is an obsolete term, but some of us can live with "computing science." In Sweden, several departments have been renamed from "administrative data processing" or "information systems" to "informatics," while in Norway, the term "informatics" is synonymous with "computer science." In fact, in Norway there is a split between "informatics" and "information science." To have a working name, I will here use the term "social informatics," inspired by Rob Kling and much in line with discussions at the IRIS conferences.

With this issue, the editorial board has tried to address the discussion about our changing discipline. This is not the beginning of that discussion, nor is it the end, but it is an attempt to pull that discussion forwards and to provide a forum where such contributions are welcome. Such contributions can be very different. Some may explicitly address the discussion about the nature of our discipline, some may contribute through discussions of research methods, some may bring in new theories, and some may contribute simply by presenting examples of new kinds of research. This may result in a mix of different contributions, and there will not be any clear definition

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of what belongs to our science, and what does not. This mix is, however, much to prefer compared to what I personally have labelled "the increasing relative irrelevance of computer science:" departments more preoccupied with practising their scientific field as it was when the departments where founded, than to take up the challenge of the ever c

In this issue we publish four ordinary papers and one specially invited paper. At IRIS in 1996, professor Kristen Nygaard was given the honour of opening the conference. We asked him to kindly revise his manuscript to a form suitable for publication. The resulting paper is published in this issue.

In his paper "Deferring Generalizability: Four Classes of Generalization in Social Enquiry," Richard Baskerville discusses different approaches to generalisation in information systems research. He argues that we should look carefully into what kinds of generalisations we make, and with what criteria. Baskerville makes a point out of the difference between generalisation from a base case (or cases) to a general case (a theory), and from a general case to a goal case (a new situation where the results can be applied). Through this two-stage view of generalisation, and the criteria applied at the two stages, he identifies four classes of generalisation. In this way, Baskerville gives theoretical underpinnings for the differences between different approaches to research in our discipline.

In his paper "The New Informatics," Bo Dahlbom describes and argues in favour of the ongoing changes to our discipline, using the Swedish change in terminology from "information systems" to "informatics" as a central example. To Dahlbom our science is a design and theory oriented study of information technology use, *i.e.* the way technology is used is the core of the field. This does not, of course, exclude the study of the technology. Dahlbom concludes his paper by entering into a discussion of how an appropriate curriculum for our discipline could be put together.

Joan Greenbaum's paper addresses the limitations of only considering work. She argues that labour issues are still relevant, and that labour issues are not covered by work issues. While we may consider user participation and computer-supported cooperative work to be steps forwards, these do not give people more permanent or better paid jobs. Similarly, new technology opens up for distant cooperation and homework, enabling a separation of work from place, and thus contributing to the growth of the contingent or supplemental fraction of the workforce.

Finally, Anders Mørch, addresses tailoring of generic computer applications into domain-oriented applications. While this topic is technical, it is well rooted in "social informatics." As Mørch argues himself, supporting end-users in making evolutionary change is well in line with the Scandinavian democratic approach to system development. When end-users have a legal right to participate in the development process, it is a logical consequence to make applications tailorable. Through some of its more technical content, Mørch's paper demonstrates that a staring point in social informatics does not stop researchers from entering into technically challenging research.

Finally: a note on editorial policy: previously, the editorial board could not publish in the journal. With the publica-

tion of Dahlbom's paper, we change this policy, while, of course, maintaining ordinary review standards.

The editors wish to thank the following reviewers for their work with published and not published paper during 1996:

Richard Baskerville
Gro Bjerknes
Kristin Braa
Keld Bødker
Gunnar Christensen
Andrew Clements
Pelle Ehn
Joan Greenbaum
Guido Gryczan
Peter Holm
Marius Janson
Karl Kautz
Heinz Klein
Jona Löwgren
Kim Halskov Madsen
Lars Mathiassen
Eric Monteiro
Michael Müller
Markku Nurminen
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