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Crossing the academia–practice divide in interaction design

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Crossing the Academia–Practice Divide in Interaction Design

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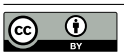
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Abstract

The divide between academic research and professional practice in interaction design continues to challenge how methods, ethics, and innovation are understood and applied. This CHI 2026 meet-up creates a forum where academics, practitioners, and industry leaders can reflect together, share experiences, and explore collaborations. Structured activities will help participants map shared concerns (such as ethics in AI, sustainability, usability in context, and evolving educational practices) while also strengthening cross-sector connections and identifying opportunities for action. The aim is to cultivate a practice-aware, inclusive community that ensures HCI research remains connected, relevant, and impactful. The meet-up capitalizes on the conversations and relationships sparked at ARPPID 2025 (Academic Research and Professional Practice in Interaction Design), a working conference that brought these issues to the fore, extending them into the CHI community and charting directions for future collaboration.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing**; • **Interaction Design**; • **Interaction design process and methods**; • **user-centered design**;



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Keywords

academia–practice divide, translational research, hybrid professional roles, research–practice collaboration

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1 Main Goal of the Meet-up

The proposed meet-up will convene the ARPPID (Academic Research and Professional Practice in Interaction Design) community, a network initiated through the ARPPID 2025 Working Conference [6]. ARPPID emerged as a response to the challenges and opportunities of bridging academic research and professional practice in interaction design. A central rationale for this meet-up is the persistent tension between academic research and professional practice in HCI, a theme repeatedly highlighted in the literature. Austin, Abdelnour-Nocera, and Clemmensen's "Era of Ferment" study [1] shows how HCI remains unsettled, with divergent epistemologies shaping practice in ways that complicate collaboration across academia and industry. Hertzum and Clemmensen's cross-cultural work on usability [4] further demonstrates that practitioners interpret and apply HCI constructs in highly situated ways, often diverging from academic framings. Earlier, Clemmensen [3]

pointed to structural mismatches between HCI and software engineering knowledge, identifying why research insights often fail to translate into everyday design and development contexts. In parallel, Churchill's work on the HCI Living Curriculum [2] argues that curricula must be flexible and continuously updated through feedback loops with professional practice. More recently, Smits and colleagues [5] have advanced practice-led research agendas in recommender system design, underscoring the value of grounding research outputs in practitioners' needs and contexts. Taken together, this body of work underscores the urgent need for dedicated spaces, such as the proposed meet-up, where academics, practitioners, and industry stakeholders can negotiate these tensions, align vocabularies, and co-create more sustainable bridges across research and practice in interaction design.

The aim of this meet-up is threefold:

1. Consolidation: Strengthen and expand the ARPPID network established in 2025 by reconnecting participants and welcoming new members from the CHI community.
2. Collaboration: Explore avenues for sustained collaboration across academia, industry, and policy, with a focus on interaction design challenges such as ethics, AI, sustainability, and practice-based innovation.
3. Community Building: Provide a forum at CHI for academics, practitioners, and students who are seeking alternatives to purely AI- or theory-driven HCI approaches, emphasizing the integration of research with lived practice.

This meet-up is relevant to CHI attendees because it addresses a core concern in the field: ensuring that interaction design research is not isolated from the contexts of application but rather embedded in professional practice and aligned with human and societal needs.

2 Planned activities

The session is designed to fit within a 90-minute timeslot:

- Welcome and Framing (10 min): Introduce the community vision and summarize key insights from ARPPID 2025.
- Lightning Introductions (20 min): Participants briefly introduce themselves, their current work, and their interest in bridging academia and practice.
- Community Mapping and Discussion (45 min): Small-group activity initiated with a schedule of possible topics, followed by identifying shared themes, challenges, and possible collaborations. Identified themes and challenges will be treated as "wicked problems' to be solved through a design thinking exercise. Outputs will be captured using visual mapping techniques.
- Wrap-up and Next Steps (15 min): Plenary discussion of outputs in terms of next steps for the community (e.g., publication outlets, workshops, funding proposals, policy engagement).

The format balances networking, structured discussion, and actionable outcomes.

3 Organizers

The organizing team brings together leading voices from both academia and industry, with extensive experience in practice-based research, design, and community building. José Abdelnour-Nocera (University of West London) works on socio-technical systems and design for diversity, while Teresa Macchia (Rolls-Royce) leads digital transformation initiatives with a strong human-centered focus. Elizabeth Churchill (MBZUAI, formerly Google Research) is a senior HCI researcher known for her leadership in bridging academic and industry design communities. Aletta Smits (HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht) develops tools that make design research directly useful for practitioners, emphasizing user control in algorithmic systems. Marta Rey Babarro (Zillow) is an industry leader in UX research and innovation, with a commitment to sustainable and inclusive design. Torkil Clemmensen (Copenhagen Business School) has a long-standing track record in HCI, work analysis, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Tony Russell-Rose (City St George's, University of London) embodies a hybrid role that spans academia and professional practice, bringing expertise in search user experience, applied information retrieval, and the research–practice interface. Marta Lárusdóttir (Reykjavík University, Iceland) has been central to advancing user-centered design in both academic and industrial contexts. Together, the team has organized international workshops, led cross-disciplinary projects, and published on inclusive, practice-driven HCI, ensuring effective facilitation and sustained impact for the meet-up.

4 Towards an Ongoing Community

The meet-up will be of interest to multiple CHI constituencies: academics seeking to connect research with professional practice; practitioners and Industry Professionals interested in embedding research insights into everyday design work, policymakers and stakeholders who value translational research and practice-based innovation; early-career researchers and tudents looking for communities of practice aligned with inclusion, diversity, and real-world impact.

This event resonates with CHI's long-standing mission of advancing research that makes a difference in people's lives. By fostering dialogue across academic and professional boundaries, this meet-up will strengthen ties within the HCI community and position ARPPID as a sustainable, global network. We will also take the opportunity to invite attendees to the next edition of this conference in The Netherlands in June 2026, rebranded as RAPPID.

The CHI 2026 meet-up will provide an anchor point for a growing international community that addresses the academia–practice divide in interaction design. Building on the momentum of the ARPPID 2025 Working Conference, the session will consolidate connections, foster collaborations, and chart future directions. By embedding ethical awareness, practice-based insights, and inclusivity at its core, the meet-up offers a vital contribution to CHI's ongoing conversation on responsible and impactful design.

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