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LTER DataBits
Information Management Newsletter of
The Long Term Ecological Research Network
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◆ News Bits
A whirlwind tour of collaborative practice
- Karen Baker and Helena Karasti, Palmer Station

The Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) is a computer systems' research and development community that brings together the social and technical aspects for supporting collaboration. Karen Baker and Helena Karasti attended the biannual CSCW Conference in November 2002 (http://www.acm.org/cscw2002/). CSCW is sponsored by the Association of Computing Machinery (ACM). The ACM is an organization founded in 1947 (http://www.acm.org/) to advance the skills of information technology (IT) professionals and students worldwide and it houses several special interest groups (SIGs) such as Groupware (SIGGROUP) and Management of Data (SIGMOD).

Karen and Helena participated at CSCW02 in a metadata-related workshop entitled "Storytelling and Collaborative Activities". A paper derived from our presentation will be published this year in the SIGGROUP Bulletin. In addition, we were able to attend several tutorials including "A Whirlwind Tour of CSCW Research", "Understanding Collaborative Activities and Applications: Methods for Studying Usefulness, Usability and Use of CSCW Systems", and "Collaboration Technology in Teams, Organizations, and Communities".

Helena has returned to the Oulu University in Finland, with her UCSD and LTER ties continuing. As a professor in the Department of Information Processing Science, she recently placed an ad (http://www.tol.oulu.fi/lter.html) for master's students to work with her on LTER materials collected during her year at UCSD. From the diverse ethnographic materials, final transcriptions of more than 50 interviews are being completed just this month.

In collaboration with Karen Baker and Geof Bowker, she has proposed to lead a workshop at the European Computer Supported Cooperative Work conference to be held in Helsinki, Finland this fall (http://ecscw2003.oulu.fi/). The workshop, titled "Computer Supported Scientific Collaboration", aims to bring together for the first time those interested in use of CSCW views and methods within the scientific arena. The workshop proposal is in recognition that much of the CSCW community work focuses on the business, medical, and education fields whereas the challenges that scientific collaborations pose for CSCW may be somewhat different.

The alignment of opportunities was most fortunate to support a one year study with the LTER community combining an ethnographic focus on technologically mediated work practices with participatory design (e.g. Information Systems Research in Scandinavia, http://iris.informatik.gu.se/). A report and paper are in preparation to serve as a continuation of the dialogue initiated with the LTER IM community in February 2002 at the IM Executive Committee meeting in San Diego and at the LTER IM Committee meeting in July in Orlando. Having introduced the concepts of sociotechnical systems and participatory design, plans are developing for Karen to visit Oulu in relation to attending ECSCW03 and for Helena to revisit San Diego. The visits allow continuation of analysis and co-writing, work with the students, and plans for future collaboration as well as of investigations into local floras, faunas and saunas.