Foreword

Welcome from the General Chair and the Program Co-Chairs

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the 2008 IEEE Symposium on Visual Languages and Human-Centric Computing (VL/HCC), located at the Haus der bayerischen Landwirtschaft Herrsching in Herrsching, a small town on the east shore of beautiful Lake Ammersee, 35km southwest of Munich in Germany.

We are particularly pleased to present this volume of the VL/HCC proceedings, celebrating the 24th meeting of the Symposium (originally Workshop) on Visual Languages and Human-Centric Computing (previously called Visual Languages from 1984 to 2000 and Human-Centric Computing from 2001 to 2003.) Looking across this whole history, this year starts the 25th year of activity of the Visual Languages community. And after 13 years, it is hosted again in Germany. This year, VL/HCC is co-located with two other conferences that focus on different, but related aspects of the visual approach: The ACM Symposium on Software Visualization (SoftVis’08) and the International Conference on the Theory and Application of Diagrams (Diagrams 2008). These three conferences, together with two VL/HCC workshops (Layout of Engineering Diagrams and Sketch Tools for Diagramming), and the VL/HCC Graduate Student Consortium make up Visual Week 2008. Through this co-location and exchange among Visual Week attendees, VL/HCC as part of Visual Week promises to provide a stimulating forum for exchange and debate around a wide range of topics relating to visual languages and human-centric computing in general.

We are pleased to welcome two renowned keynote speakers. Professor John Stasko, an expert in information visualization and Director of the Information Interfaces Research Group at the Georgia Institute of Technology, USA, delivers the first keynote speech entitled “Visualization for Information Exploration and Analysis”. The second keynote speech entitled “Model Driven Development with Mechatronic UML” is delivered by Professor Wilhelm Schäfer, a leading researcher in the application of visual languages in Software Engineering and head of the Software Engineering group at the University of Paderborn, Germany. Both of these speakers are serving as joint keynote speakers, to emphasize the common aspects of the co-located conferences. John Stasko is a joint VL/HCC & SoftVis keynote speaker, and Wilhelm Schäfer delivers a joint VL/HCC & Diagrams keynote.

These keynotes are the highlights of a high-quality technical program. The Call for Papers for VL/HCC 2008 attracted 63 submissions of full papers and 12 submissions of short papers. Every paper, in both categories, was independently and anonymously reviewed by three members of the Program Committee. After the first round of reviews, the authors were invited to submit rebuttals; this was followed by further discussions among the reviewers. At the end of this process, the Program Chairs selected 18 full papers and 4 short papers, for an acceptance rate of 29%. To enrich the technical program, they also accepted as short papers 14 papers that had been originally submitted as full. At the conference, these 36 papers were organized into sessions addressing visualization, formal methods, domain-specific languages, spreadsheets, empirical studies and tools for end-user and professional programmers, and user interaction techniques.

The result of this thorough review and selection process is the present volume, which also reflects how the VL/HCC community has been evolving. While paradigms for the formal definition of visual languages seem to have now stabilized, new domains of application are being addressed by visual languages and associated tools. Increasingly, when new applications of visual communication are proposed, they are supported by contextualized user studies, while systematic empirical studies of user behaviors continue to provide insight into underlying cognitive and communicative phenomena. Although the promise of a completely visual form of communication is far from being achieved – and will probably never be – it is rewarding to note that in its 25th year, the community is still energized by questions of how computational studies, accompanied by a focus on interaction, can facilitate communication among humans, and between humans and machines.

Numerous people have contributed to making this edition of VL/HCC a success. We could not have accomplished our tasks as general chair and Program Committee co-chairs alone. We would particularly like to thank the members of the Program Committee, acknowledged on the following page, for their careful and thoughtful consideration of the submitted papers. In some cases, our Program Committee delegated papers to outside reviewers, listed on a following page, whose contribution we also gratefully acknowledge.
We would also especially like to thank the following individuals: Emmanuel Pietriga of INRIA, France, did a magnificent job as publicity chair and also designed and managed the Web site; Alan Blackwell of Cambridge University, UK successfully put together an excellent satellite program of two workshops; John Pane and Susan Wiedenbeck secured funding for, and organized, the graduate student consortium, which has become a tradition at this conference; Barbara Wirtz of the Haus der bayerischen Landwirtschaft Herrsching energetically cooperated with the general chair, who also served as local chair of the co-located conferences, during the laborious task of making local arrangements for the three conferences of Visual Week 2008; Johannes Spreter generously permitted the use of his photographs of Herrsching and its neighborhood for the web site, printed material, and this Proceedings. We thank Gem Stapleton from the University of Brighton, UK, general chair of Diagrams, and Rainer Koschke from the University of Bremen, Germany, general chair of SoftVis, for jointly organizing Visual Week 2008; and Florian Brieler, Sonja Maier, as well as Steffen Mazanek, PhD students at the Universität der Bundeswehr München, for running the registration desk at Visual Week 2008. Finally, Florian Brieler reliably implemented the online registration and payment system for Visual Week, Steffen Mazanek diligently compiled this volume, and Sonja Maier made the Oktoberfest arrangements.

We would also like to thank our sponsors: IEEE for assisting with the organizational and financial aspects of the conference; INRIA, France, for providing the call-for-papers flyers and posters; Microsoft Research for financially supporting the conference banquet at Andechs Monastery; and the Universität der Bundeswehr München for its organizational support. Without their support, VL/HCC 2008 would not have been possible.

We hope you find the Symposium intellectually stimulating, that you take pleasure in meeting up with old colleagues and forging links with new ones, and enjoy the many attractions of Herrsching and the south of Munich.

Mark Minas  
General Chair  

Paolo Bottoni and Mary Beth Rosson  
Program Committee Co-Chairs