



European SeniorWatch Observatory and Inventory -
*A market study about the specific IST needs of older and disabled people
to guide industry, RTD and policy*

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IST-1999-29086

Technology and the Elderly

*A major awareness and research cluster project initiated
by the Dutch government*

Report Version:	1.0 by NPOE
Report Preparation Date:	December 28, 2001
Classification:	<i>public</i>
Contract Start Date:	1 st of October 2000
Duration:	18 Month
Project Co-ordinator:	<i>empirica</i>
Partners:	WRC, STAKES, EURAG, NPOE



Project funded by the European Community under the
"Information Society Technology" Programme (1998-2002)

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Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Case: Technology and the elderly. A major awareness and research cluster project initiated by Dutch government	6
2.1	Description	6
2.2	Analysis	8
2.3	Acknowledgements and links	9

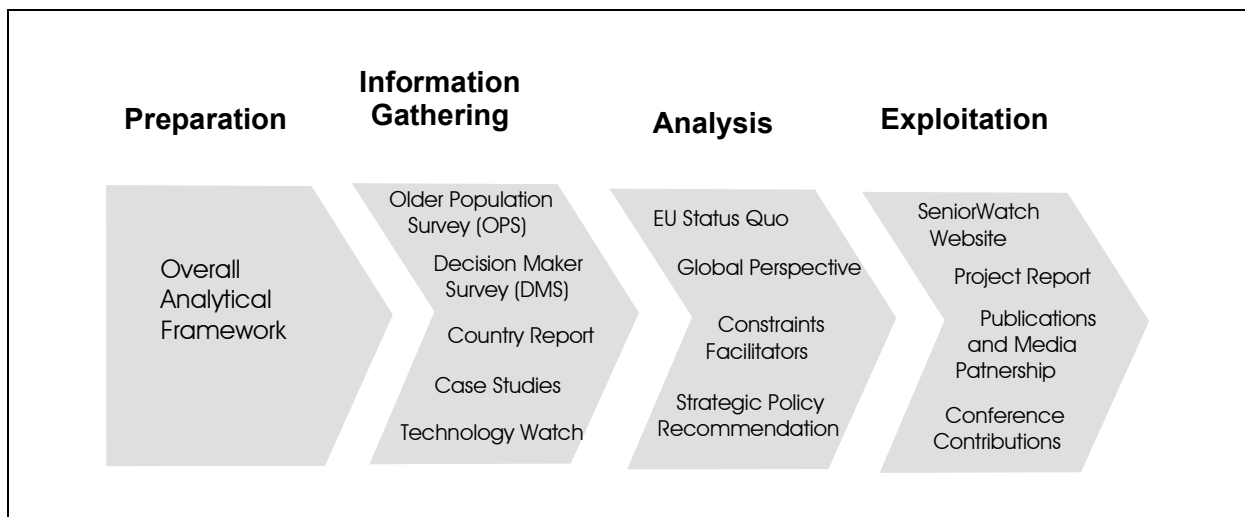
1 Introduction

The SeniorWatch project addresses the need to understand better and to monitor the market dynamics of Information Society Technologies (IST) applications and services targeted at older (and older disabled) citizens. Currently, there is insufficient empirical data about the needs of older citizens which could be met by IST-based applications and services, and a lack of awareness on the part of industry, users and politicians that hampers the rapid exploitation of new market opportunities arising from IST developments. In order to redress this state of affairs SeniorWatch will provide a European single source of empirical information on the market potential of IST-based products and services targeted at older people. The main objectives can be summarised as follows:

- to help and encourage European industry to address the market opportunities, and particularly challenge current competitive advantages of the US industries,
- to enable policy to really influence the current situation and to benchmark achievements between different European regions and countries and to make comparisons with competing world economies (Japan, US) most relevant to the field,
- to inform citizens about what is now possible with the support of IST and, thus, encourage them to demand IST products and services which meet their requirements.

As illustrated by Figure 1-1, these objectives require a comprehensive methodological approach to be applied. On the basis of an overall analytical framework, it integrates a set of complementary research methods such as European-wide surveys of older people and of decision makers in care services, best practice case studies, technology watch work shops and country reports. Synthesising the various types of empirical information gathered with help of these methods will finally enable the project to arrive at an holistic overview, to establish a technology and market observatory, and to derive policy recommendations to accelerate market development. Research results will be exploited by means of different measures.

Figure 1-1: The Project Phases of SeniorWatch



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As part of the project's overall methodological approach the SeniorWatch case studies aim at providing a useful source of information on how the IST-related needs of the target groups in question can adequately be served. They are also intended to help to understand - in a qualitative manner - more deeply specific aspects of the market situation related to IST

products and services relevant for older citizens. To allow a comparative analysis of real-life examples, a common approach for selecting and describing suitable cases was developed. The main selection criteria applied in this context include:

- suitability of the case to provide input to the overall understanding and analysis of the market for IST among older people;
- suitability of the case to serve as an example of a success story (or failure) that can guide and motivate others to take actions that will support the diffusion and take-up of IST by or for older people.

In the following the SeniorWatch case study no.2 is described.

2 Case: Technology and the elderly. A major awareness and research cluster project initiated by Dutch government

2.1 Description

In 1993, the European Year for the Elderly, a strategic conference had been hold in order to get an insight in the way on which the possibilities of 'technology for the elderly' could be explored and realised. The government initiated project has been realised after studies about the field. The findings were: Elderly form a growing age group in Dutch society. Not only is this section of the population growing in size, people are also living increasingly longer. When asked, the vast majority of the elderly indicate that they want to participate in society independently for as long as possible. This will continue unabated in the years to come. The manufacturers and suppliers of services are barely responding to this social development. The elderly are frequently confronted with products and services which take no account of their declining physical abilities and changing social circumstances. This makes life more difficult for them then it need to be.

In response to the importance attached to the ability of the elderly to function independently at home for as long as possible, and to help close the gap between demand and supply, in 1995 saw the start of the Gerontechnology Project.: 'Technology and the Elderly'

The overall aim of the project 'Technology and the Elderly' was:

- 1) to help close the gap between supply and demand in the market for the elderly,
- 2) to blur the dividing lines between aid devices and comfort articles that appeal to everyone and
- 3) to demonstrate that involving seniors led to design-for-all products (user friendly and attractive products for many people).

Over sixty demonstration projects related to nearly all aspects of daily life to the electronic highway-appliances. At the end of each year a national conference has been hold. The project was structured around five courses of action. The first three are aimed at the design and distribution process of (technological) products and services and enhancing safety as experienced by the elderly by executing pilot projects. The fourth course of action is devoted to gathering, opening up and distributing the knowledge and experience gained within the project. And the fith is aimed at publicity.

The *Gerondesign* course of action was aimed at generating a wide range of model products. Specific account was taken of aspects such as selfsufficiency and acceptance by the elderly. 14 pilot projects were carried out in the following areas:

- personal care;
- residential facilities;
- furniture;
- the bathroom;
- the kitchen;

Short Title

- household appliances;
- recreation/leisure;
- communication.

Within the course of action concerning *distribution*, there were pilot projects aimed at making distribution concepts connect up better with the wishes and abilities of the elderly. The main point of the activity was to improve senior citizens' use of the main distribution channel: the shop. Pilot projects were executed in the following areas:

- strengthening the information function of the retail sector;
- improving existing distribution channels;
- developing information products aimed at selfsufficiency;

distributing care products in 'normal' shops.

The development of this course of action proceeded on a two-track basis:

- improving the user-friendliness of existing equipment.
- developing new equipment in which special attention is paid to the integration of various functions such as social alarms and fire and burglary alarms within one device.

Specific attention was paid to the question of how to prevent the facilities in the area of social safety being associated with illness and the need for aid and how to change the image.

The experiences gained during the pilot projects are laid down, made accessible and distributed to the various target groups so that they are made generally available. This relates both to the experiences gained with the contribution of the expertise of the elderly and the assistance in the design of products and services or preparing and reaching the market.

Workshops were held on the themes 'changing the image of social alarm systems', 'the safe bathroom' and 'telecommunication' and 'Design for All'. A feasibility study was carried out into the use of electronic superhighway by the elderly and a preliminary study on mail ordering was also carried out. Two mirror groups' were instituted, one specifically for making optimum use of expertise of the elderly and the other for the transfer of knowledge. The mirror groups can be used to exchange, check and distribute experiences, and the key points of the project can be taken up in the existing groups and organisations.

Result

At the end of the project in 1999, the documentation book 'Technology and the elderly' was published: this handbook describes all the knowledge and experiences that has been gained during the project. Further a videotape 'Senior power' was produced in order to disseminate the ideas behind the project. Workbooks were produced that offer manufacturers, designers and senior citizens concrete practical information.

A trial issue of the Silver Pages helps older people to find their way around what is on offer. It contains specific information on the theme 'the bathroom'.

Workshops with students of design schools and seniors have been held.

Context

The Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, and the Ministry of Housing, Urban Planning and the Environment financed the project. KITTZ (Quality

Institute for Applied Home Care Innovation), Groningen coordinated the project and Willems & van den Wildenberg did the preliminary research.

The target group of the demonstration projects is the older people in the Netherlands (active as well as frail). But the philosophy lying behind the approach to involve older people in the product development process, is to get 'design-for-all' products. So the target group of the overall project is the designer and industry.

2.2 Analysis

Impact

The aim has been reached. The awareness of manufacturers and industrial designers that older consumers are an interesting target group has been increased.

Also the readiness for carrying out user tests and involving older people in user panels increased. The awareness that only 10 or 12 respondents are sufficient for user tests, is very important.

A reaction of a manufacturer: "Contrary to the prevailing images, the elderly are vocal and critical users. They are not easily led up the garden path. The product has become easier to use for all. Without becoming a 'product for the elderly'". Another reaction was: "What's good for the old is also good for the young. It's amazing that we didn't realise that before".

Unfortunately user tests are not standard in the development process and not standard yet in the curricula of design schools in the Netherlands.

It was a great surprise to realise that most manufacturers and designers never test their products or services with users in the field at all. At most they test their products with some employees as respondents. One of the reasons that manufacturers don't let carry out user tests is the misunderstanding that research is always expensive because you need a large number of respondents, and that it will take a lot of time.

To the great surprise of manufacturers, it appeared that involving (elderly) people during the designing process is a simple, inexpensive method with a small group of selected people, that yields many useful data.

Design schools get more and more an eye for the elderly as consumer group (marketing and ergonomic aspects) and for teaching user tests.

Consumer organisations for elderly people have 'seniors and technology' at the agenda.

A focused design school 'Human Technology' has been established with strong relationship to the project. This school has user tests and design-for-all approach in the curriculum.

A Human Technology Expert Centre has been established with the aim to gather information available in the Netherlands and abroad, to make it accessible and to contribute to the development of products aimed at a wider public.

The participation and application of the government, manufacturers, industrial designers, design schooling (long term influence).

SME (small and medium enterprises) has no designers in service, so only indirect influence will focus them at elderly: The market must have added value to involve the elderly or the government should permanently stimulate the involvement of the elderly.

Lessons to learn

Lessons that can be learned are: there is no success without demand pull and awareness. But also no success without government stimulation of industry and no success without knowledge focused at seniors at design schools (long term).

Manufacturers will take account of elderly consumers and will involve seniors in user tests if they see financial surplus values.

Perspectives

As a result of the strategic conference held in March 1999, a new three-year's project (called Seniors and Technology) started in 2000, financed by the ministries and also co-ordinated by KITZ. The aim of this project is to determine what knowledge or information is required and in what form it is to be presented. Therefore 9 national networks (for instance a network Design-for-All, network User-friendly living environment, network Consumerempowerment and network Media) have been started in December 2000. They play an important part in the exchange of know-how and expertise among its participants and the joining of forces. One of the results of the network Design-for-All is the distribution of the Design for All Award this year.

2.3 Acknowledgements and links

Person to contact

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WWW links

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