

A. PEINE, L. NEVEN. *Social-structural lag in the design of smart environments*. *Gerontechnology* 2012;11(2):194; doi:10.4017/gt.2012.11.02.285.00 **Purpose** We address how designers of smart environments address social-structural lag problems. We build on our earlier research that revisited Lawton's classic distinction between individual and social-structural lag and the implications for design processes^{1,2}. The research presented in this paper demonstrates how an individual lag perspective often comes to prevail in design processes despite initial intentions to the contrary, and thus our research sheds light on some difficulties in the design process to incorporate the image of pro-active and healthy older technology users. **Method** We followed a qualitative-inductive approach in the grounded theory tradition, using a theoretical sampling strategy to identify relevant cases³⁻⁶. More specifically, we conducted a total of 30 open interviews with key personnel in 12 design projects, and applied an open coding scheme to unravel the imagery of older technology users informing these projects. **Results & Discussion** In projects whose objectives initially employed a social-structural lag perspective, an individual lag perspective often prevailed including the associated imagery of frail and ill older technology users. This suggests that incorporating an imagery of pro-active older technology users poses significant problems. We focus on one such difficulty: an individual lag perspective seems to fit nicely with existing methods to address and specify user needs as an input for product design. We explore in more detail the similarities between an individual lag perspective and existing methods of user research that we found in our case studies. We conclude that in order to do justice to a social-structural lag perspective the role of the methodological repertoire needs to be re-thought to elicit user needs in innovation. We will provide details on the design implications of this approach.

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