

# Housing and Daily Living

## Self-Determined Community Living through Technology Adoption among Older Adults: An Action Research Study in Caring Communities B. Pottharst, T. Altenhöner. *Gerontechnology* 25(s)

**Purpose** An ageing society is increasingly confronted with a digitally connected world. Promoting Self-Determination, Quality of Life, and Social Participation among older adults within their communities is therefore of particular importance. Access to digital technologies and the development of relevant skills are essential to maintaining autonomy and integrating older adults into support networks (Hoff & Pottharst, 2023). The joint design and use of learning and experience spaces, embedded within local Caring Communities, provide opportunities to strengthen social ties and foster solidarity (Wörle et al., 2023). The aim of this research is to explore how digital technologies reach older adults in their local communities and how they learn to use and integrate these technologies into their daily lives. The study is based on the premise that the adoption and use of digital technologies in later life depend on personal needs and the social-spatial support structures available in their community. **Methods** This study employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, ensuring methodological triangulation to enhance the robustness and validity of the findings. The quantitative component was conducted within the project „Ageing@BI“ (2024), a cross-sectional survey in Bielefeld, Germany among adults aged 65 and above, focusing on age, health and aspects of digitalization (n=467). The qualitative component included participant observations during various activities such as one-on-one peer consultations on smartphone use, exchanges of technical experiences in senior cafés, demonstrations of household assistance technologies and guided tours of model apartments. In addition, different transfer events were documented in 2025 (n=8) and the innovative ITDP methodology was developed (Input, Technologies and Discussion on theme tables in own premises, Plenary). A practice-oriented approach further explored patterns of technology adoption in later life based on observation protocols, analyzed using the Documentary Method (Bohnsack, 2013). The results reported here are drawn from the qualitative phase of the study. **Results** The transfer project supported the assumption of a link between technological adoption and spatial context. Across all activities, five criteria emerged as key to fostering effective learning and experience spaces for older adults: (1) a target group-oriented invitation and introduction; (2) a positive attitude and welcoming atmosphere; (3) sufficient observation time with gradual familiarization; (4) practical relevance for daily life and health; (5) and continuous guidance and support. **Recommendations** In order to facilitate the adoption of technology, it is essential to integrate theoretical concepts with practical applications. One effective approach to achieving this integration is to complement conventional instructional methods, such as lectures and presentations, with interactive formats that allow people to engage with the subject matter hands-on. Practical applicability and real-world use should be enabled, for instance through stations offering moderated trials. In addition, peer-based approaches in community-based support should be expanded as older adults can learn effectively from one another and peer counselling as well as learning by doing can systematically promote this.

### References

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