

C. Leonardi, C. Mennecozzi, E. Not, F. Pianesi, M. Zancanaro. *Getting older people involved in the process of ambient assisted living research and development. Gerontechnology 2008; 7(2):152.* Technologies for Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) can play a crucial role in increasing the feeling of confidence required for Aging-in-Place in elder people, and in their families and associated caring personnel. AAL may offer some basic support to everyday activities, detect health critical situations, and may facilitate and strengthen the communication with loved ones. However, the success of AAL solutions greatly depends on a sound design. Even more than with 'ordinary' technologies, in fact, acceptance by users determine the actual adoption of the technology. No matter how functional a technology is, elderly will not use it, if they perceive it as intrusive, complex, embarrassing, revealing their limitations, or disrupting their home environment. Recent studies have started to shed some light on the issues related to the effective involvement of older people in the design-development-validation cycle^{1,2}. In many respects, however, we are still at the initial stages, with the difficulties due to the poor understanding of elders as users of AAL services exacerbated by the experimental nature of many of the underlying technology (for instance, ambient intelligence) and functionalities (such as behaviour monitoring), and by the ensuing ethical and privacy issues. In the end, involving elders into the process of designing AAL solutions means making them part of a complex research process that requires the building and nourishing of a long-lasting network of users and stakeholders for project support; this goes well beyond the current practices of sporadically resorting to care givers associations or end users to deal with specific project requirements (for instance, requirement elicitation, evaluation)¹. **Investigation protocol for AAL projects** We present and discuss a protocol for the design of advanced AAL services that distils insights gained in the course of the NETCARITY (FP6) project by a multidisciplinary team (interaction designers, social scientists and care givers). We focus on a concrete strategy for: (i) motivating the participation of elders in the design team and establishing long-term relationship with the other elders and the 'experts'; (ii) reducing the risk of drop-outs; and (iii) securing the quality of the information obtained. The attainment of those objectives requires: (i) nurturing the sense of belonging to a pioneering group; (ii) emphasizing the value of individual and group contributions; (iii) increasing trust and confidence; and (iv) developing a sense of ownership of the project's results. Moves and actions that are instrumental to those goals are: (i) the endorsement and direct involvement in the project of local authorities and elders associations, with the role of mediators and guarantors; (ii) the constant integration of design activities with existing daily practices, for instance, in aggregation centres, by embedding the activities of the design team in regular activities, and at home, by finding suitable time and space slots where testing activities can be carried on; and (iii) the continuous clarification to elders of how any specific activity (such as interviews, focus groups) contributes to the following steps of the project and to the project as a whole, and how it is linked to previous activities (such as through the appropriate selection of the material used, questions, stimuli, props, etc., and periodic events where findings are presented and discussed with users).

References

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Keywords: user-centered design, ambient assisted living

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