

Best Practice

A Story Table: ICT to overcome social isolation

The 85 years and older inhabitants of the Twiske Home, a facility for assisted living in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, have chosen a special facility for story telling as a dedicated work of art that the government was willing to provide. The Waag Society, an Amsterdam-based organization devoted to the development of new media, took up the challenge to design and produce it in co-design with the inhabitants.

The Story Table is a specially designed piece of furniture that offers space to up to six elderly users, but usually many more are present to comment or to join in viewing and listening. On built-in flat screens the elderly have access to musical, film, and television material of 20th century Dutch cultural life, from cabaret to the coronation of Queen Wilhelmina, and from World War II and the liberation by the Allied Forces, to the major flooding of Zeeland in 1953, and the somewhat smaller one of Tuindorp Oostzaan in 1960. The inhabitants of the Twiske Home add their comments, gossip, and stories. These are recorded, archived, and can be listened

back. The Story Table thus develops over time into a database of stories and in an asset to both the memories of individual inhabitants and the oral history of 20th century Amsterdam.

In the project 'Story Table' the Waag Society researched the conditions for a high-quality, interactive experience-based environment for inhabitants of a home for the elderly. Central to this endeavour is that the elderly users are content producers and don't just navigate through existing material. Designing an interface that doesn't require the users to learn a completely new skill has been a challenge. A tactile interface that can be used as intuitively as possible arose as the most effective.

From the first day of its co-design by the inhabitants of the Twiske Home, the Story Table has met extensive interest of the elderly, leading towards a major increase in social intercourse and conversation.

The design is extremely user-friendly. On the basis of tests with future users prototyping took place in small steps and with continuous adjustment. The users insisted, for instance, that navigation and recording should be clearly separated. Only two



Older people concentrating at the Story Table

Photo by the Waag Society

intelligent buttons are present: start and stop. They are context-sensitive and are used to navigate, to run, pause or stop presentations, and starting and stopping of the recording of stories.

The design process of the Story Table may be viewed in 92 pictures at www.factory.org/verhalentafel/ The Story Table has been designed by members from the Waag Society's R&D Group 'Interfacing Access', consisting of Janine Huizenga, Tom Demeyer and Aske Hopman, in collaboration with the artists Hans Muller and Michaël van Eeden. The team intends to produce more Story Tables for other facilities of assisted living in the region.

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In Memoriam Michel Frossard PhD (1943 - 2002)

Michel Frossard was born on June 25th 1943 and died on September 4th 2002. Michel was a member of the editorial board of *Gerontechnology*, and Professor of Economics at the University of Grenoble in France. He was one of the pioneers of health economics in France; his expertise in the economics of human ageing led him to work with several French government departments and the World Health Organisation. He published widely, and his academic interests included quality of life, retirement, case management, and new technologies.



Michel believed in the value of pluridisciplinary approaches to working with elderly people, and conducting research studies. He was appointed Director of Grenoble's Centre Pluridisciplinaire de Gérontologie (CPDG) in 1989. This centre was estab-

lished in 1971 to provide gerontology education for health and social care professionals, and to conduct research into various aspects of ageing, and care of the elderly. More recently, Michel co-founded the Laboratoire Interuniversitaire de Gérontologie de Grenoble (LI2G). The LI2G is a meeting point for researchers from a range of disciplines, including medicine, economics, psychology, and engineering. One of the main axes of research concerns new technologies for elderly people, both in community and institutional settings.

Since the mid-1990s, Michel directed several research studies into economic aspects of 'Telegerontology'. He coordinated the first French book about gerontechnology, entitled 'Télémédecine en Gérontologie', which included 18 chapters about different applications of technology in the field of elderly care (such as teleassistance, telemonitoring, and teleconsultation) and gerontology education.

Michel enjoyed traveling to different parts of the world (including the United Kingdom, Canada, Africa, and America), to collaborate with colleagues in the fields of gerontology and health economics. He had been looking forward to presenting his most recent work at the 4th International Conference of Gerontechnology in Miami this year, but unfortunately, his premature death prevented him from participating as planned. Michel is remembered by his colleagues and students as an enthusiastic teacher and innovative researcher. Despite his busy schedule, he was always willing to help those who sought his advice, and remained modest about his own achievements. His untimely death is deeply regretted by his family, friends, and colleagues.

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