Published on *Digital Agenda for Europe* (https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda)

Safer, more active and independent: the proven benefits of ‘Ambient assisted-living' technology

Published by Editor Connect on 02/02/2012

[1]

When I am less worried, I do not think about the fact that I'm alone': the words of an older Swedish person who participated in a recent trial of European technology that supports active ageing. Loneliness from being disconnected from friends and family, fears about health and safety and worries about security are some of the many burdens of old age.

Share this

Date:

02/02/2012

Venue:

Speaker:

EU-funded researchers are proving how technology can alleviate the problems.

Like the person quoted above - who, according to carers, now talks about 'Ambient assisted-living' (AAL) technology 'a lot' - dozens of older people across Europe have recently experienced firsthand the benefits of ICT applications that can make them feel safer and more secure, monitor their health and help them stay in touch with family and friends.

As part of the EU-funded 'Mainstreaming on ambient intelligence' (Monami [2]) project, more than 80 elderly people living alone and in care homes in Spain, Slovakia and Sweden tested a wide range of AAL applications.

'The user feels much better - he went to the patio to plant flowers because he feels safer with the panic button… he is willing to engage in more activities due to Monami,' noted one carer involved in the Slovakian trial.

'It affects her everyday life in terms of confidence and security. The user suffers from episodes of

dizziness and now, with the Monami system, is much more confident and feels safer…(more confident especially in regards to not feeling alone),' observed another.

The trialled services use sensors, actuators and smart software as part of an ambient intelligent environment that communicates with users and carers via alarms, TVs, computers or mobile devices. The services were run on Monami's innovative open software platform, which allows bundles of applications to be easily installed and tailored to individual users' needs, overcoming the interoperability, customisation and scalability issues that have often hampered the roll out of AAL systems to date.

With applications such as DoorSure, WindowSure and DoorVue older trial users of the Monami system were automatically alerted if their door or windows were left unlocked and they could check via a camera who was ringing the bell. With AppSure they were reminded if they had left the kettle or cooker on. And with PresenceVUE and SUREZone carers were alerted in the event of an accident, a health problem or if something in the home appeared to be amiss.

'Europe's population in general is getting older, and one side-effect of that is that increasing numbers of older people are living alone. They don't have their families close by and they need to find ways to cope: they might forget to take their medicine, turn off the stove or suffer an accident at home. They are in a risk zone that can be addressed by ICT,' explains Theresa Skehan, the Monami project manager at the Swedish Institute of Assistive Technology (SIAT). 'Applications such as those deployed in the Monami trials give older people the support they need, they can deal with safety issues and make them more comfortable.'

Safer... and more independent

Indeed, applications focused on increasing safety and security were identified as the most beneficial features of the Monami system by the vast majority of trial users, particularly at test sites where older people were living at home alone rather than in assisted-living facilities.

The system not only made users 'feel' safer, it also made them safer. In one incident, also in Slovakia, Monami's SMOKESure fire alarm service enabled the son of an elderly trial user to awake his father after he had fallen asleep while making tea, preventing a fire.

Martin Knapp, the director of the Personal Social Services Research Unit of the London School of Economics, coordinated the Monami trials, which involved 87 users: 31 at a care home in Spain, 25 people living by themselves in Slovakia and 31 in Sweden, who were also living alone. Users filled in questionnaires about how they thought the technology might help them before the start of the trials and were then reassessed after using the Monami applications for two or three months.

Knapp notes that besides the direct benefits of the technology, such as making older people feel safer and more secure, there were also many less tangible ones.

'Most of the people involved in the trials had not had much exposure to computers or smart phones before - for many of them it was a real revelation,' Knapp says. 'Though in some cases there was resistance to the technology at first, after a while, many people started using not only the Monami applications but became interested in using the devices for other purposes such as going on the internet or communicating with family. One man in Sweden was really happy when he found he could receive photos on his phone of his grandchildren who live in another part of the country.'

In Slovakia, for example, one carer reported that an older woman she was taking care of 'learnt how to use Skype, and now uses it regularly and independently. She didn't even have an interest before.'

It also gave users something new to focus on and become involved with: 'The user is occupied with the technology and not so oriented towards his health problems. They can talk about something else since Monami was installed,' another Slovakian carer noted.

For their part, carers were also highly appreciative of the benefits of the technology, noting, among other things, that it gives them greater peace of mind that the people they are looking after are ok and that they can be more active and independent than before.

'The carer feels freer when she is not taking care of the user. She is less worried and more relaxed,' evaluators of the Slovakian trial noted. They added: 'One care staff would recommend the MonAMI system "to all elderly ? everyone over 70 should have the possibility to have such a system".'

Since the project ended in May 2011, the Monami partners have gone on to form part of the AAL Open Association (AALOA [3]), an alliance of more than 40 AAL-focused European research projects set up to help create an open market for AAL technologies.

- 'Mainstreaming on ambient intelligence' - Monami project website [2]
- Monami project factsheet on CORDIS [4]
- Ambient Assisted-Living Open Association - AALOA project website [3]
- European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing - EIP-AHA [5]

- An open market of assisted living apps for older people [6]
- EU offers fresh funds for healthy life expectancy boost - CORDIS News on European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing [7]
- Ageing: study shows active life leads to more quality years [8]

- Information source: Theresa Skehan, Swedish Institute of Assistive Technology (SIAT), & Martin Knapp, director of the Personal Social Services Research Unit of the London School of Economics
- 2012-02-02
- Offer ID: 7989

Contact:

Newsroom Item Type:

- Projects news and results [9]

Around Europe & the World:

- Sweden [10]

Source URL: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/safer-more-active-and-independent-proven-b-nefits-%E2%80%98ambient-assisted-living-technology

Links
[1] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/sites/digital-agenda/files/newsroom/offer_id_7989_3200_1.jpg
[2] http://www.monami.info/
[3] http://www.aaloa.org/
[4] http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=PROJ_ICT&ACTION=D&DOC=10&CAT=PROJ&QUERY=0133a302ad83:55c3:22f012a8&RCN=80197
[5] http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?section=active-healthy-ageing&pg=home
[6] http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=OFFR_TM_EN&ACTION=D&DOC=1&CAT=OFFR&QUERY=01

353e8b947f:0ca4:21ce3f55&RCN=7968
[7]
http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS&ACTION=D&DOC=4&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=01350b22e622:ab09:22bdbee4&RCN=33673
[8]
http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS&ACTION=D&DOC=2&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=01350b22e622:ab09:22bdbee4&RCN=33987
[9] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/newsroom/all/projects-news-and-results
[10] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/country/sweden