

**Socio-Anthropological Workshop on ICT and Ageing
2-3 June 2008, Brussels**

SENIOR is hosting a one and a half day workshop with the objective to explore the socio-anthropological themes related to ICT and ageing, and to address the social and cultural meanings of this mega-trend.

We aim to understand what people expect from this technology and what values, beliefs, hopes and hype are embedded in information technology for older people. We also aim to understand how information technology is changing people's perspective on ageing, how people's standards about ageing (ageism included) have been influenced by ICT advances. Understanding societal factors that drive inclusion and exclusion processes is the core of e-Inclusion.

Three areas of concern/interest will be explored during the S.A. Workshop:

- Human-ICT Interaction in the Ageing Context
- Techno-animism
- Homeliness

If you are interested in participating in this event free of charge please register now as there are limited spaces available (first come first served basis).

Contact:

Trine F. Sørensen
Email: tfs@in-jet.dk
Tel: +45 2711 9244

Workshop Themes:

Human-ICT Interaction in the Ageing context: In their influential book, the Media Equation (1996), Nass and Reeves demonstrated convincingly that interactions with ICTs are identical to real social relationships. People equate media with real life, in a fundamentally social and natural way, and way not even realise that they are doing so. One of the transformations brought about by the ageing of society is the total reorganisation of social ties. Trends in family structures (e.g., declining birth rates, tendency towards families with fewer members, single-parent families, and childless, rather than extended, families, etc.) and trends in mobility, which increase physical distance between generations of a family, have resulted in weakening social ties and networks, and this is likely to continue. These trends are leading to a reshaping of civil society characterised by new forms of communication. Social structures are moving in an increasingly virtual direction: phone calls instead of visits, e-mails instead of phone calls, instant messages instead of e-mails, from instant messages to monitoring the ambient environment and from there to assuming that the ambient environment alerts us when 'necessary'. The widespread deployment of intelligent user interfaces will probably be a critical factor in shaping the future. Human-ICT interaction will probably become a real component of individuals' social network. How is this trend going to impact on older people? Is this going to impair or to improve their capacity for establishing social connections?

Techno-animism: Marc Pesce (2000), one of the early pioneers in virtual reality, speaks of 'techno-animism' to describe a world pervaded by computational objects. Humans have a deeply intuitive

tendency to project human features onto non-human aspects of the environment, and we commonly perceive intentional agency even in inanimate objects. Animism is a feeling or belief that our environment is saturated by invisible communication between the things that surround us in our daily lives. That is, things have the ability to observe, gather knowledge, to communicate and perform actions in the real world. This is actually what smart networked technologies promise to do. Blogjects is a neologism introduced to describe objects that blog, a network of tangible, mobile, chatty objects enabled by miniaturisation, the ubiquity of consumer electronics and a pervasive Internet. Techno-animism can have deep a psychological impact on older people who are expected to be less able to cope with this experience. Special attention should be paid to people suffering from any mental impairment or disturbances. Still more important is to analyse in depth the effects of techno-animism on older people's experiences of exclusion, isolation and loneliness. Are techno-objects destined to become "man's best friend"?

Homeliness: "Home" means the house¹ but also everything that is in and around it, as well as the people, and the sense of satisfaction and contentment that all these convey. Since about 1985, starting with the TRON-house in Japan, houses (or at least flats) were built and equipped with modern technology. Examples for automated or smart homes in Europe are "Futurelife" (Switzerland), "Homelab" (Netherlands) and e2-home (Sweden). Smart homes might raise issues because they are exposed to public view. The distinction between 'private' and 'public', and correspondingly between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', is a key criterion in the meaning of home. Emotions, experiences and feelings occur in space and inevitably become associated with various highly charged places; feelings cannot occur "out of space". This hold true in particular for the elderly. Memories of events such as marriage, bereavement, having children and transitions into adulthood are tied to the physical home. Likewise, these events often trigger physical relocations or major conceptual redefinitions of home space. Home is linked to each individual's inner private sphere, to one's sense of self-history and personal identity. In many cases, home based care can be both more comfortable and convenient for senior citizens and less costly for providers. Yet this change implies some organisational changes in services, for instance, by moving the responsibility of care from health institutions to the family, elderly individual and service sector. The introduction of smart home services might impair the "human" quality of services. "Technology should not be substituted for human contacts, and citizens who ask for human warmth and care, should not be given machines," said the EPTA report on ICTs and elderly people. How can this risk be countered?