

Standards for Smart Citizens, 11 December 2019, Brussels

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What is 'smart' is usually subject to endless debates. Mainly used in the building sector to initially describe energy-efficient dwellings, the adjective 'smart' was progressively expanding to the context of 'smart homes' to address accessible and usable physical designs, assistive technologies, etc. In the housing field, smart homes are usually understood as:

*'home or dwelling with a set of networked sensors and devices that extend the functionality of the home by adding intelligence, automation, control, contextual awareness, adaptability and functionality both remotely and locally'*¹

'Smart communities' certainly go even beyond the scope of housing to include wider living environments and a sense of belonging, of social interaction, of bonding. Is it possible, as suggested in the above definition to 'extend the functionality' of a community? In two recent projects (PROGRESSIVE and Homes4Life), AGE contributed to integrate this smart approach with an age-friendly one. As per the World Health Organisation's definition, age-friendliness is usually defined as an approach that is:

*'respecting lifestyle choices, needs and preferences of people regardless of their age; and enabling accessibility (especially for older people) of all areas of community life, thereby promoting inclusion and engagement'*²

And here we are with environments, services, and goods that support participation within the community and independent living. If digitalisation can certainly optimize access to services, reduce costs, increase efficiency and enable better opportunities for civic participation, the above will only materialise if the information and communication technologies (ICTs) comply with the "triple A" rule: availability, affordability, accessibility.

Stating the obvious: battling our stereotypes

The pervasive ageism in which we live have for long led us to overlook the voices, preferences and needs of older people, considered of less worth or relevance. 50 years ago, Robert Butler, the American psychiatrist who first coined the term 'ageism', was already flagging that 'the greatest loss of age is that of choice'. **At a time when the demographic, social, political and ethical 'dynamic' that relates to the inclusion and empowerment of older people is gaining momentum, this denial of our own ageing, and the exclusion of the oldest members of our communities can no longer be accepted.**

Ageing is a natural process that affects all of us. As a consequence, we find the same diversity in older age than we can find in any other age groups. As Angela Cluzel from the Home Sweet Home project recalled, there is no standard older person:

'Older persons are a totally heterogeneous group and that is a vital point to learn. You have those who continue to decide on their daily living and those who at the same age have given up. You have those who will grasp the remote control and flick through the channels and those who leave it in the drawer preferring to push the button'

¹ Bennett J., Rokas O. and Chen L., in PROGRESSIVE D10.1, p. 8

² WHO, in PROGRESSIVE D1.3 Version 2.0, p. 6

Diversity in communities, diversity in co-creation

The lack of diversity among developers, who are mostly technically educated, young, white men, contributes to this digital divide. This difficulty is unfortunately not addressed by testing panels that remain too small and not diverse enough to consider a true diversity of community members. It is critical to include the most diverse panel in a genuine co-creation process, incl. people from particularly vulnerable groups such as those living with co-morbidity issues, multiple impairments or finding themselves at the intersection of different grounds of potential discrimination (old age, disability, ethnic minority, low income, ill health, etc.).

'Are their needs for safe, reliable and transparent services often forgotten?' you ask. Does 'safety' mean the same to everyone? Given the diversity of needs of every community member, the notion can vary from one person to the other (e.g. if you consider children's safety in some public areas, you will use gates requiring two hands to open but that may hinder the capacity of an (older) person with reduced mobility to move around). **Because we do not consider a community that would not be diverse and intergenerational, we believe it is our collective responsibility to find a way to reconcile those different needs, in order to protect and promote the diversity and inclusiveness of our communities.**

Interoperability and seamless integration: beyond the buzz words

Consultation with end users on the importance of interoperability in the frame of the PROGRESSIVE project highlighted the benefits of systems that function seamlessly: interoperable systems help users gain confidence in their capacity to navigate the interface (since they get accustomed to a more widely used and harmonised system). Interoperability improves the performance of service platforms that can integrate better. And it lowers costs in developing solutions that are based on widespread technical standards.

If integration needs to happen at the technical level, we should never forget that behind data are people. The people that compose the community navigate online, but also offline from their home, to the amenities of their neighbourhood and city, sometimes to the country side. The seamless integration of physical environments and the mobility services offered to facilitate the navigation of those places is also critical. **Because what happens when one cannot or does not want to interact with a digital interface? Are there tangible alternatives? Are they accessible?**

Living independently: the right to say no?

Beyond the "triple A" rule, the fear of being excluded, of human beings to be replaced by technology, of privacy being at threat, etc. constitute key ingredients of a distrust towards digitalisation. Yet technology acceptance cannot be forced, even for people's own safety. If GPS trackers can be very interesting for people with dementia so they can keep going outside safely, we need to make sure that safety purposes are not taking over the right to informed consent. And that's no longer a matter of being smart, it's a matter of respecting human rights.

This statement was informed by the insights AGE gathered from:

- *its member organisations, among others the expert and older persons' representatives involved in the work of AGE around age-friendly environments, technologies and standardisation,*
- *several European projects, among which **Home Sweet Home** - Health monitoring and sOcial integration environment for Supporting WidE ExTension of independent life at HOME, **PROGRESSIVE** – ICT Standards for Active and Healthy Ageing, and **Homes4Life** – European Certification for Age-Friendly Housing*