

Press Release

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INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK FOR THE EVALUATION OF AAL-SOLUTIONS FROM AUSTRIA

A milestone in the evaluation of AAL solutions has been achieved by the AIT Center for Technology Experience in the "3vAALuation" project in cooperation with the Carinthian University of Applied Sciences.

Active and Assisted Living (AAL) technologies and solutions such as emergency call systems, digital locking systems, fall prevention or standing-up aids as well as care robots or smart "helpers" in the home, offer many older people the opportunity to live independently in their own homes. However, the real implementation and concrete use of AAL solutions often fails due to concerns about costs, benefits, profitability or stigmatisation.

Age group 65+ is growing rapidly

At the same time, the target group is getting bigger and bigger. According to current surveys, there are already more people aged 65 and over living in Austria than there are people under 20. Moreover, the share of people over 65 will continue to increase strongly in the coming years and, according to Statistics Austria, will rise from 19.2 % at present to 26.4 % in 2040. In addition, life expectancy is increasing: it is currently 84.0 years for women and 79.3 years for men. "All the more important is it to use new technologies aimed at Active and Assisted Living – they can be really great in helping people to be able to live a self-determined life into old age. But a crucial point here is to take a close look at the scientifically verifiable potential effects," Julia Himmelsbach, scientist at the AIT Center for Technology Experience, is convinced. What is needed to ensure that more AAL solutions are actually implemented, however, is a guideline that helps those responsible to better evaluate the implementation of AAL solutions. "There have been a lot of AAL solutions so far, but only very few of them made it to the market," Himmelsbach regrets.

"EvAALuation" for standardised evaluation of AAL products and services

Therefore, the project series "EvAALuation" was launched, commissioned by the Ministry of Technology and Innovation (BMK). While the first project was about first developing suitable indicators, "EvAALuation²" focused on the development of concrete measuring instruments and questionnaires for evaluating the impact of AAL solutions. In the third project, "3vAALuation", which was completed in December 2021, the focus was on a review and further development as well as the creation of a standardised and internationally applicable evaluation toolkit for AAL solutions. The focus is on potential positive effects for older users (maintenance and/or increase of quality of life, participation in social life) and fundamental requirements for the technologies (usability, simple, intuitive use, no stigmatisation or discrediting of users). Operational and economic aspects were also taken into account in this broad analysis, insofar as existing framework conditions for a comprehensive implementation in 14 European countries were examined.

AAL commissioners, public institutions, care organisations, companies that want to provide AAL services, but also older persons themselves should receive concrete guidelines for practice as to whether an AAL solution makes sense or which challenges have to be overcome. The project result is a standardised and internationally applicable handbook with associated validated questionnaires, which enables an evaluation of AAL solutions in the application areas of health, care and activity & human potential.

Methodology and benefits of the manual

The English translation and international extension of the "EvAALuation²" manual are essential elements of this research project. The country-specific analyses for 14 European countries focus on economic, institutional as well as legal characteristics and the validated English-language questionnaires are accessible to a broad scientific community. The handbook itself consists of three parts: 1. general description of processes and methods, 2. indicators for the professional audience and 3. concrete examples for the application of the handbook in practice.

What makes the project unique

3vAALuation is characterised in particular by an interdisciplinary approach, well-founded involvement of all stakeholder groups, consideration of pragmatic and ethical aspects as well as explicit reference to future practical use. "With the handbook, we now really have a great set of tools - it is a completely new and holistic way of looking at AAL products and services," states Julia Himmelsbach.

Albert Luger from the Institute for Applied Research on Ageing (IARA) at the Carinthian University of Applied Sciences also points to the added value of the project: "With this international handbook, we have developed a good set of measuring instruments as a decision-making aid and hope that in future AAL products and services can actually be realised more quickly. On the one hand, this is for the benefit of the increasingly ageing population and, on the other hand, so that international and national research facilities and institutions can cooperate even more and thus learn and benefit from each other."

Outlook into the future

A next step would be to set up a website or to analyse data specifically in order to disseminate and further develop the practicality of the research results. The researchers are also interested in international benchmarking and experiences from the individual countries.

The handbook is available for download on the FFG website:

https://www.ffg.at/sites/default/files/allgemeine_downloads/thematische%20programme/IKT/3vAAL_uation_manual.pdf

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