

The TAO Project: An Overview

March 2010

Introduction

Modern information and communication technologies offer us the possibility to engage in social interactions more frequently online, to move a share of our social contacts to the internet and to use the framework of online communities to participate in processes of value creation. There are many indicators that, for a number of reasons, older persons use these opportunities only partially and underestimate the opportunities that ICT has in store for them. What is more, online communities are striving to involve more persons above the age of fifty years in their volunteer projects and are determined to use older persons' diverse experiences and competencies more efficiently.

Project Targets

"TAO" (Chinese for way, method) is not only a placeholder for the Chinese ideograph but also an acronym for "Third Age Online". The main target of the project is to highlight the ways in which the access of older persons to the opportunities offered by online communities can be facilitated. At the same time, the project aims to profit from the growing number of older persons to advance charitable projects of online communities.

Two kinds of online communities are at the center attention: On the one hand partly goal-oriented senior communities such as Seniorweb Switzerland and Seniorweb Netherlands, on the other hand goal-oriented Wikimedia communities with a mixed target group.

The main focus of the project is on two important challenges that pertain to the enhancement of older persons' participation in online communities:

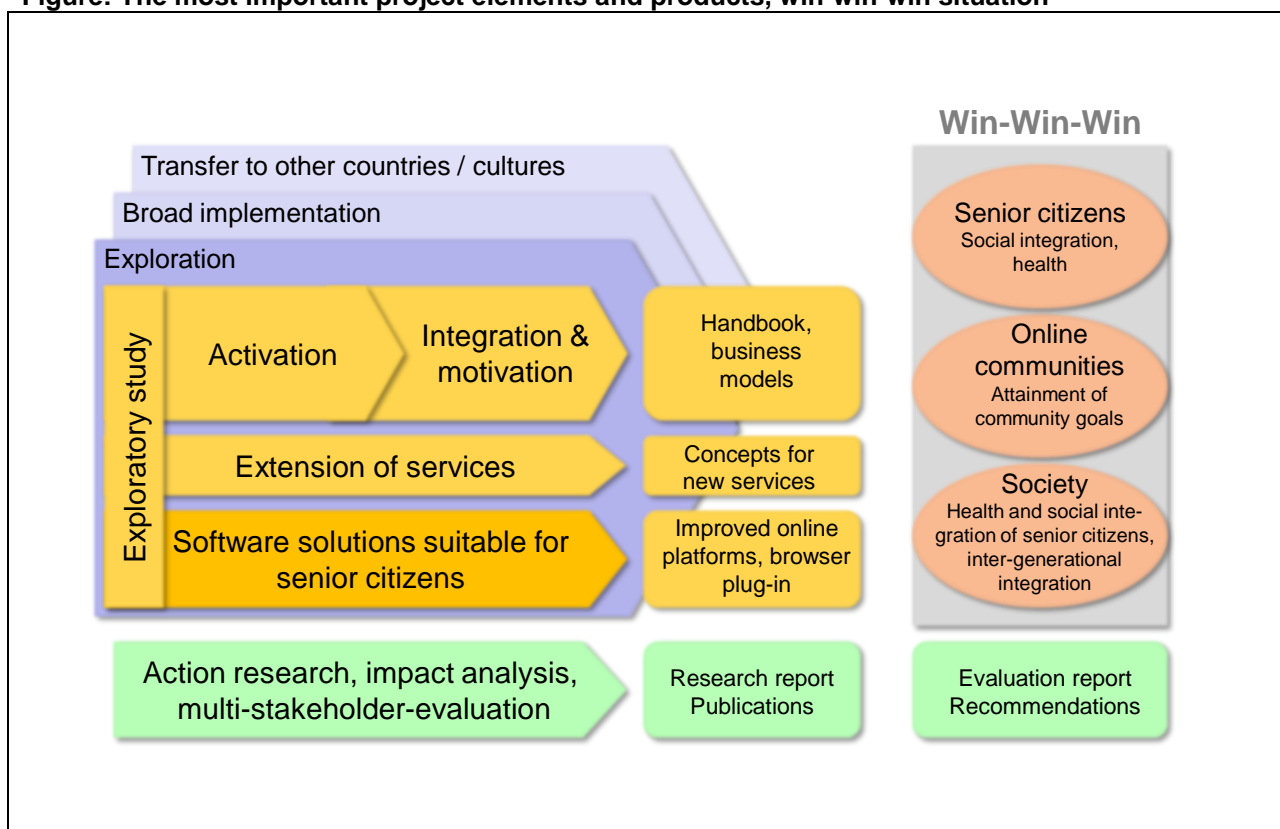
- To develop **effective methods and measures** for motivating older persons to participate in online communities and for fostering the intergenerational integration of these communities.
- To adapt the design of the **user surfaces** and the **functionalities** of online platforms to the specific needs of older persons (all the while considering the needs of the existing community).

A Holistic Approach with a Focus on Sustainability

With its multi-disciplinary approach the project differs from similar research and development initiatives because it takes into account both the technological and the non-technological aspects. Both the current users of online communities and the target group of senior citizens are involved in the project work, which encourages intergenerational interaction. A further aim of the project is to broaden the scope of impact quickly by involving suitable implementation partners and by developing business models that guarantee a sustained effect of the project measures.

In order to assure sustainability, the project is striving for a win-win-win situation between senior citizens, online communities, and society as a whole.

Figure: The most important project elements and products, win-win-win situation



Outputs and Expected Benefits

Thanks to the project, **older persons** should profit from an enriched selection of services and from facilitated access to the activities related to online communities (introductory courses, offline-meetings, low-level user support, user-friendly online platforms). The project can be expected to enhance older persons' social integration and especially participation in the information society (e-inclusion), which in turn is supposed to have a positive effect on older persons' general well-being.

Once the project ends, the **participating community partners** should have a set of successfully tested measures for the activation and involvement of older persons in their own online communities. A sustained impact and the long-term implementation of measures are important criteria by which the success of the project should be measured. Therefore, special attention will be paid on guaranteeing that older persons who participate in the communities are truly being offered an added value and – owing to suitable business models and partnerships – that the developed measures can be continued after the project ends.

The **operators of online communities** will have a handbook containing instructions on how to activate and involve senior citizens successfully and on how to develop products and services so that they are suitable for senior citizens. Moreover, they will profit from improved online platforms whose design and functionalities will meet the needs of older persons.

Society as a whole will profit from the project insofar as the developed measures aim to enhance intergenerational integration and the wellbeing of older persons. An indirect benefit is created by promoting the charitable activities of the participating community partners aimed at e-inclusion and free access to knowledge (online encyclopedia Wikipedia and related projects).

Consortium Partners

Under the lead of the Bern University of Applied Sciences the following organisations submitted a successful project proposal to the European “Ambient Assisted Living” program:

Bern University of Applied Sciences Department of Business and Administration, Health, Social Work	<i>Expertise in the areas of social work (research on old age and integration), health, organisational development, change management, IT-architecture and standardisation</i>
University of Maastricht – MERIT Collaborative Creativity Group	<i>Global leader in the area of research on open source and Wikimedia communities</i>
University of Ulm Centre for General Scientific Continuing Education	<i>Long standing expertise in the areas of continuing education and e-learning with a special focus on older persons</i>
Seniorweb.NL	<i>A Dutch community of senior citizens with a strong focus on user education and e-inclusion; the leading European non-profit senior citizen platform</i>
seniorweb.ch	<i>A non-profit Swiss senior citizen community with a focus on e-inclusion; operator of an online platform with edited contents and networking possibilities</i>
Wikimedia Germany	<i>Non-profit organisation for the promotion of free knowledge, recognized by the Wikimedia Foundation; initiator of a program to facilitate the inclusion of older persons in the Wikipedia community and its related communities</i>
Wikimedia Switzerland	<i>Non-profit organization, recognized by the Wikimedia Foundation, for the promotion of projects aiming at the creation of freely accessible contents. Focuses on supporting volunteer projects of the Wikimedia Foundation such as the popular online encyclopedia Wikipedia</i>
Zeix AG	<i>Swiss market leader in the areas of usability and user-centered design</i>
Liip AG	<i>A Swiss SME focusing on web development, user-centered design and the management of web projects; specialized in the development of sustainable software based on open source and open standards</i>
„Access for All“ Foundation	<i>Swiss foundation for the promotion of accessibility; certifying body; developer of accessibility standards</i>

Cooperating Partners

In order to achieve a sustainable and broad project effect we rely on a close cooperation with implementation partners in the areas of user education (e.g. administrators of computer courses), software development, public relations and networking.

Negotiations with different potential partner organisations are ongoing, including a larger Swiss telecom company, which is considering to support the project with substantial efforts in the areas of user education and public relations, and also including the German ViLE-network (a virtual and real-life network for older persons), and the Swiss terz foundation.

Funding

The project budget amounts to around 3 Mio. Euro. Roughly one half of that sum is being funded within the European "Ambient Assisted Living" program. The remaining financial means have to be contributed or raised by the project partners themselves.

Timeframe / Project Duration

The project is scheduled to start in autumn 2010. The project duration will be 36 months.

Contact Information

Please contact us if this project touches on a topic that is relevant to you or your organisation. We are always interested in discussing possible forms of cooperation.

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