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SILHOUETTE

USING NOVEL INFORMATION
AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES
FOR THE SUPPORT OF ELDERLY'S ACTIVE
PARTICIPATION IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY



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ICT-based Support for the Elderly in Asturias: Stakeholders' view

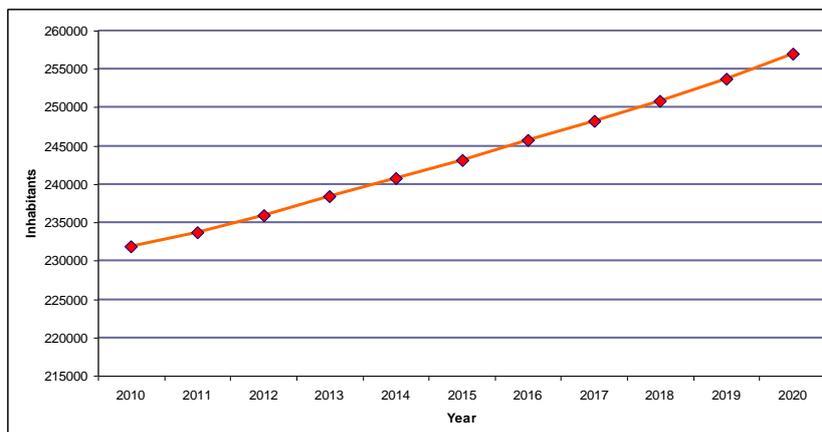
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1. Introduction

Asturias is the second most aged region of Spain¹. In 2010, there were been registered 7.931.164 inhabitants over 65 of which were 4.557.733 women and 3.373.431 men. About Asturias, next figure shows the evolution of the Asturian population over 65 estimated in the period 2010-2020.



Taking into account the expected evolution, it is necessary to develop policies and strategies to solve the ageing challenge trying to guarantee quality of life and an ageing in a natural and positive way. These initiatives are mainly promoted by the regional and local governments, sometimes based on national guidelines.

This report includes information about senior-oriented initiatives in the Asturias region, needs, benefits, barriers and opportunities of using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for the support of the elderly. Collected information is based on the feedback given by different stakeholders interviewed during the process:

- Five representatives from the local and regional administration (city council, association of municipalities, municipal centres).
- Nine representatives from care and social welfare centres.
- Four representatives from private companies.

¹ Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística. Padrón municipal de habitantes 2010.

2. Senior-oriented activities

2.1. Supporting the elderly communities in the region

The government of the Principality of Asturias is divided into different regional ministries, each one of them with different competences. Some of these regional ministries have been working in the elaboration of strategies and measures related to the elderly some years ago. One of the most important regional ministries related to the elderly in Asturias is the one called “Social welfare and Housing”, involved in active ageing and social inclusion initiatives. In this field, the main objectives and action lines related to the elderly are the ones summarized in the following table:

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Action lines</i>	<i>Resources involved</i>
<p>1. Promoting active and health lifestyles among the elderly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disseminating active aging model as the key strategy to improve the quality of life and the dependence prevention. - Raising awareness about healthy habits. - Boosting physical activity, cognitive activity and psycho welfare among the elderly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organization of courses and workshops about active aging. - Supporting the definition of research priorities about aging (European programs). - Developing specific programs for informal caregivers (mainly females). - Execution of workshops and activities focused on physical (gerontogym) and cognitive stimulation and maintenance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional ministry of social welfare and housing. - Regional ministry of health. - City councils. - Municipal social centres. - Day care centres and public old people’s homes. - Private entities. - R&D and innovation entities. - Associations. - Volunteering.
<p>2. Safety and daily-life conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving safety and daily-life conditions for the elderly at home. - Improving safety of the elderly in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Home adaptation (technical aids to eliminate barriers and acquisition of supporting products). - Support and safety at home (tele-assistance service, helping at home, meal-on-wheels,...). - Organization of informative sessions in social centres, day care centres and old people’s homes (about safety in towns and cities, and also consume safety). - Rural environment (extension of the “Breaking Distances” program). 	
<p>3. Social participation of the elderly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitating the access to education, culture and leisure activities for the elderly. - Facilitating the access to new technologies and social networks for the elderly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of training itineraries addressed to aged people and adapted to their needs, knowledge and previous expertise. - Promoting the “University for the Elderly”. - Execution of workshops about new technologies, addressed and adapted to the elderly (internet, social networks, blogs, etc,...) - Increasing the coverage of Internet and WiFi in rural areas. 	

2.2. Usage of ICT-based solutions in supporting the elderly

In this scope of the Silhouette project some products and services based on ICT have been identified in the Asturias region. Some of them are in early stages (prototypes and pilots), but some others are already on the market.

About ICT-based products or services already in the market, the majority of the interviewed people agree that the most extended one is the tele-assistance service. In Asturias, this service is provided by city councils² through the Municipal Social Service Centres (MSSC), in collaboration with Red Cross. There are also private providers. There are also some private companies providing bracelets and geo-locating services for people suffering from cognitive disease (e.g. early stages of dementia), mainly linked with old people's homes or care centres.

Regarding relevant pilot initiatives, the one called „Retemancosi/Telegea” combined with „Cybervolunteering” is the most relevant one at regional level, due to the collaboration of public authorities, regional and local administrations, private companies and cyber-volunteers. All of them are working together to provide coordinated home-care (social and health) services to the elderly in rural areas. This is a pilot project (2008-2012), expected to be in production in 2013. Videoconferencing and advanced tele-assistance are the two top-2 services of the ICT portfolio, being currently involved more than 50 users (total expected: more than 600), 25 cyber-volunteers and 16 care professionals.

Nevertheless, almost all the interviewed people agree that there is still an important gap between prototypes and sustainable products and services. A holistic approach, public-private partnerships and new model businesses are expected in the future.

² More info (e.g. service offered by the city council of Gijón) at <http://mayor.gijon.es/servicios/show/154-teleasistencia-domiciliaria>.

3. National, regional and local programs and strategies of supporting the elderly

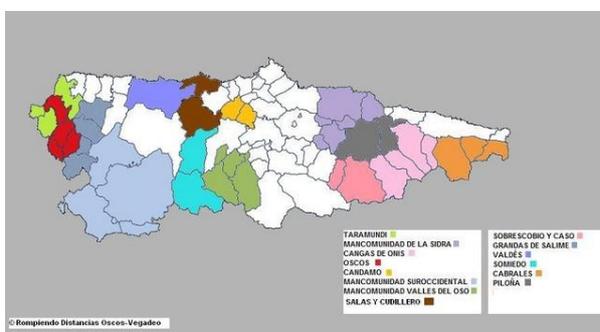
3.1. Practical implementation of programs

One of the most important organisms in Asturias working towards satisfying the needs of the elderly is the Social Wellbeing and Housing Regional Ministry. Two main documents elaborated by this ministry are particularly relevant: the first, the “Regional Plan for Social Inclusion in Asturias” proposes several measures to fight against the social exclusion and to guarantee the inclusion of all social groups with special reference to the elderly. The second, “Strategy to promote active ageing in Asturias”, promotes active lifestyles to address the ageing process as something natural and positive. The policies and strategies reported are the basis of the practices described in the Asturias region. Nevertheless, a gap needs to be filled between strategy plans and sustainable services, because different municipalities have different ways to use and support technology-based approaches, and more efficient cooperation between public administration, private agents and citizens is required.

From the practical point of view, integrated Municipal Social Centers (MSC) for the elderly managed by the Regional Ministry of Social Welfare -in collaboration with city councils- propose their gerontological resources to the community and aim at the promotion of active aging and personal development, at boosting active social participation and integration of the elderly within the community, as well as facilitating their access to culture and their use of technologies. Inclusion of people at risk of digital exclusion is also conducted by the Regional Ministry of Public Administration through didactic materials and resources to raise citizen's awareness and to facilitate learning and training in ICT software and technologies not only by the elderly, but also by those individuals in charge of promoting and supporting the inclusion of the elderly in the ICT society.

The most representative examples of programs currently implemented in the region are:

- Tele-assistance service (public service organised through the municipal social centres, in collaboration with Red Cross; there are also private providers).
- Home assistance service (home cleaning, etc). Organised through the municipal social centres in collaboration with Red Cross (public service); there are also private providers.
- Holiday Programme for the Elderly³ (promoted at national level).
- Programme “Breaking Distances”⁴ (focused on rural areas).



³ http://www.imserso.es/imserso_06/envejecimiento_activo/vacaciones/index.htm

⁴ About 38.000 people over 65 years old in the 43 municipalities highlighted. Source: INE. Padrón Municipal de Habitantes. Elaborado por SADEI - Last update: Feb2010 .

3.2. Needs concerning creation and implementation of programs enabling wider usage of ICT

All the care providers interviewed stressed the need of a greater cooperation and coordination between public and private entities and resources.

Regarding representatives from private companies, they underlined that ICT solutions at large scale requires important investment in terms of human and economic resources needed (great effort vs. a priori small potential market).

Representatives from public administration consider as one of the key factors to be able to measure benefits in terms of cost reduction and savings. This is not an easy question as far as they ask for evidences at medium-long term (e.g. many pilots are specific initiatives not longer available/sustainable when projects are finished).

The surveyed representatives of local and regional governments believe that using ICT to support the elderly should:

- Boosting active participation of people at risk of digital exclusion from the Information Society.
- Prevention of exclusion and boosting of elderly social participation.
- Promotion of an active and healthy lifestyle among the elderly.
- Empowering the elderly (and also caregivers).

This should increase the sense of safety, inclusion and independent living. Also financial savings (cost reduction).

In addition, one question stressed by the majority of the interviewed people is the unquestionable need of having good infrastructures to assure the communication with the elderly at home (many aged people have not a computer at home, there is not broadband connection –e.g. in many rural areas-, etc). This is one of the key factors when thinking about programs enabling wider usage of ICT solutions for the elderly. The other one is the reticence of the elderly to accept new „ways of doing” in their daily life, probably due to low ICT-literacy and lack of information and daily support.

4. Benefits and barriers in implementing ICT-based solutions for supporting the elderly

4.1. Benefits

The main reported benefits include the following:

- Improving quality of life of the elderly.
- Reducing social isolation and exclusion.
- Boosting of elderly social participation.
- Better coordination of professionals and services for the elderly.

Besides these benefits for the elderly, several stakeholders (mainly care providers and representatives of private companies) underlined also specific benefits for relatives and informal caregivers.

4.2. Barriers

The main reported barriers could be divided into barriers due to the socio-economic context, and barriers directly linked to the target group (the elderly). Many of the interviewed people underlined the following as the most important ones:

- Limited financial resources and public funds.
- Shortages in personnel resources.
- Lack of information and low support.
- ICT devices and services not “user-friendly” for the elderly.
- Low ICT-literacy levels (more remarkable in rural areas).
- Technical barriers and insufficient infrastructures (“how to connect to the elderly at home?”).
- Poor coordination between private and public resources.
- Some programs are not maintained through the years (changes in strategy plans due to political changes).
- A priori, the elderly are averse to change (it is necessary to invest time, the elderly require more time and patience during the learning/training process, “it is a long-distance race”).

5. Potential of the region to utilize ICT-based solution for supporting activity of the elderly

5.1. The size of the regional market

Taking into account the estimated evolution of the Asturian population over 65 in the period 2010-2020 presented in section 1, the potential market in Asturias is important. However, the number of regional companies directly involved in the commercialization of ICT-based products for the elderly is low. This is based on the fact that most of the elderly care services currently being offered are managed by public administrations/institutions, and the market is monopolized by national entities/companies (supra-regional level).

Although government's strategy plans for elderly care include the use of several ICT-based solutions, the most introduced solutions right now are safety alarms, tele-assistance and meal-on-wheels. The social perception of the health-care services as a free public service is holding the expansion of the market back. According to the plans of the regional authorities, public administrations are not clearly facing the deployment of new services due to the associated costs and the lack of clear evidences of success in the medium-long term.

5.2. The R+D and innovation potential

The innovation potential of Asturias to develop and commercialize ICT-based solutions to support the elderly is based in two factors. Firstly, research and innovation activities currently carried out by some research centres and University groups, and also some private companies. Secondly, the commitment of the regional government to use ICT solutions to improve health and care services for the elderly.

Although there is no research groups at the University of Oviedo specialized in ICT solutions for elderly people, some research groups in the field of ICT, psychology and health are researching in this topic. Research institutions such as CTIC – Technology Centre have specialized research units with the aim to develop new solutions for the elderly in cooperation with private companies.

Private companies involved in the research of solutions for the elderly include hardware manufacturers specialized in solutions for the elderly at home, and also Telco providers interested in services related to elderly safety at home. It has been also identified some companies in the region that have plans to develop new products for the elderly care market (e.g. a company from the domotics and home automation sector has mid-term plans to develop home-care products for the elderly and also for informal caregivers).

Taking into account the availability of tele-assistance service and alarm buttons for the elderly in Asturias and Spain, different stakeholders have identified some key research lines for the next years. These potential research lines include the development of illness prevention systems and self-care solutions based on self-check of health conditions. These research lines are based on the necessity for elderly people to be aware of the importance of self-care (prevention at early stages).

6. Recommendations of regional stakeholders

Some final comments considered interesting as part of the “global picture” (holistic point of view):

- A better coordination among public and private resources is required.
- More evidences of success in a medium-long term are needed (e.g. in terms of cost reduction and savings).
- Importance of the relatives and informal caregivers in the elderly care.
- ICT-based services vs. “human-based” services (fear of losing human contact, isolation feeling).
- Talking about professionals: importance of multidisciplinary profiles with complementary competences (technical competences + social competences – new profiles required?).