AAATE Newsletter, Winter 2004/5

FROM THE EDITOR

Lawrence Normie *LNormie@jdc.org.il*

The editor, on this occasion, is writing his opening words in a spirit of pleasant astonishment at the sheer volume of material that has been received for the present edition. Owing to the bursting size of this newsletter, I shall keep my words very brief. But I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the newsletter during 2004 and encourage everyone in AAATE to keep the news flowing for future editions. Seasons greetings to all!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Harry Knops *h.knops@irv.nl*

Dear AAATE Members, Winter time is arriving and bringing us pleasant times around Christmas and New Year. The last months of the year are always very busy in our respective institutions. We have to finalize projects, reports, set the budgets for the next year, and so on.

We can look back on a fruitful last quarter of the year 2004 for AAATE. On this occasion I want to refer and highlight the following activities of our Association.

The presentation of the Assistive Technology and Design for All awards in Düsseldorf during the REHA fair. We can proudly say that this was a great event that expresses the vitality of our sector.

This award event showed that there is still a lot of innovative and creative people working in the AT sector. The entries for this award demonstrated a great variety of good products in different categories. Also remarkable was the considerable number of entries from young researchers.

I wish to thank the European Commission, represented by Mrs. Wallis Goelen, for the support in organising this event. Also, many thanks to the team of Prof. Christian Bühler, at FTB, who performed for their high quality and professional organisation of the award ceremony.

AAATE was active in the jury for the Assistive Technology award and is looking for possibilities to continue this event on an annual basis. The AT and DfA award ceremony was for me, and I believe also for others, an exciting event.

The **Workshop on Education and Training** was also held during the REHA fair in Düsseldorf. It was a combined workshop of AAATE and EdeAN to exchange and discuss the developments in Design for All and Assistive Technology Education. A report of this workshop will be available in February 2005.

The Annual General Assembly took place in combination with the above mentioned workshop. You all will read the details of this meeting in the minutes to be made available shortly. But, I want to highlight one point out of a large number of agenda points discussed at the AGA. Erland Winterberg finalized his work as Association secretary and board member. I want to thank him on behalf of AAATE for the great work and support he gave to AAATE, as well as a board member and as director of the Danish Centre. We all wish him success in his future working and private life.

The elections resulted in prolongation of the board membership of Pier Luigi Emiliani and a new board membership of Niels-Erik Mathiassen. I want to congratulate both with this election.

I want to give special attention to our AAATE conference in 2005 in Lille, France. Please, take note of the new dates **6–9 September 2005** and also the relevant dates for the Call for Contributions for the most

important conference in our sector. You will find full details on the website www.aaate2005.com.

So, at the end of this president's message I want to wish you all a successful and healthy 2005.

NATIONAL NEWS

Reports from AAATE national contacts

Denmark
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The NAME project (*Nordic Assisted Mobility Evaluation*)

It has been decided to change the instrument in the NAME project so that it directly measures the participant aspects and frequency of activities.

The change is so extensive that a new pilot test has to take place, starting at the end of November, after the instrument has been revised. In addition, the other participant countries have carried out tests of the relevance of the questions for young people.

The Dyslexics and IT Conference

This national conference has previously taken place twice with great success (2001 and 2003). The conference is now established as a tradition, and the dates for the next conference are 2–3 November 2005.

The Danish Centre is still organizing the conference, but the Danish Centre for Dyslexia and the Danish Dyslexia Organization participate as professional co-organizers.

HMI-Basen Back

The Danish Centre's internet based module for dealer inputs and updates of product information in the HMI-Basen, which was published on 30 April 2004, is being used by more and more dealers.

More than 33% of dealers with products in the database are system users themselves, and they have made a total of 1,240 inputs and about 3,000 updates. Dealers report that they are very satisfied with the system.

Nordic co-operation regarding product types and technical data (*the Nord-4 project*)

The second joint Nordic meeting has taken place and the method selected has been tested for chosen ISO-classes.

An internet-based system has been developed. This system gives an overview of the existing standard levels in the Nordic countries. The system can handle formulation of joint Nordic proposals and approval procedures.

In the EASTIN project, the participating parties have acknowledged the Nordic definitions of the elements at the 4th level, and Italy wishes to take part in the Nordic work and the Nordic parties have agreed to its request. Italy will send a representative to future meetings.

The NFTH-secretariat (*Nordic Forum for Telecommunication and Disability*)

NFTH held a meeting on the 21–22 October at which NFTH's future was on the agenda. NSH (The Nordic Cooperation on Disability), which finances the NFTH-secretariat, is at the moment considering which areas should be put into focus in the coming years. NSH has in connection with this announced that the decision whether to continue the financing of NFTH is not going to be taken until February 2005.

The members of NFTH (the tele-agencies, phone companies and a representative appointed by The Ministry for Social Affairs in the Nordic countries) are working for continuous financing of the secretariat to enable it to continue its work. NSH has announced that it has a positive attitude to creating conditions so that the NFTH-secretariat can continue. Provided that the funds are granted for continuing administrative functions, the next meeting in NFTH will take place at Iceland on the 23–25 May 2005.

The Sitsite project

The Sitsite project (www.sitsite.dk), which is developing a website for material concerning adjustment of seating positions, has now been completed. The project was co-financed by NUH (The Nordic Development Centre for Rehabilitation Technology) and was implemented in three phases: A pre-project, in which the need for the website was examined, the development of the actual website, and deployment and financing phase in which efforts were made to obtain financial support though advertisement revenue.

However, it turned out that a website with such a large extent of professional relevant content about a specific area does not change often enough for the companies to find it interesting to advertise at the site. Because of this www.sitsite.dk is now a part of the Nordic Seating Symposium, which takes place every 21/2 years. The website is going to be the Symposium's official website through which the programme information is disseminated, and where registration can take place. At the same time the website will continue to have relevant material within the area of seating positions. The website is to be updated with professional knowledge shared at each symposium and not continuously as originally planned.

The Smart Home project

The Danish Centre is to implement a project consisting of two intermediate projects:

1. Establishment of testing facilities for testing of Smart Home technology at MarselisborgCentret in Denmark).
2. Completion of an inquiry into preparation for testing and evaluation of the effects of Smart Home technology in a number of housing situations.

The new project description is to be presented to the County of Aarhus, which is financing the pre-project work.

Three million DKR previously was granted to the MarselisborgCentret for a Smart Home project (with Danish Centre as project manager).

Project co-operation is with DSI (The Danish Council of Organisations of Disabled People) in connection with "Assistive Technology for disabled people in occupation".

The Danish Centre has contributed to the project in the form of a web-based description of assistive technology for disabled people in work occupations, with links directly to the HMI-basen database to relevant product areas. At the moment, DSI is working on implementing the system at their Job-portal, which was launched on 30 November 2004.

Germany
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REHACARE International 2004

From 10 to 13 November, 50,000 trade visitors and people with special needs visited REHACARE International 2004 in Düsseldorf – Europe's No 1 trade fair for people with disabilities or requiring care. In six halls 805 exhibitors from 32 countries presented innovative rehabilitation technologies and services and offered advice and information on all aspects of rehabilitation and care.

Among the guests were 7,500 international trade visitors hailing from a total of 41 countries, including a number of high-profile delegations from Japan, China, Taiwan, and Russia. Every third visitor was a person with special needs or a family member of such individual, 77% were trade visitors and buyers, and half of these specialists claimed to have decision-making powers over procurements.

Visitors' main concern was with vehicles and wheelchairs (49%); second in the popularity stakes were daily living aids (48%), followed by mobility aids (45%). More than half of REHACARE visitors made use of the educational opportunities and gathered facts and advice from over 120 associations and organisations represented.

Partner country this year was Denmark, which presented forward-looking ideas as part of a special exhibition.

Exhibition

This year FTB, once again, was actively involved in the special exhibition of the Ministry for Health, Social Affairs, Women and Family of the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia. FTB demonstrated new developments, innovative projects and informed the numerous national and international visitors about Assistive Technology and special services for people with disabilities.

Design for All and Assistive Technology Award

A special highlight this year was the first European "Design for All and Assistive Technology Award" initiated by the European Commission.

For the first time, the European Commission has awarded outstanding achievements in the areas of Assistive Technology and Design for All. FTB was in charge of organising the AT competition and Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide was responsible for the DfA award.

Two-hundred-and-one entries from 17 European countries were received: 75 for DfA and 126 AT.

The 7 winners of DfA Awards and 47 short-listed AT entries were presented to the interested public in a special exhibition at REHACARE International 2004.

Prizes for the Assistive Technology as well as for the Design for All sectors were awarded in the categories:

Winners and jury members of AT and DfA award.

– Daily Living.
– Mobility and Transportation.
– Communication and Information.
– Lifelong Learning.
– Employment and Professional Life.
– Culture, Leisure, and Sport.

In addition, the European jury awarded two special prizes in the fields of 'New Territory' and 'Integrated Solutions'.

Five of the AT jurors were members of AAATE, including the chairman of the AT jury, Harry Knops. AAATE NCCs were involved in public relations activities and distributed information about the award project all over Europe and the Associated States.

The official award ceremony took place as part of REHACARE in Düsseldorf on Friday 12 November 2004 and was attended by about 600 representatives from political, economic, scientific parties as well as by organisations for disabled people and media representatives.

Further information about the ceremony and the winners can be found in the internet www.dfa-at-awards.org.

Barrier free Web design

A new 'Handbook on barrier free Web design' has been issued in German language by the 'German Alliance for barrier free Information technology (AbI, http://abi-projekt.de)'. With about 370 pages and a CD, it is the first book of its kind in German. A talking book version in DAISY format is under preparation for early 2005. The book has immediately found a good market.

On 3rd December 2004, the winners ceremony of the BIENE awards for barrier free websites was celebrated in Berlin, with considerable public interest. Out of more than 200 applications, the best sites were iden-

tified and awarded. This is the second time the awards have been held and it is expected that the initiative will be repeated in 2005.

Greece
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New studies published

An overview of the work concerning web accessibility in Greece is presented in a study conducted by the University of Crete. The study is entitled "*Universal Access and Equal Participation of people with disabilities in the Information Society*" [C. Stephanidis (Ed.), 2004]. The study provides an in-depth analysis of the current situation concerning access to IST products and services for people with disabilities in Greece, including the results of the first survey carried out in the country to monitor the accessibility of public and governmental web sites.

The issues addressed in the study include an overview of user requirements for people with disabilities in the Information Society, an investigation of the current market situation with regards to the Assistive Technologies sector, an overview of regulation and legislation as support measures for the disabled, as well as an overview of standards and accessibility guidelines and initiatives.

The study concludes by proposing a coordinated action plan to promote eInclusion and Universal Access at a national level. The study was funded under the Operational Programme "Information Society" of the 3rd Community Support Programme (Secretariat for the Information Society, Hellenic Ministry of Economy and Finance).

Although the study is currently available only in Greek, an extended summary in English will also be soon available

A guidebook entitled **A Guide for the Development of Accessible Websites and Portals** [C. Stephanidis (Ed.), 2004] was recently published. The guide presents accessibility principles, proposes design methods and guidelines for the development of accessible websites, and provides useful examples of their use and implementation. It is the first technical guide regarding accessibility available in Greek.

The publication has been funded under Operational Programme "Information Society" of the 3rd Community Support Programme (Secretariat for the Information Society, Hellenic Ministry of Economy and Finance).

Dissemination activities

EDeAN, the European Design for All eAccessibility Network, and the Greek National Network GR-DeAN, were widely promoted to a large number of visitors of the Thessaloniki International Fair, from 11–19 September 2004. A significant number of people visited the ICS-FORTH stand, were the EDeAN and GR-DeAN web portals were presented. Amongst the visitors were the Greek Prime Minister and the Minister of Development. On-line demonstrations of HERMES, the EDeAN web portal, and ARIADNE, the EDeAN Virtual Resource Centre infrastructure, were available. The booth received very positive comments.

Information days

Three information days were organized in Athens and Thessaloniki on 22, 23 and 29 November 2004, by the Development Partnership PROKLISI (www.proklisi.gr/), and funded under the EQUAL initiative of the European Commission.

In the context of these information days, the overall results, as well as a number of technology applications developed in the context of the PROKLISI Development Partnership, were presented. Moreover, demonstrations of the accessible browser ARGO, were presented. The ARGO System supports visual and non-visual interaction in order to address the requirements of the blind and of people with low vision, as well as switch-based interaction through scanning in order to address the requirements of people with mobility impairments.

ARGO was developed by the Institute of Computer Science of the Foundation for Research and Technology – Hellas and is currently installed in two information kiosks in the municipalities of Cholargos (Attiki district) and Neapoli (Thessaloniki district).

GR-DeAN, the Greek EDeAN Network, and the accessible web portal www.e-accessibility.gr will be presented and promoted in a two-day event entitled "The social dimension of the Information Society" on 20-21 December 2004, in Athens. The event is organized by the Hellenic Ministry of Employment and Social Protection.

Second series of AT training seminars launched

The second series of training seminars organized by the national project EYTEXNOS (www.di.uoa.gr/speech/eftehnos/), funded by the General Secretariat for Research and Technology of the Hellenic Ministry of Development, took place from 15 November to 13 December and from 7 to 17 December 2004, in Athens and in Heraklion (Crete), respectively.

These seminars were targeted post-graduate students as well as professionals, and aimed at introducing methods and practices that enable the use of ICT by people with disabilities. EYTEXNOS aims at creating know-how and promoting the use of accessibility guidelines, specialised design tools, and advanced technologies for the design and development of accessible applications and web services.

The project is co-ordinated by the National Kapodistrian University of Athens (scientific responsible Prof. Georgios Kouroupetroglou, E-mail: koupe@di.uoa.gr).

ICS-FORTH to host the EDeAN Secretariat for 2005

The Institute of Computer Science of the Foundation for Research and Technology – Hellas will be the host of the EDeAN Secretariat for 2005, taking over from iRv – the Netherlands. The EDeAN Secretariat is run on a yearly rotating basis by one of the EDeAN National Contact Centres.

Ireland
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Inclusive Learning through Technology (ILT) Project

The Inclusive Learning Project (ILT) is the combination of integrating new technology and new learning techniques into two special schools in Ireland.

Funding through the McMahan Center in New York has provided the Central Remedial Clinic School in Dublin and St Gabriel's School in Limerick on the west coast of Ireland with new learning horizons supported by cutting edge network technologies.

The ILT uses Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to facilitate learning and has engaged in a series of parallel activities, the main components being:

– Provision of laptop computers and personalised Assistive Technology (AT) on a 1:1 ratio, with wireless Internet access to facilitate access to ICT.
– Using the thinking activities devised by Dr Edward de Bono to encourage structured thinking.
– Using a link between the two schools as a stimulus for interaction using videoconferencing, email and a face to face visit.
– Encouraging students to work in groups to research material related to the project theme.

The integration of the CoRT (de Bono, online) thinking techniques into curricular areas has equipped students with transferable higher-order thinking skills which enable these students to better understand their capabilities and shortcomings regarding their education. This in turn impacts on the teachers' pedagogical practice evolving from whole group instruction to a more differentiated approach of individual and small group activities.

Classroom interaction has been enriched and enlivened with online and offline collaborative activities, supported by technology. Twenty-one students have wireless laptop computers giving both teachers and students one-to-one access, making the computer a ubiquitous tool for the educator and the learner. Wireless access to the internet allows students and teachers to acquire information that is not available through conventional methods. The project has been extended for another year through addition funding from the McMahan foundation.

Further info: on www.atireland.ie/inclusive or gcraddock@crc.ie

Israel
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Knesset's Technology Committee discusses establishment of National AT information database

On the 16th of November, a special meeting of the Knesset's (Israeli Parliament) Subcommittee on Science and Technology was held to discuss the need for a establishing a national database on assistive technology products and services.

Representatives from across the healthcare and rehabilitation services sector, research institutions, and disability associations participated in the debate. Testimony was given by several organizations concerning the scope of the requirement for establishing and deploying the information service, as well as the type of information to be made available to the public. Progress in this area with the EU (e.g., the EASTIN project) was noted as a case model of what is possible to achieve.

Over the last 24 months, a consortium of organizations – including Eshel (the Association for the Planning and Development of Services for the Elderly), GeronTech, Yad Sarah (a nationwide AT device lending service), Alyn Children's Rehabilitation Center, and Milbat (an AT device customisation and advice centre), and others have designed and developed the prototype for such a national information database of AT products and services (currently in early beta testing). It is hoped eventually that this system will be included as part of a national information infrastructure, within the context of Israel's "Accessible Government" (or eGovernment) programme.

The minutes of the meeting are available (in Hebrew) at: www.knesset.gov.il/protocols/data/rtf/mada/2004-11-16.rtf.

Italy
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Handimatica exhibition

Handimatica – the key Italian event of the year in the field of ICT-based assistive technologies – took place in Bologna on November 25–27. The event included a specialised exhibition of AT products with 48 exhibitors, most of them manufacturers or suppliers of communication devices, computer-access peripherals and software, software for learning disabilities, home automation appliances, and electronic controls for navigation or mobility aids.

Almost 50 conferences, seminars and workshops took place on a wide variety of subjects: technical (latest technological development in AT), clinical (role of AT in rehabilitation and education), and policy (service delivery system of AT).

A workshop was devoted to the role of the Assistive Devices Centres in the national service delivery scenario. Although a number of these centres already exist on the initiative of both public and private non-profit agencies, their information and counselling activity is not yet acknowledged in any public service-packages at national or regional levels. That is why a working group has been set up within GLIC (the national association of ICT-based Assistive Device Centres) to work out a road-map towards official acknowledgement.

Handimatica was organised by ASPHI (www.asphi.it), an Italian non-profit organisation whose mission is to promote, through the use of ICT, the integration of people with disabilities in the school, at work, and in society) in conjunction with the Region of Emilia Romagna, the IBM Italy Foundation and the University of Bologna. The next edition will be in 2005.

Distance Training through the SIVA Portal

The SIVA Internet Portal on Assistive Technologies (new address: www.portale.siva.it) is equipped with a facility that allows for broadcasting lectures, and also

making them available afterwards on demand. The facility has been extensively used during 2004 to carry out monthly seminars for rehabilitation professionals, AT users and AT manufacturers/suppliers on a variety of topics, such as electronic controls for wheelchairs, aids and adaptations for camping and caravanning, accessibility of building, and transportation, clothing aids, cognitive aids, e-accessibility, and AT policy issues.

Each on-line seminar is composed of two parts: 1) a lecture, often including live demonstration of equipment, that is broadcasted by the portal so that anybody can watch and listen at a distance through his/her standard internet browser, and a DSL-like connection; and 2) a discussion held in audio-conference among 9 Centres of the Don Gnocchi Foundations throughout Italy, where the audience can freely go, put questions and interact with the lecturers.

Each seminar is held on the first Wednesday of each month at 12.30 – that is the easiest time for the staff of each Centre to have the routine work suspended for training – and lasts one hour. Those who are not able to attend at that time have the opportunity to watch the lecture afterwards, through video on demand from the same Internet page http://portale.siva.it/ita/servizi/incontri/default.asp.

This method of training has been proved very effective; currently it features an average attendance of 250 people, plus those who watch only the lecture on their own without taking part in the audio conference discussion. For the time being this educational programme is going to proceed regularly in the Italian language. Prospects for international dissemination are being explored.

Finland
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Wellness Dream Lab is offering tools for business development

Wellness Dream Lab (WDL) is a business development program for small and medium size companies in wellness and well-being technology area. The program is run in Jyväskylä, Central Finland by Jyväskylä Polytechnic, University, Science Park and various companies. The wellness technology sector in the Jyväskylä region focuses upon the measurement of human health and functional capacity, as well as on the development of interfaces between people and technology. Unlike many larger corporations, small businesses have very limited resources for their business development. WDL

can offer them similar R&D and business development tools as larger companies are using.

The strength of the WDL programme is the ability of different players to bring down the barriers that normally separate them in order to achieve common goals. All parties are committed to carrying progress forward in an unselfish spirit. The program is able to offer multidisciplinary expertise from the fields of user-centered design, physiology, psychology, usability, gerontology, neuromuscular activities, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, etc.

As regards the future, two main trends can are apparent: ageing of the population and independent living. Both trends will have a positive impact on the demand for wellness technology. So far, most of the companies which have been able to benefit the WDL programme are from the sports technology area. Recently, some companies from the assistive technology area have joined programme too. One growing field of interest is gerontechnology, in particular because the location of the research center of gerontology in Jyväskylä.

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Hungary
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Ambient Intelligence for persons with special communication needs

This ongoing project at the Eötvös Loránd University has three main components:

– Development of special communication tools.
– Development of machine learning techniques for situational optimization.
– Development of ambient intelligence systems.

Development of special communication tools: The tools include image processing software, sound processing software, motion detection tools, and control and communications software. One of the image processing tools, the HeadMouse (see photo) can be downloaded freely from the internet at http://nipg.inf.elte.hu/headmouse/headmouse.html. Similarly, an EyeMouse is under development.

A particular feature of these tools is that they use simple webcams. Integrated with the tools, webcams enable the system to detect moods, recognise people, and to react accordingly. Last but not least, we are

Screenshot of the headmouse application. Rectangle: area identified as the location of the head. Smaller rectangle: restricted area of feature selection. Dots on the face: currently followed features.

using radio-frequency microelectronic and mechanical (RF-MEMS) tools for position and configuration measurement and for gesture recognition.

Development of machine learning techniques for situational optimization: We have been using state-of-the-art machine learning tools for evaluating and predicting motion patterns, which – for people with special communication needs – could be used for intelligent corrections. Reinforcement learning permits improving the combined performance of the machine and the user.

Development of ambient intelligence: A government grant will now allow us to incorporate these technologies into an intelligent house and the building of the Alternative and Augmented Communication Center of the Hungarian Bliss Foundation www.c3.hu/~drahu/bliss/segito.html. This building will have webcam-enabled laptops on the wheelchairs, and special communications software, including intelligent writing tools, text-to-speech tool, WIFI communication for transmitting images, text and voice, software tools for therapeutic needs and an "Aibo" pet www.aibo.com for children.

Aibo can transmit visual information, has a speaker and microphone, and can be directed by the Head-Mouse. Using our software tools, children will be able to control the pet to approach people and the establish remote communication.

We are just about to start the project and expect this building in operation by the end of June, 2005.

For further information:

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The Netherlands
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Augmented travelling for intellectually disabled persons

Those with cognitive disability, like most people with handicap, often feel a need to travel more independently. Many European countries offer travel information in accessible web site formats for augmented travelling.

However, intellectually disabled persons do need individual support through specific and individually configurable assistive technology. Common website accessibility guidelines (such as W3C) so far are not geared to the needs of these user groups and specific assistive technology for travel purposes is lacking as well.

TNO-TM (project leader), iRv and @ACT, an AAC and ICT centre for the intellectually disabled performed research on accessibility guidelines for mobile devices (PdAs) and use the concept development of augmented travelling software as a case study. The goal of this project was the development of guidelines and concepts.

A first working prototype has been realised. Key features are simplicity of navigation, language representation (symbol use, choice of communication level), representation of maps, time and directions, and the assurance of basic safety. Currently the first field tests are running.
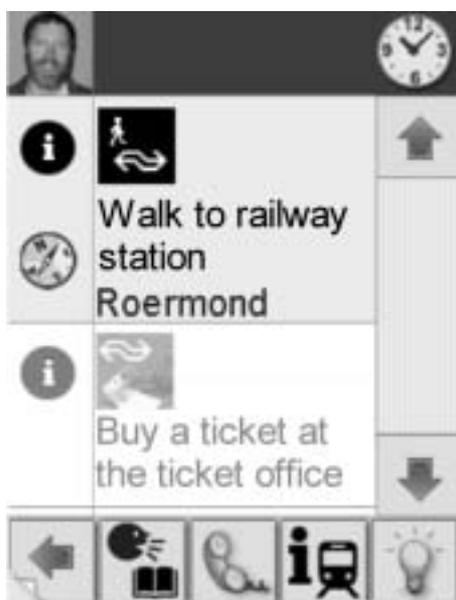
The system provides cues and indications in audible and graphical formats and has an integrated cell phone for alarm and caregiver consultation functions. Additional features such as dynamic routing information and an editing function for relatives and caregivers, allowing them to program and download new travel information, are foreseen in future versions. Finalisation of the accessibility criteria based on these developments is in progress.

For further information:

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Guidelines for accessible websites

Screen shot of user interface.

The Delta Centre has published a booklet with guidelines for owners and developers of websites to ensure that accessibility is considered when planning and developing new websites. The booklet debates the difference between access and accessibility, prejudices regarding accessibility and design and focuses on success factors during the project phase. The accessibility criteria refer to the W3C/WAI guidelines.

The booklet contains a checklist intended to be used as a specification of accessibility criteria during the purchasing process and also a matching checklist to be used as an evaluation tool after delivery.

Development has been made in co-operation with Norge.no, the official gateway to public services and information in Norway. Norge.no now addresses the same set of accessibility criteria when evaluating the Norwegian public websites.

The guidelines are available in Norwegian only. For more information, contact Haakon Aspelund at the Delta Centre, E-mail: haa@shdir.no

Association News

New AAATE S.I.G. on AT outcomes

At the annual AAATE general assembly in Düsseldorf the board accepted a proposal on the foundation of a new Special Interest Group (S.I.G.) on the outcomes of Assistive Technology and its assessment.

AT Outcome Assessment – In recent years an increasing interest in outcomes of the use of assistive technology (AT) across Europe has taken place. Parties financing AT are becoming increasingly concerned about the lack of insight into the relationship between outcomes of assistive technology and the costs involved.

Similarly, there is a growing awareness that due to lack of information about the outcomes to be expected, the selection from the available range of AT devices made by an end-user and his or her advisors may be sub-optimal, resulting in a low effectiveness.

Evaluation of outcomes of AT is, however, complex since many factors and circumstances influence the use of assistive technology. The outcome of using an assistive device may depend on the user's age, type and degree of disability and illness, the duration of device use, the environment in which the device is used, the activities carried out, the characteristics of the device, the assistive technology service, etc. Furthermore, the use of assistive technology is only one measure within the rehabilitation process and it is often used in combination with other devices or other interventions such as training, adaptation and assistance from others.

Likewise, the outcomes of use of assistive devices are diverse. The overall purpose of using assistive devices is often to improve independence, make specific activities possible for the user, and provide possibilities for participation in society, which in turn are expected to improve quality of life.

However, there are also intermediate outcomes such as execution of single tasks, enhanced self-efficacy and personal control, frequency of use, substitution of costly home services and prevention of the necessity to move into institutions.

The interest in different sorts of outcomes may be dependent on the stakeholder. Various stakeholders have different expectations of, and needs for, outcomes of assistive technology, and therefore the perspective on outcome research may be programme-management oriented, rehabilitation science-oriented, or user oriented. Each of these perspectives implies different aims, choices of outcome criteria, validity issues, etc.

AT Outcome Assessment Instruments – Given the diverse nature of outcomes it is hardly surprising that measuring outcome is a challenging domain as well. The absence of a unifying theory and the fragmented development of expertise, results in a shortage of well developed and internationally recognized instruments.

Only a limited number of reliable and valid instruments for outcomes measurement currently are available within the area of AT, and many are developed in North-America, while in Europe they are to be used

within a different culture, language, and societal structure. Hence, there is an urgent need to develop new and adapt existing instruments for use in Europe's various countries.

Besides, the preconditions for common European projects on AT, outcomes are instruments that are reliable and valid in all involved countries. Furthermore, outcomes should be seen in the light of the costs involved, thus including aspects of economic evaluation such as cost-effectiveness, cost-utility, and cost-benefit.

In each European country there is a limited number of professionals working with outcomes of AT, and European collaboration may enhance development of the area of outcome assessment.

Aim of the SIG – The aim of the SIG OUTCOME ASSESSMENT is to provide a European meeting point for professionals interested in, or occupied with, the assessment of outcomes of assistive technology (AT). Such a meeting point can be formed by establishing and maintaining an international network of professionals on outcome assessment. Mainly through the facilities offered by AAATE's SIGs, internet, newsgroup, conference, and newsletter, will these objectives be achieved.

Through the availability of a platform for outcome assessment the SIG strives for exchange of information on:

- the practice of outcome assessment;
- the outcomes of various types of AT;
- effectiveness and efficiency of available instruments.

In addition, the SIG aims at contributing to the European discussion on:

- development and improvement of instruments;
- implementation of instruments.

The activities of the SIG will add to the professionalism of AAATE members concerning the measurement of outcomes, the insight in the potential of assessed outcomes, and the contribution to the further development of the outcomes discipline.

Interested? AAATE members interested in participating or requesting more information are invited to e-mail Åse Brandt aab@hmi.dk (Danish Centre for Assistive Technology) or Gert Jan Gelderblom gj.gelderblom@irv.nl (iRv).

AAATE welcomes a new national contact!

Anna-Liisa Salminen

Anna-Liisa.Salminen@sport.jyu.fi

Björk Palsdottir has accepted to be the Icelandic national contact of AAATE. Björk works as the head of the Department for Technical Aids in the State Social Security Institute. Her e-mail address is: bjork@tr.is and the www address to their organisation is www.tr.is.

MEMBERS' NEWS

ISO meeting on Wheelchair Standards
Ricard Barberà i Guillem *ribargui@ibv.upv.es*

The Instituto de Biomecànica de Valencia (IBV) hosted during the first week of last November the 15th meeting of ISO/TC 173/SC1 Technical Systems and Aids for Disabled or Handicapped Persons: Subcommittee on Wheelchairs.

Around forty experts from all around the world met at IBV in the different working groups of this subcommittee devoted to the development and revision of wheelchairs standards.

The working groups present in the meeting were:

- WG1- Test methods.
- WG6-Wheelchair restraints systems.
- WG8-Stairs traversing devices.
- WG9-Determination of the performance of stand-up type wheelchairs.
- WG10-Requierements and test methods for electro-technical systems for wheelchairs.
- Wg11-Wheelchair systems.

The event had important coverage in the mass-media (TV and press), which was positively regarded by IBV owing to the possibility to increase the general awareness concerning the potential for new wheelchair models and developments to benefit wheelchair users in the Spanish market.

New European project on Assistive Technology and Training

Evert-Jan Hoogerwerf *hoogerwerf@ausilioteca.org*

KPT (Keeping Pace with (Assistive) Technology) is the title of a new European Project which started in October 2004 and will run for 30 months. The proposal is supported by the European Commission, under the Leonardo da Vinci Programme.

The aim of the project is to meet the life-long learning needs of professionals working with people with disabilities in health services, social services and vocational training/job orientation (doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, social workers, educators, rehabilitation engineers, trainers, tutors, psychologists).

The project will focus on skills development associated with Assistive Technology applications, in particular in those areas where technology develops rapidly: e.g., aids for communication, computer access, and environmental control.

As professionals belonging to the target audience indicate, they often lack the specific competences needed to understand how technological aids can support rehabilitation, independent living and social inclusion programmes, tailored to the individual needs of people with disabilities.

One of the reasons is the rapid development of assistive technology, which quickly outdates the initial training knowledge of the target audience. Another reason is the lack of knowledge of the specific factors of successful AT intervention, such as interdisciplinary teamwork, appropriate timing of interventions, and good case management. These professionals can make their interventions more effective and efficient if they have access to appropriate learning opportunities in a life long learning perspective.

Many professionals belonging to the target group have university qualifications but lack opportunities to update their knowledge or to find AT related support in managing cases. Across Europe there are a number of Assistive Technology centres that work in close contact with territorial services, normally in response to the needs of AT users and bringing in their specific competences in inclusive technologies.

Recognised as important resources by public authorities, the number of independent AT Centres in Europe is rising, and providing training and support to professionals in the field is considered to be one of their main activities. Nevertheless, not all these centres have as yet optimised their training practice, although important initiatives that aim to respond to training needs of professionals are under way in Europe.

A large international consortium of AT centres, universities, training organisations, organisations representing professionals in health, social services and vocational training, and people with disabilities, will implement the project.

The project will be coordinated by Ausilioteca and the AT Centre of AIAS Bologna onlus, an Association of people with disabilities and their families.

Technology is developing rapidly, and one of the major challenges of the inclusive society is to enable people with disabilities to benefit from available technologies. The project's target audience, professionals supporting people with disabilities, need to be aware of the impact assistive technology can have on their clients' lives; but many lack opportunities to update their knowledge or to find AT related support in managing cases. In many universities, even in initial training, very little is done to fill this knowledge gap.

Within the project, guidelines will be developed to direct and support training provision to the target audience. The guidelines will refer to an integrated model of training in which the various learning opportunities a professional will come across during his career (initial training at university or vocational training, AT centre managed training programmes, and informal learning through case management support) will be geared towards co-ordinated and common goals.

The guidelines will distinguish these learning opportunities, defining for each of them learning objectives, content, tools and delivery strategies; taking into account differences among the target audiences' professional profiles and national and regional situations. Finally, examples of training modules that meet these guidelines will be developed.

The project outcomes will be useful to staff members of AT centres responsible for training and support, university teachers, employers in health, social services, and vocational training. A specific user group will be formed by professionals developing policy in (continuing) vocational training. These potential users will be informed of the outcomes of the project.

The outcomes will be made available through the project web site and a brochure in English, Italian, and Dutch, summarising the project outcomes and referring to the website, will be published and disseminated directly by the partners through conferences and via direct mail. For more information:
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Upcoming prototype of EASTIN

Renzo Andrich *renzo.andrich@siva.it*

An upcoming milestone of the EASTIN network (European Assistive Technology Information Network www.eastin.info) will be the launch of the prototype of the EASTIN search engine – a tool that will allow for searching at the same time across all national information systems belonging to the EASTIN Consortium. In this way, it will be possible for anybody interested to retrieve in an integrated report AT-related information (products, fact sheets, case studies, ideas etc.) available in the various countries (Italy, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, Denmark, and The Netherlands), and have it displayed according to common formats that help readability and understanding.

By using automatic translation software tools – appropriately customised so as to correctly reflect the specific terminology of this domain of knowledge – information will be displayed in English whenever the native record is not in a language the user understands. A further step will be of course the retro-translation from English in the user's language, which will be tackled later in the project.

The prototype will be online around early April, in order to carry out an extended user test especially with representatives of AT end-users, health care professionals and AT manufacturers/suppliers. Those who are interested to take part in the beta test groups are welcome to apply to the national contact partner of the EASTIN Consortium, who can be reached by e-mail through the EASTIN website www.eastin.info.

Technology for older people in Argentina

Lawrence Normie *Lnormie@jdc.org.il*

Spanish readers among you might find interesting the information on www.inti.gov.ar/terceraedad, which contains details of "The First Symposium on Technology in the Service of Older People", that took place in Buenos Aires at the beginning of November.

The conference was organised by INTI the National Institute for Industrial Technology (a government standards qualification and R&D organisation). GeronTech (our organisation) was invited to the event to talk about the Israeli experience in establishing a resource and infrastructure for technology and ageing research and development. Similarly, a representative from MIT AgeLab shared with the conference delegates information on his organisation's activities in the field.

The Argentinean government has expressed substantial interest in developing the field of technology and ageing as a national priority. Therefore, I think there should be considerable scope for international cooperation with AAATE members whose work concerns needs of older people.

Those interested in exploring collaborative opportunities in this direction, please email me or contact INTI directly: Ing. Rafael Kohanoff rkohanoff@inti.gov.ar.

International Workshop on Accessibility Requirements for Public Procurement in the ICT domain.

Thijs Soede *msoede@irv.nl*

Last autumn (October 19–21, '04) a workshop was held in Brussels on Public Procurement. In the area of implementation of Assistive Technology we have seen the US examples of legislation which have the intention to include people with disabilities in the working society, and to begin with the government as a major employer. Not only numbers count, but the government has (should have!) also the obligation to present a best practice lead as an example for other employers. Numbers are important because revenues from the larger volume of purchases enables industry develop better (accessible and usable) products.

The initiative of the European Commission in cooperation with the EU ICT standards board, the European Disability Forum, and the US Access board, to organise this conference was most welcome and needed. The workshop relied also on the work of the eInclusion@EU project.

A session was held on the benefit of harmonisation, in which the EDF made a plea for various measures and support through appropriate legislative and standardising actions. Legislation in EU-countries is done at EU-level and therefore harmonisation of actions in our field must rely on the possibilities within the framework of the EU system (action plans, recommendations, and directives).

Further sessions, included the description of the current EU-situation, policy aspects, technical domains and international aspects (referring to the EU and outside Europe).

Apart from the informative descriptions of the technical domains and issues brought forward from users' perspectives, a major focus was on industry issues and that is exactly what has been so remarkable in the US experience. The requirement for companies to play a role in public procurement, and the way this is organised in the US, is a complex matter, but regarding which we can learn, adapt and, perhaps improve within a European context. (at least that must be the ambition).

The proceedings of the conference are available on:

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/policy/accessibility/regulation/pubproc_ws_2004/index_en.htm

or just type the title of the workshop in the Google search box.

Web accessibility work at City University London

Helen Petrie *h.l.petrie@soi.city.ac.uk*

The Inclusive Design and Assistive Technology Group, at the Centre for Human-Computer Interaction Design at City University London, has an ongoing programme of research on web accessibility.

Earlier this year we completed an extensive and indepth study of web accessibility for the British Disability Rights Commission. The report and other relevant documents can be found at www-hcid.soi.city.ac.uk/research/Drc.html.

We have now completed a similar study for the Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives (www.mla.gov.uk) investigating 325 museum, library and archive websites for both technical and user accessibility. The report for this study will be released in April 2005.

We also have a number of more specific projects related to web accessibility. We are participating in the EU-funded BenToWeb Project that aims to create an enhanced European standard for accessible websites in Europe. It will develop and assess benchmarking testsuites for evaluation- and repair-tools, in conjunction with such as the W3C.

We are also developing a set of guidelines and best practice to help web developers provide appropriate descriptions of images, principally for visually impaired web users. As with all our work, this project is taking a highly user-centred approach. So we are consulting visually impaired people about what kinds of descriptions they would like, and then testing example descriptions with them.

In another project we are undertaking a comparative evaluation of a range of accessibility evaluation and repair tools for functionality, range, accuracy and usability. Finally, we are developing a model of the relationship between accessibility and usability, and testing this with empirical data. The results of these projects will be available by April 2005.

ITSE-project has ended

Anna-Liisa Salminen
Anna-Liisa.Salminen@stakes.fi

The national ITSE-project aimed to improve knowledge and promote assistive technology expertise of the staff that work in the welfare and health care services; develop new models and networks for the welfare and health care services; disseminate knowledge of new technical developments and services to the staff and users in relation to new assistive technology in Finland.

The project was implemented as 18 local projects and it covered 288 counties. Local projects followed the overall aims of the ITSE-project, but were planned according to the local needs. The project began in the spring of 2001 and continued until mid 2004. It was co-ordinated and evaluated by the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES). Overall funding in the project was 3.6 million euros.

To achieve the aims of the project 100 articles that informed about assistive technology and related services were published in different newspapers, magazines and other publications. One national and ten local assistive technology exhibitions were organised. In addition one permanent exhibition home for assistive technology was founded. 80 local networks were created to increase co-operation between welfare and health care professionals, professionals from educational institutions, non governmental organisations and assistive technology companies.

Ten new models to implement assistive technology services locally, seven technical adaptations and 15 guides for local assistive technology services were developed. 659 training events for over 12 000 participants were organised.

As the outcome of the ITSE-project the knowledge of assistive technology among people who work in the welfare and health care has clearly increased. Local stakeholders have got more interested in improving assistive technology services and to offer related training. In addition most of the new developments that were developed during the project will continue on permanent basis.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

In this section, members are invited to submit announcements concerning meetings and events in the AT field. In addition, FAST UK (www.fastuk.org) provides a comprehensive, annotated, and long-range listing of future national and international events relating to AT and allied fields.

Accessible Design in the Digital World Conference 2005 will take place in Dundee, Scotland from 23–25 August 2005.

Keynotes: Dr Vicki Hanson (Accessibility Research, IBM), Prof Alan Newell MBE (Applied Computing, University of Dundee), Chris van der Kuyl (VIS Entertainment Ltd) and Prof Helen Petrie (Centre for HCI Design, City University)

The conference will explore the frontiers of inclusive design in the real world. It will examine some of the challenges in implementing the numerous guidelines and meeting legal responsibilities. There will be opportunities for discussion and debate among those at the front-line of design and development work and those providing guidance regarding accessible and inclusive design.

The programme committee is looking for papers, posters and workshops, covering all aspects of accessible design in the digital world that may cover topic(s) falling into at least one of the following broad areas:

– New methods for inclusive design of accessible objects which enhance the quality of the user experience of technology and e-services.
– Emerging technologies and developments for inclusive and accessible design which will provide better experiences for users.
– The impact of inclusive design and its implementation on designers, developers, users, service providers, etc.
– Examples of innovative designs which enhance accessibility.

Deadlines:
Workshops: 1st Feb 2005.
Papers: 12th April 2005.

Posters: 24th May 2005.
For more information:
www.accessinthedigitalworld.org or Lorna Gibson lgibson@computing.dundee.ac.uk

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