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On "Digital change – and the consequences for older persons"

Digitalisation represents a far reaching, profound and almost universal (r)evolution which affects and transforms increasingly, in one or another manner, our technology-based society. It changes rapidly the production and consumption of goods, services and knowledge. It has to be understood as a totally new cultural technique which penetrates into quasi all areas of our material environment, our living conditions, our ways of apprehending, judging and acting.

This is not only true for the younger or middle-aged generations but it has also an incremental impact on the life of older persons. Even though there is a wide-spread warning of the danger that this development may - or even will - dehumanise society and anonymise personal contacts between individuals as well as their relationship with society's institutions and processes, it has to be recognised that the applications of this new cultural technique can – and in fact does - generate a lot of appreciable, helpful and enjoyable opportunities and solutions to common problems – also for older persons.

Just to mention – as examples - some major areas where the advantages may - or already are - particularly visible and advantageous:
- in the area of medical services (tele-medicine, etc.), nursing and care,
- in matters of information, communication and social participation,
- in facilitating shopping, cooking and planning/performing various daily routines,
- in the enjoyment of culture and the choice of entertainment,
- in the management of one's finances and administrative duties.

Certainly, one might imagine many more areas and tasks where the use of the instruments and solutions provided by digitalisation can represent a lot of added value to the individual and society at large.

However, it is also frequently argued that older persons have too many difficulties or are even incapable to use such modern technologies. Apart from the fact that this might be a stereotype prejudice, it is simply an unjustified assumption – because it depends on the condition of the individual person and on the accessibility of the hardware devices, the usability of the programmes and the clarity of the output responses.

This all will fundamentally change with the further developments of the digital application sectors. Once interactive processes with voice command working features, the evolution of artificial intelligence-based relationships between machines and users, security measures with voice, face and behaviour identification, etc. become standard, the individualised usability of the systems will make them very easy to handle and to benefit from their possibilities.

Main issues to be considered, addressed, and reflected upon through careful analysis upon are certainly:
- The domains in which older persons can most benefit from digital devices and processes
- The precise advantages and potential barriers/dangers of specific devices and processes
- The best ways and means to ensure easy and beneficial use of digital devices and processes
- Constructive proposals and recommendations to be submitted to researchers, politicians, manufacturers, system developers and coaches.

Kronberg im Taunus, 16 February 2021   Dirk Jarré, President of EURAG