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Temporal Aspects in IS Research: Older People and Technology from a Temporal Perspective

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Abstract
In this position paper I present my PhD project - dealing with the relation between technology (ICTs and ATs) and older people â from a temporal perspective. In my research, a temporal perspective is useful both in the study of the process of aging and in the studies of gerotechnologies. In particular, in this position paper I take into account two concepts proposed by Barbara Adam (1990, 2004, 2009): timescape and futurescape. Timescapes identifies the combination of the irreducible elements involved in "time." Amongst these, my analysis is focused on three elements: timing, tempo, temporal modalities. Futurescape is a useful theoretical tool to account for the social and historical features of our lives. In the paper I consider this concept from two different standpoints: present future and future present (Luhman, 1981; Adam and Groves, 2007). At the end, I propose to study the role played by ICTs and ATs as objects linking past, present and future.

Keywords: Keywords: Aging, ICTs and ATs, temporality, timescape, futurscape

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Abstract

In this position paper I present my PhD project – dealing with the relation between technology (ICTs and ATs) and older people – from a temporal perspective.

In my research, a temporal perspective is useful both in the study of the process of aging and in the studies of gerotechnologies. In particular, in this position paper I take into account two concepts proposed by Barbara Adam (1990, 2004, 2009): *timescape and futurescape*. *Timescapes* identifies the combination of the irreducible elements involved in "time". Amongst these, my analysis is focused on three elements: *timing, tempo, temporal modalities*. *Futurescape* is a useful theoretical tool to account for the social and historical features of our lives. In the paper I consider this concept from two different standpoints: *present future* and *future present* (Luhman, 1981; Adam and Groves, 2007). At the end, I propose to study the role played by ICTs and ATs as objects linking past, present and future.

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In order to explore the temporal aspects in IS research, in this position paper I will account for my PhD project that deals with the relation between technology (ICTs and ATs) and older people.
Specifically, I chose as empirical field two European projects that are designing and testing new kinds of technology for older people's houses, aimed at promoting social inclusion and at improving quality of life. Within this frame, my analysis will focus on the dimension of space and time organization in elderly people's daily life. In particular, my research questions are: *how do ICTs enter in older people's everyday life? How are time and space perceived and constructed in this phase of life in the presence of new technologies?*

In this kind of research, a temporal perspective is useful in a double sense.

1. The idea of temporality is fundamental in the **process of aging**. According to the sociology of aging (Burgalassi, 1994; Micheli, 2003; Novak, 2006). I consider project participants as belonging to a "new generation" of older people, characterized by many factors unknown to previous generations of elderly. Living at the turn of the modern and post-modern era, this generation have probably lived more changes than all other generations. In these changes, time and temporality play an important role:
   - "new" older people have witnessed phenomena as the *high speed society* (Rosa, 2003), the *acceleration of social life* (Leccardi, 2009), and the time and space compression (Harvey, 1990);
   - people live longer and with best physical and psychological conditions than in the past. This means that there are a lot of older people still healthy and autonomous and that the condition of "older people" is more heterogeneous than in the past (Facchini, Rampazi, 2009);
   - in this context new kind of projects and rituals (Zerubavel, 1981) emerge. "New" in a double sense: on one hand because they are different from the projects and rituals these people had in their past, on the other these because they are different in respect of projects and rituals experienced by other elder people in the past. Old age appears today as a part of life yet to be invented, both in terms of the position of the population group in the society, both in terms of individual perspectives (Tramma, 2003).

2. Another new factor in older stage of life is the development of new **gerotechnologies** to improve older people's life and to extend the *aging in place* (Fozard *et al.*, 2000; Horgas, Abowd, 2003; Mahmood *et al.*, 2008A temporal perspective can also be useful to study what happens when these new technologies enter in older people life. More precisely, my analysis focuses on the practices emerging from the introduction of ICTs and ATs in older people life and how they influence:
   - the elder people's routines and the modalities they structure and narrate their times and spaces;
   - the rhythms of life and temporal regularity characterizing the old stage of life;
   - the perception and construction of individual and social time.

In particular, during my research I would want to take into account two concepts proposed by Barbara Adam (1990, 2004, 2009): *timescape and futurescape*.

1. *Timescapes* identifies the combination of the irreducible elements involved in "time": "the 'scape' part of the concept acknowledges that we cannot embrace time without simultaneously encompassing space and matter, that is, without embodiment in a specific and unique context. Thus, a *timescapes* perspective acknowledges this spatiality, materiality and contextuality but foregrounds the temporal side of the interdependency" (Adam, 2009, p.1).
   Adam lists the structural features involved by the temporal perspective: *time frame, temporality, timing, tempo, duration, sequence, temporal modalities*. Taking for granted that none of the

structural elements operate in isolation, I will concentrate my analysis on some particular elements: *timing, tempo, temporal modalities*.

a. The temporal element of ***timing*** (answering the question: *when?*) gives the opportunity to focus on social synchronisation and co-ordination. Different kind of time – besides the time of calendar and clocks – are routinely synchronised in daily life. In order to study the relation between older people and technologies, I will focus on:
   - the body time which is hugely variable as it is affected by age and degrees of wellbeing;
   - the internal times of the technologies which can condition and change the elder people's routine;
   - the times of institutions (shops, workplaces, etc.) which strongly condition older people's everyday life both on an individual level – that is, when they can do something – and in the relationship with the others – that is, when family people, care givers or friend have the possibility to meet them.

b. The second *timescapes* element I want to focus on is ***tempo***, which relates to the speed, pace and intensity at which activities are conducted, work has to be completed, etc. In a *high speed society* (Rosa, 2003) do the elderly have to conform to the pace of the working majority or do they – consciously or unconsciously – propose different strategies to relate to *tempo*? And what happens when there is a clash of *tempi* and caregivers cannot balance working/public times with family/care times? Which role can ICTs and ATs play in this dynamic?

c. Lastly, ***temporal modalities*** – comprising the sphere of individual and/or collective past, present and future – could be an important element for my analysis. The possibility to create a narrative continuity amongst past, present and future and the issue of memory in older phase of life could be a key issue of my project.

2. Within this frame, alongside the importance of *timescape* it emerges also the importance of the concept of ***futurscape.*** As Adam (2009) puts it, *futurescape* is a useful theoretical tool to account for the social and historical features of our lives: "everything we do in our lives is not just embedded in a socio-historical past but also projects into a socio-environment future (…) futures are created continuously (…) the future is therefore an inescapable aspect of social and cultural existence" (2009, p. 7). In my research, I will take into account this concept from two different standpoints: *present future* and *future present* (Luhman, 1982; Adam and Groves, 2007).
   From the position of *present future* people can understand the future as a personal realm to shape and create. While, from the position of *future present,* people come to know themselves as being acting and trespassing in the rightful domain of others, that is, they are borrowing from the *future present* of successor generations. As such, focus on the *present future* asks 'what can the future do for me' while concern with *future presents* asks 'what are we doing to the future'?
   In the elders could prevail the *present-future* perspective as the *future-present*: What is future in the final part of the life? Which perception older people have of the future? Is future closer to the past? Do older people project the future or they think about all the life without projecting it?

Within this perspective I will focus on the role played by ICTs and ATs as objects linking:
- past (pictures, written material as poetries, phrase of the day…)
- present (information and communication with other people, researchers, and services)
- and future (projects, relationship with the other generations…).

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