Chapter 20

Collaborating with Elderly End-users in the Design Process

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20.1 Introduction

The fact that end-users can participate and contribute to the design process, was pointed out in previous studies on user participation to the design process conducted by Cavanagh (1996), Ciccantelli and Magidson (1993), Mitchell (1995), Morini and Pomposini (1996), and Reich et al. (1996). For Howes, et al. (1998), participatory design is a design methodology, European in origin, giving an important contributory role to the end-user in the development of products they would eventually use. This paper presents a study (Demirbilek, 1999) in which elderly end-users were involved in the design process by means of participatory design sessions. In these sessions, the expertise of designers and the comments and ideas of elderly end-users were applied to how doors and door handles for domestic use should be designed. Two different design sessions were run for each group of elderly end-users.

20.2 Participatory Design Sessions

20.2.1 Characteristics of the Sample of Elderly End-users

The participatory design sessions were held with potential end-users, each consisting of 3-6 elderly people, mostly widowed, male and female over 65, from the city of Ankara. Random sampling was used among a group of volunteers. A pilot session was conducted with 4 elderly participants (one male and three females between 68 and 75 years old), at the end of which the participatory design session was revised. A sample of 13 potential elderly end-users forming 3 different groups (see Figure 20.1) took part, each completing both participatory design sessions.
The sample of volunteers, consisting of 10 females and 3 males, had a mean age of 75. Nine of the elderly participants were living in a residential home, with two of them having their own homes but preferring to stay in this sheltered accommodation where they have a one-room studio with a bathroom and a small kitchenette. The other four participants were living in their own homes, two as a couple, and two with their children. None of them had any severe disability limiting their physical activities. Four of the women used canes and three of them had problems when sitting down and standing up. Only one of the women had difficulty walking due to her age (93) and weight.