Project QLK6-CT-2001-00458 within EU FP5.

Foreword

The shifts in age-group ratios in the population are confronting us with new challenges. At the moment Europe is at the top of the old age statistics with the highest life expectancy rate. The changes in the age structure of the population mean new socio-political responsibilities both today and in the future. It is quite obvious that appliances and technological equipment can help to maintain older persons' quality of life by enabling them to stay longer in their own homes, and/or to lead relatively more independent lives even if living in an older people's home or some other institution.

FRR ("Friendly Rest Room") was an EU project within the Quality of Life programme which set out to make toilet facilities better suited for older people and people with disabilities. Many elements of the FRR (seat, grab bars, etc.) are individually adjustable to meet the needs of persons with different functional limitations or disabilities, allowing them to gain greater autonomy, independence, self esteem, dignity, safety, improved self-care and, therefore, enable them to enjoy a better quality of life.

We are proud to present in this conference some of the main results from the FRR-project. In many of the scientific disciplines that collaborated in the project, these results form the first attempt to investigate in-depth the area of toileting, thus providing knowledge that did not exist prior to the FRR-project. Though we are fully aware that we did not arrive at a final point, we see a lot of possible solutions to problems so widely spread within the European population.

This conference is hosted by the care providing institution Caritas Socialis in Vienna whose clients and staff members already have contributed significantly to the evaluation of the different laboratory and field test prototypes of the FRR project. This offers an optimal base for our final conference which intends to put the focus on the user related results. Additionally and complementary to this final conference, the consortium is working on publishing a book containing more detailed scientific findings (to be available by mid of this year, publisher: IOS press).

Many of these findings would not have been possible without the continuous support of our Project Officer, Dr. Gesa Hansen, who guided us through difficult phases of the project and thereby encouraged us to carry on. We would like to thank her and our Project Technical Assistant, Mr. Ivor Ambrose, for this support.

Most important, however, was the collaboration of users and user organisations who voluntarily contributed to the project without being reimbursed fully for their large investment of time and effort. The project's success is owed to their willingness, and would not have been able without their contributions. We are very grateful for their support.

Prof. Johan Molenbroek

On behalf of the FRR project consortium