Consensus FS (IST-2000-26456)
Promoting CONSENSUS in assessing driving ability of persons with special needs through common methodologies and normative tools

Summary

CONSENSUS project has been a feasibility study on developing a thematic Network of experts on driving ability assessment issues. The project focuses on the use of IT tools for supporting the communication between the network members and for facilitating the currently followed driving ability assessment for persons with special needs (PSN).

Main goal of CONSENSUS is the establishment of a thematic network on PSN driving ability assessment issues covering EU and associated states. Within this network modern IST technologies will provide efficient communication channels between the members. One of the projects main subtasks is to provide the framework for a pan-European consensus on methodologies and normative tools for PSN driving ability assessment. Furthermore a set of telematic aids (shared databases, expert knowledge tools, driving simulators, virtual environments, etc.) for use within the driving ability assessment of PSN will be specified.

The current situation

Until now the evaluation of fitness to drive is primarily based on the certification of the medical status of a person. The lack of standardisation in the terminology and the various assessment procedures used in different countries pose a major barrier for an equal and fair treatment of PSN. Previous research (TELAID, V2032) has shown that there are at least 5 distinctive PSN driving assessment models. Experts are aware that instead of converging towards a common assessment paradigm the assessment methodologies are further diversifying. Although certain knowledge transfer occurs between the members of different states such small scale co-operations can only achieve limited standards.

Thus it is obvious that only a pan-Europe thematic network group could integrate the needed width of expertise to reach the ‘critical mass’ necessary to overcome local assessment practises and procedures.
Thematic network establishment

Key actors of such a thematic network will be all organisations, authorities and individuals that are directly or indirectly connected to the PSN society like PSN driving assessment authorities, assessment centres, PSN representatives, relevant technology providers, etc. The CONSENSUS consortium has identified 96 organisations from 29 countries as key players in the field of PSN driving assessment. Currently 36 members from 19 different countries co-operate in the CONSENSUS network.

A crucial task in the establishment of the thematic network is to provide efficient communication tools to the network members in order to facilitate workflow throughout the network. CONSENSUS uses a broad range of modern telecommunication tools like common WWW site with an integrated FTP server, a discussion forum, the possibility to hold multi-participant web conferences (web cam based) and shared web space for publications. A basic characteristic of all these tools is their easy applicability. Thereby CONSENSUS covers a wide range of users regardless of their hardware or their knowledge about software tools. The use of these telematic tools enables the network members to keep an easy and fast communication established and simultaneously store data efficient and systematically.

Overview of existing assessment practices

A first step of the CONSENSUS network towards a common pan-European assessment scheme is the classification of schemes currently in use. Therefore a questionnaire was developed and distributed among the consortium members to acquire information about existing assessment procedures. The information collected by the questionnaires provides a thorough overview over the current situation of PSN driving assessment. Starting from the existing assessment procedures commonalities and differences as well as gaps were identified to serve as basis for the development of a new assessment scheme integrating the strength of current procedures and overcoming their flaws.

Pan-European Workshop

A workshop was organised inviting members from 88 organisations. Finally 45 persons attended the workshop. The workshop proved to be a valuable source of information for the CONSENSUS consortium. A broad variety of opinions considering driving assessment of PSN could be gathered. Furthermore the experts gave important feedback to the consortium, showing interest in the work hitherto achieved. It is worth mentioning that the initial set of priorities rated within the CONSENSUS consortium had to be modified based on the results of the different workgroups. The workshop helped to broaden the perspective on driving assessment due to the input of the invited participants.

Future Plans

Reaching consensus in assessment practices and the used tools is obviously a big and ambitious project, which translates into a lot of time and effort. An estimated period of at least 20 years is considered necessary. Setting the right strategy to achieve this goal is an important starting point of this intended process.