



FemTools

Gender-sensible usability research on tools for firewood production for private users

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Büro für demografiefeste
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über
grenzen
denken
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Tool manufacturers promote products like chain saws and shredders almost exclusively with pictures of young strong men – the ideal image of a lumberjack. In doing so gender-specific responsibility and competence for lumbering is suggested. This social construction is reflected in the product design as well (e.g. form of handles, weight, efforts for starting). The gender-specific division of work that is communicated by the design of the tools and the product marketing leads to structural exclusion in both access and use of the tools for private lumbering of many women, but also of some men and older persons.

Research questions

Only a few empirical studies are available which explore the incorporation of gender relations into products. FemTools will therefore consider the following research questions:

- How does the re-production of social gender relations (“doing gender”) manifest itself in tool manufacturing and product communication and use, using the examples of chain saws and shredders?
- How can a gender-adequate design of tools in this sector be initiated?

The innovative nature of the project lies in addressing gender-specific incorporation in tool design under the approach of universal design. The results of this research project constitute a necessary first step towards innovative, gender-adequate answers. These answers will also be of value for other groups like men and older persons.

Project aims

Main objectives are the knowledge production concerning gender-specific factors in tool design, in product communication and in the use of the products (tool tests and lumbering courses), and the reduction of gender stereotypes in these fields by identification of doing gender aspects (e.g. pictures of the “ideal user”) and the approach of universal design.

Another objective is the promotion of the empowerment of women for lumbering. The project contributes to social, ecological and economic sustainability by including ecological aspects of tools, promoting collaborative use of tools, promoting the use of a sustainable fuel and enlarging user groups.

Methods

Together with tool manufacturers gender-relevant factors for product design will be identified. In tool tests and lumbering courses for women gender-specific factors in product use and social interaction will be elaborated upon.

Dissemination of results

Research results will be transferred to other product types and will be of benefit for users, manufacturers, salespersons and educational providers.

www.ecology.at/femtools.htm