

Older people, social networks, online social network platforms – myth and practice

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Project: Go-myLife

Going online: my social life



AAL project, 07/2010 – 12/2012

Go-myLife develops and offers a **mobile social networking platform** facilitating the **social inclusion** of older people as well as easy access to relevant geographically based information.

Partnership: 7 organisations coming from 5 countries

Research methodology: literature study, interviews with operators of 50plus platforms, seven participatory workshops with older people for user requirements elicitation (UK, AT)

Website: <http://gomylife-project.eu/>



Social integration is the recipe for longevity – earlier studies

- **Social networks** have a **dual function**: the provision of social support and social connectedness.
 - **family** focused networks: tend to be high on instrumental support
 - **friend** focused networks: tend to be high on emotional support (because friends are generally age-peers)
- **Diverse networks** (with family and friends) offer more opportunity for well-being than do restricted networks.
- The **older** people are, the **more restricted** are the network types most commonly used (Fiori et al, 2007)

Family is not always the source of overcoming loneliness - earlier studies

- **Visits by children** make little impact on loneliness (Wenger and Burholt 2003)
- Very old **widows** living with children are frequently amongst the loneliest (Wenger and Burholt 2003).
- Older people may turn to the family for instrumental help, they are least likely to do so in times of loneliness (Wenger and Burholt 2003).
- **Reciprocal relationships** and mutual help systems are **preferred** over **family** support (Department for Communities and Local Government 2008).

Family ties – own findings

- The majority of older people are **instrumental** and **material support givers** within their families and they often provide far more support than they themselves receive.
- Family ties are an important **source** of **joy** (e.g. grandchildren) but with a strong notion of **solidarity** with the younger generations and the normative feeling of giving support to them.
- Family relationships are important in the early years after retirement BUT may **change** as grandchildren grow older.

Source of emotional support is the peers – earlier studies

- Long-term friends provide support in times of **transition**

(Cattan, White et al. 2005; Chambers, Allan et al. 2009)

- Friends are helpful in **adapting** to **change** with **age**

(Stevens, Martina et al. 2006):

- sources of **information**;
- role **models** undergoing similar changes;
- confirmation of **identity** and **self-esteem**;
- as **companions** for pleasurable activities.

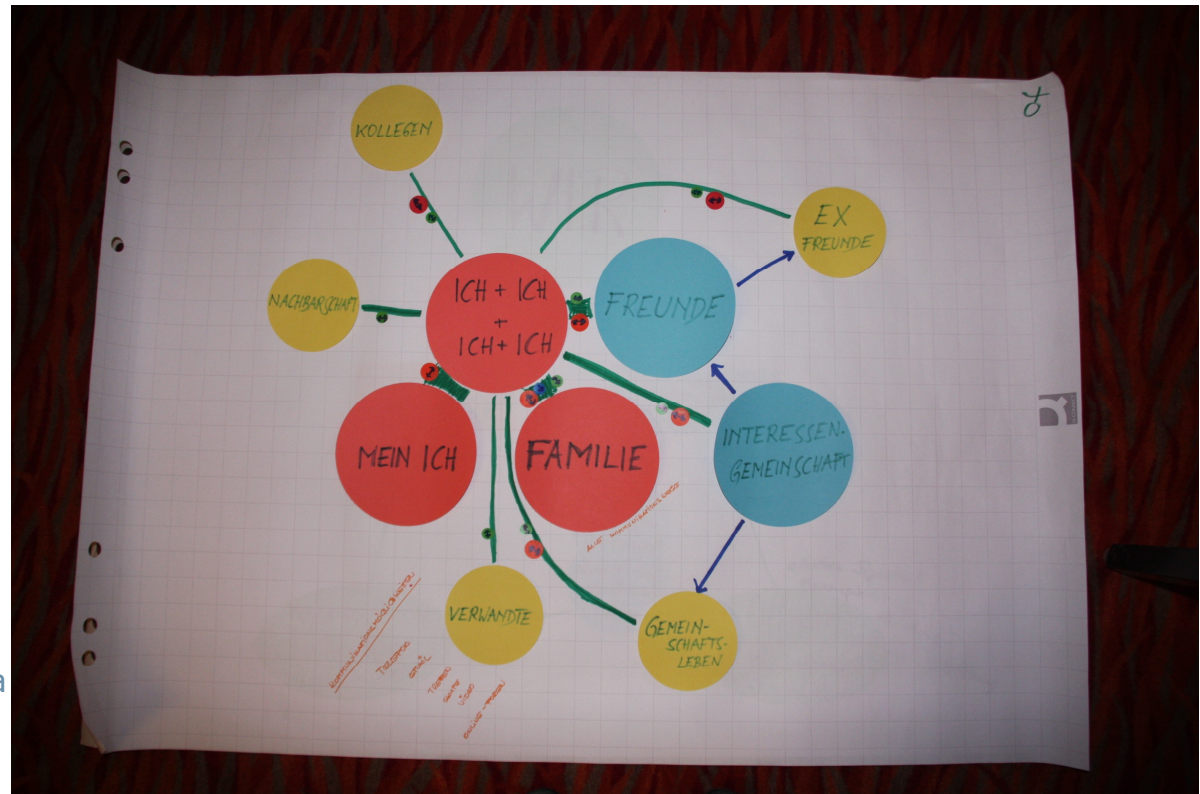
The importance of local neighbourhood – earlier studies

- With increasing frailty, older peoples' lives are affected by, and bounded within, their immediate **physical** and **social environments**.
- Older people spend **more time** in their local **neighbourhood** and they invest a great deal of themselves in the area (Department for Communities and Local Government 2008)
- The community is a major factor in older people's decisions about **where** to **live** (Evans 2009).
- Problem: **closure** of local services.

Ideal network in 10 years (I)

own findings

- Household with friends
- a “residential-free” society for older people
- my me – time for self-reflection
- technological support for participation
- The neighbours as self-aid group



Functionalities on online social network platforms - Conclusion

- **Foster relationship** with distant family members and friends, e.g. Group building, Video-telephony, ...
- **Support local community and neighbourhood**, e.g. Neighbourhood self-aid groups, Information on local organisations and events, Service for match making, ...
- **Participation in interest groups** related to politics, religion, health etc., e.g. Service to allow the launch of groups or forums, Functions to leave messages in forums and groups anonymous, Political forums, online polls, ...
- **Support in organising one's life**, e.g. "User-generated" Yellow pages, "User-generated" AroundMe, ..
- **Enjoyable, entertaining** activities

Thank you for your attention!

You are invited to visit the Go-myLife
website

<http://gomylife-project.eu/>

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