

TITLE OF PAPER: OLDER PEOPLE, SOCIAL NETWORKS, ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORK PLATFORMS – MYTHE AND PRACTICE

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We agree on that a PDF version of the Power Point presentation associated with the accepted abstract can be published on the IFA website (www.ifa-fiv.org).

Abstract

Embeddedness in social networks contributes significantly to older people's quality of life. It leads to lower rates of depression, decreased risk of dementia and lower mortality rates. Diverse network types with family, friends and further significant others offer a higher degree of social well-being than restricted networks do. However, given current social changes, where significant others tend to live geographically remote and traditional venues for social interactions (such as local services) tend to close, the conventional opportunities for social interactions are under threat. New technologies and communication means, like online social network platforms, might have the potential to make up for decreasing "real-life" social interactions. But which features does it need to support older peoples' social needs and which social groups can be successfully linked and fostered online?

Derived from literature analysis and from seven participatory workshops with older people in the UK and in Austria, the paper will discuss: i. what are older peoples' main network groups with regard to social support, social well-being and feeling of attachment?; ii. how do these groups change with increasing age?; and iii. which functionalities on online social network platforms support best older peoples' network activities?

The paper concludes with older peoples' visions of the ideal social network in old age.