

COMMUNITY MAPPING



Green Town by Friedensreich Hundertwasser

Transnational Report on the Needs and Assets of Older Citizens Living in Rural and Sparsely Populated Areas

21st June 2019



Northern Periphery and
Arctic Programme
2014–2020



EUROPEAN UNION

Investing in your future
European Regional Development Fund

Contents

1.0	Report Summary	1
2.0	Context: PLACE-EE	2
3.0	Workshop participants.....	3
4.0	Assets of older citizens and their community.....	3
4.1.	Services.....	3
4.1.1.	Local services available to older citizens	3
4.1.2.	Assets that local services offer older citizens	4
4.1.3.	Facilities in place to access services	5
4.2.	Community	6
4.2.1.	How the local community helps older citizens	6
4.2.2.	Connection to the local community	7
4.2.3.	Assets that younger members of the community offer older citizens	7
4.2.4.	Young people as a source of connection	8
4.2.5.	Connections between communities across the world	8
4.3.	Culture and heritage.....	9
4.3.1.	Examples of culture and heritage.....	9
4.3.2.	Preservation and celebration of local heritage.....	10
4.3.3.	Personal artefacts	10
4.3.4.	Personal skills and assets.....	11
4.3.5.	Importance and relevance of skills and assets	12
4.4.	Technology.....	13
4.4.1.	Experiences of older citizens using technology	13
4.4.2.	Confidence of older citizens using technology.....	14
5.0	The needs of older citizens	16
5.1.	Services.....	16
5.1.1.	Availability of local services.....	17
5.1.2.	Barriers to accessing services	18

5.2.	Community	19
5.2.1.	Improvements to the local community	19
5.2.2.	Younger members of the community	19
5.2.3.	How have local communities changed?	20
5.3.	Culture and heritage	21
5.3.1.	Sustainability of culture and heritage	21
5.4.	Technology	21
5.4.1.	Availability of technology for older citizens	21
5.4.2.	Problems older citizens experience with technology	22
5.4.3.	Hopes and wishes older citizens have regarding technology	23
6.0	Conclusion	23

Figures

Figure 1. Local services across PLACE-EE demonstrator areas	4
Figure 2. Skellefteå Stadsparken	5
Figure 3. Age friendly parking in Newcastlewest, Limerick	5
Figure 4. Older PLACE-EE participants in the Desmond Complex, Limerick	6
Figure 5. Intergenerational skill exchange in Skellefteå	8
Figure 6. PLACE-EE participants in FODC.....	9
Figure 7. Þorrablót traditional gathering in Fjarðabyggð	10
Figure 8. A historical vaccination record from FODC	11
Figure 9. Stories related to family history in Fjarðabyggð	12
Figure 10. Participants in LCCC discuss the history of Irish currency	12
Figure 11. An artefact presented in Skellefteå	12
Figure 12. A former swimming champion from Fjarðabyggð	13
Figure 13. Internet usage of older citizens in Fjarðabyggð at the beginning of the project	14
Figure 14. Device usage of participants in Limerick	14
Figure 15. Confidence levels of FODC participants before and after PLACE-EE	15
Figure 16. Online interests of older citizens in Fjarðabyggð following PLACE-EE workshops ...	15
Figure 17. Improvements reported by Limerick participants following workshops	16
Figure 18. Services requiring improvement in demonstrator areas	17
Figure 19. Main barriers to older citizens accessing services	18
Figure 20. Young and old participants in FODC	20
Figure 21. Problems faced by older citizens when using technology	22
Figure 22. PLACE-EE participants, facilitators and partners in Limerick	24

1.0 Report summary

Project background and aims:

In recent years, there has been a revolution in social networks and human interaction. Smart devices have fundamentally changed how people interact. They have become the primary mechanism for many in maintaining and establishing real-world connections and they have become a source of news, entertainment and commercial engagement. For those who are not digitally connected, the risk of social exclusion is compounded. Platforms for Ageing Community Engagement — Exchange and Enterprise (PLACE-EE) is a transnational partnership of public health agencies, local authorities, academics and ICT experts dedicated to improving the quality of life for older people. Funded by the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme of the European Union, our aim is to develop and implement locally derived sustainable solutions to encourage Internet use and person-centred e-health.

The use of ICT can aid with battling issues such as isolation and social exclusion, of which elderly individuals living in rural sparsely populated areas are at particular risk. This project helped older residents understand how technology can enhance their lives through improved communication, as well as access to information, services, hobbies and interests. By empowering older people with knowledge and skills to go online it can help them to live more independently and to feel more connected to their families and the wider world and contribute to their overall wellbeing. This report is generated from feedback gathered from elder citizens during intergenerational workshops across four PLACE-EE demonstrator areas, including Fermanagh and Omagh, Northern Ireland; Fjarðabyggð, Iceland; Limerick, Republic of Ireland; and Skellefteå, Sweden. The focus of this report is on the assets and needs of elder citizens, and data is structured into the subcategories: services; community; culture and heritage; and technology.

Report findings:

Findings reveal that all demonstrator sites have various local services available to older citizens, including health care, public services, voluntary services and transport. Assets provided by local services include green spaces, outdoor exercise facilities, information points and opportunities for socialising. There are also varied facilities in place to assist with access to services, such as information centres, transport facilities, advice clinics, community centres and elderly care departments. However, participants also report gaps in current service provisions, ineffective transport links, a lack of civic engagement and poor broadband access in their areas and have found that barriers to accessing services are primarily physical, psychological, financial and geographical.

It is evident that there are varied ways in which local communities help older citizens in their everyday lives. Organisations have been set up to support older people in their pursuit of hobbies, leisure activities and education. Community support groups, church groups and active retirement groups play an avid role in supporting the elderly cohort within the demonstrator sites. The majority of participants feel connected to their communities; however, some do not, and express desires for existing barriers to be addressed.

Report recommendations:

The PLACE-EE skills exchange workshops reveal the knowledge and assistance that can be offered to older citizens by younger members of the community with regards to technology and ICT. However, the physical space required to facilitate these intergenerational connections is unavailable in some areas. Increased intergenerational engagement and improved digital inclusion for elders can revitalise overall social cohesion, and participants voiced wishes for more shared spaces to facilitate connectedness.

The PLACE-EE workshops highlight the importance of preserving local cultural and heritage and it is evident that each region has a rich tapestry of unique history and knowledge. There is an abundance of local community work preserving and promoting natural, built and cultural heritage. Participants indicate that locally-based assets should be preserved as they provide a record of how life was for previous generations, show how a region has progressed over time and provide a sense of identity to people who live in the region. Intergenerational work can break down barriers between groups of people, encouraging a mutual appreciation of each others' unique skills and fostering greater understanding. Skills will only survive, however, if they live in each generation. They provide a link to historical roots and are part of a shared heritage. Unfortunately, traditional crafts such as weaving, forging and soldering remain almost exclusively "in the hands of an ageing population" and are in danger of being lost, as demand for them falls in the digital age. Therefore, it is important that they are sustained.

Each demonstrator area has a mixture of older participants with different experiences, needs and aspirations towards technology. Some were relatively advanced and wished to continue learning how to use technology, while others were beginners with lower expectations. Feedback indicates that following the workshops, participants feel more comfortable and less embarrassed when asking for help with technology and understand that most issues with devices can be solved. Confidence levels have risen and participants now utilise the Internet more frequently, are more secure in their usage of technical devices and much more open minded to new technology. However, concerns remain with regards to Internet security, online safety, fraud, hacking and privacy. Participants endeavour to continue developing their technology related skills, so as to utilise local digital services and continue their lifelong learning experience.

2.0 Context: PLACE-EE

We are living in an era of unprecedented human longevity, which, alongside the growing global population of older people, presents many challenges for individuals, communities and government services. Unfortunately, available resources have not increased concurrently, placing pressure on the provision of services for people of all ages and requiring society to think of ways of doing things differently. Alongside this, there is a danger that generations are increasingly growing apart, due to changes in family structure, geographic mobility, age-segregated services and levels of trust in society. Older and younger citizens have fewer opportunities to engage and generations within families may not live near to each other or see each other on a regular basis. These factors all contribute to a disconnection and polarisation between age groups, which can engender a lack of understanding, ageism and intergenerational conflict. While social isolation is becoming prevalent among people of all ages, older individuals are particularly susceptible. The speed and prevalence of technological development in recent years has catalyzed a large-scale shift towards the digital provision of many services, including health, postal and banking, as well as reconfiguring the ways in which people communicate. As a consequence, opportunities for human interaction have diminished, leading to increased isolation, particularly for the most marginalized and digitally excluded groups within society.

PLACE-EE is a project funded under the Northern Periphery and Artic Programme. The project will run for three years from September 2017 until September 2020. The consortium consists of seven partners, including Ulster University, Northern Ireland; Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (FODC), Northern Ireland; the municipality of Fjarðabyggð, Iceland; Limerick City and County Council (LCCC), Republic of Ireland; Skellefteå Kommun (council), Sweden; Umeå University, Sweden; and the Regional Agency for Public Health and Social Wellbeing (PHA), Northern Ireland. The aim of the project is to minimise social isolation and exclusion of older persons living in remote and sparsely populated regions by producing innovative solutions to building ICT literacy. Through this project the partners are connecting local and cultural knowledge and other heritage resources with innovative ICT approaches that enable greater social inclusion and access to timely and efficient advice, support and care. PLACE-EE facilitates the sharing of experiences and exchange of skills between young

and old citizens in partner regions through a programme of intergenerational workshops.

PLACE-EE is raising awareness about age-related issues by providing opportunities for generations to meet, share, learn and better utilise the resources they have to offer one another. Through a series of intergenerational workshops young and older people were brought together to develop ICT skills, improve access to services and share cultural memories. The workshops were facilitated by a Community Engagement Officer and a Creative Arts Professional, who elicited information pertaining to culture, heritage and local interests, encouraging both young and old to share stories and while utilising ICT. The younger participants aided their elder partners in creating and uploading material to a shared online archive.

This report is generated from feedback gathered from elder citizens during the intergenerational workshops in each of the demonstrator areas of the PLACE-EE project, including Fermanagh and Omagh, Northern Ireland; Fjarðabyggð, Iceland; Limerick, Republic of Ireland; and Skellefteå, Sweden.

3.0 Workshop participants

In total, there were 61 workshops held across the four demonstrator sites. In FODC, 24 workshops were held, with an average of 18 people in attendance; 10 elders and eight younger participants. Fjarðabyggð held 13 workshops with an average of 17 participants; 10 older and 7 younger. LCCC held 12 workshops, with an average of 60 participants in attendance; split equally between young and older, and Skellefteå Kommun also ran 12, with an average of 36 attendees; 11 older citizens and 25 younger.

In terms of age profile, the majority of older participants in Fermanagh and Omagh District were aged between 55-64 and the younger cohort were 14 and 15 years of age. In Fjarðabyggð, the majority of older participants were aged 75-85 years and the younger cohort were aged 15-16. Older participants in Limerick were mainly aged between 65-74 years and the younger cohort were between 16-17 years. In Skellefteå, the majority of older participants in were aged 75-84 years and the younger cohort were aged 15-16.

4.0 Assets of older citizens and their community

As we age, the knowledge, skills, and wisdom we gain enables us to make significant contributions to the social, political, and environmental fabric of our communities. Assets relating to older citizens refer to the skills, knowledge, culture, talents and any other resources that they offer to their communities. Older people have an important role to play in advocacy, activism and nurturing the community. The following sections highlight the assets of older citizens and their communities within the four demonstrator areas.

4.1 Services

This section highlights information relating to the types of local services available to older citizens within each demonstrator area, specifically addressing the assets that local services offer elderly citizens and available facilities that assist access to these services.

4.1.1 Local services available to older citizens

As evident in Figure 1, all demonstrator sites have a variety of local services available to older citizens, including health care, public services and transport. The South West Age Partnership (SWAP) in the Fermanagh and Omagh area works with over 80 Older Person Groups in the district by providing them with information about available services, including training, workshops and events. The District Council also launched their Age Friendly Strategy in March 2019 and outcome 2 of the Community Plan 2030 states that 'older people will lead more independent, engaged and socially connected lives', illustrating the commitment to improving the lives of older people in the region.

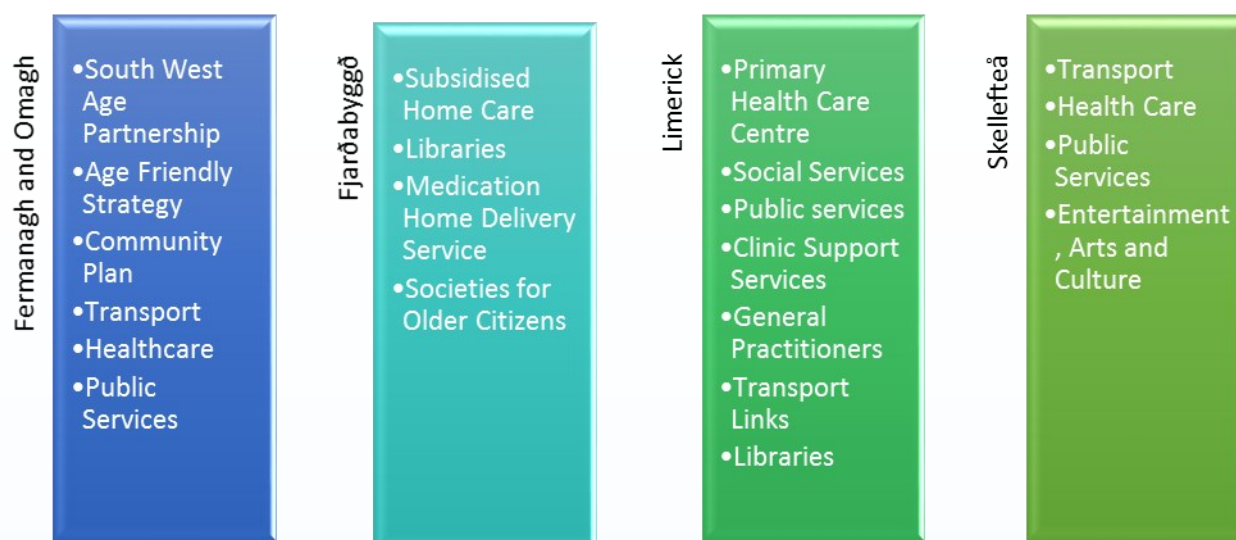


Figure 1. Local Services across PLACE-EE demonstrator areas

In Fjarðabyggð, older citizens have access to healthcare services and subsidised home care. Library services are also available at Breiðablik, the local sports centre, as well as the public library. Sporting activities are available via the local swimming pool, which has both indoor and outdoor pools. Gymnastics classes are also offered at Breiðablik, and the society for older citizens provides both swimming-gymnastics and regular gymnastics in Sigfúsarhouse. Some older citizens visit the local pharmacy to collect their medication while others utilise a paid home-delivery service offered by paramedics.

Within the Limerick demonstrator area, participants categorised the local services available to them as commercial; medical and health; transport; wellbeing; community-based; and cultural. Health and social services are provided by a Health Service Executive (HSE) funded Primary Healthcare Centre and include a range of physical therapies as well as community nursing and respite care. Local Link is a public bus service that is used by residents old and young living in rural communities, to connect them to other small towns within the demonstrator area. The local council in Limerick manages four libraries and also provides a public counter in their office, where older citizens can make enquiries in person.

Skellefteå also has a range of local services available to older citizens that include transport, healthcare, public services, entertainment, arts and culture. Many of these services are concentrated in the town centre; however, efforts are made to ensure that older citizens living in more isolated communities still have access to essential services.

4.1.2 Assets that local services offer older citizens

Local assets are the collective resources that individuals and communities have at their disposal, which can be leveraged to develop effective solutions to promote social inclusion and improve the health and wellbeing of citizens. There are many assets that local services can offer elder citizens, such as green spaces, information points and opportunities for socialising.

Several outdoor gyms are available for older citizens to utilise across the Fermanagh and Omagh region and the council have installed six interactive points across the district, which provide information about the local area, such as areas of interest. Community services in the region produce a monthly newsletter that is sent to 1200+ people via email and post.

In LCCC, assets offered by local services include age friendly designated parking in the town of Newcastlewest. Much like FODC, there is also a local park that offers age friendly exercise machines and the town also has a large community centre, which is a hub of activity for older citizens, hosting local interest group sessions, active retirement meetings and club activities specifically aimed at older citizens.

In Skellefteå, older citizens receive a number of benefits through local services. For example, socialising at community centres, using the city park (Stadsparken) or attending community activity days organised by the Kommun.




Figure 2. Skellefteå Stadsparken

A photograph of a landscaped garden area. In the foreground, there is a paved walkway bordered by low hedges and various plants, including purple flowers. In the background, there is a large building with a brown roof and a green sculpture. The garden is well-maintained and features a variety of plants and trees.

that assist access to services for older citizens. Rural areas and who have no access to public transport. In 2015/16, 58% were for older people. FODC also run four community centres home to many groups and run a number of events in the region that provide easily accessible public facing services and activities, readers groups and Knit & Knatter. The SWAP Liaison Officer is independent, who represent the views and interests of older

There are varied facilities in place in each demonstrator area that assist access to services for older citizens. Rural community transport is available in FODC for those without cars and who have no access to public transport. In 2015/16, Fermanagh Community Transport made 216,792 trips, of which 58% were for older people. FODC also run four community centres and licence a further seven across the district, which are home to many groups and run a number of events in the local community. There are two public service centres in the region that provide easily accessible public facing services and five libraries that provide a range of courses, including IT Literacy, readers groups and Knit & Knatter. The SWAP Liaison Group consists of six councillors, one from each party and one independent, who represent the views and interests of older people within the council business and at council meetings.

In the autumn of 2019, the new shared Egilsbúð community centre will open in Fjarðabyggð, which will serve to bring individuals together within the community.

In LCCC, there is a citizen information centre situated in the main town of Newcastlewest, which, among other services, offers free, impartial advice and assistance on how to access services within the area. West Limerick Resources is a community development organisation that works towards achieving positive change in the lives of people and groups in West Limerick. The resource centre runs various programmes and schemes including a volunteer support scheme, digital switchover programme, a heritage network, and ICT skills for older persons. Newcastlewest also has a fantastic facility

called Desmond Complex, which operates a day care service, providing a place for the socially isolated members of our community to meet. The service is offered three days and the attendees participate in activities such as bingo, cards, music, dancing and games. Entertainment is provided through local musicians and a hot nutritious three-course meal is provided.

The Elderly Care Department within the Skellefteå Kommun manages access to services for older citizens. Those who live in assisted living communities or elderly care homes can approach the housing manager for assistance with accessing services and amenities. Skellefteå Kommun also has community outreach programmes to help those older citizens who live alone and may be more isolated. The kommun has also run programmes focussed on helping older citizens access services through technology. For example, last autumn Skellefteå Kommun ran the 'Tech Corner' project at the local library, which was a space where older citizens could drop in and get ICT and technology help.

4.2 Community

The following section highlights how the local communities within each demonstrator area help older citizens in their everyday lives. Discussed are the connections that older people feel to their communities and the types of assets that younger people can offer to their older neighbours. The topic of connecting communities across the world was also explored with older participants during the workshops and their feedback is included.

4.2.1 How the local community helps older citizens

There are varied ways in which local communities help older citizens in their everyday lives. As people spend more of their active life in retirement, many organisations have been set up to support retired people in their pursuit of hobbies, leisure activities and education.

In FODC, SWAP administer grants for Older Peoples Groups, and also coordinate the Fermanagh and Omagh Interagency Forum for Older People, which has representatives from other statutory bodies in the district, including Government Departments, Health, Transport, Social Services and the Emergency Services.

Some older citizens in Fjarðabyggð receive a food delivery service, while others avail of cleaning services. There is a great sense of family connection and community spirit in the area .

In the Limerick demonstrator area, community support groups such as Friends of the Elderly visit older people at home, in hospitals and in nursing homes; help out at social clubs; and provide transport for older people who may not have access to their own. There are also Men's Sheds located in Newcastlewest and Glin, which provide a safe, friendly and inclusive environment for men to gather and work on meaningful projects at their own pace, in their own time and in the company of other men. There are also a number of active retirement groups, which are run voluntarily and provide older people with an opportunity to engage and socialize in organised activities.



Figure 4. Older PLACE-EE participants in the Desmond Complex, Limerick

In Skellefteå, in addition to the assistance provided by the Kommun, there are a number of groups that help older citizens. For example, a number of community groups focus on bringing older people together to socialise and also to help with accessing services and there are a number of church groups in the area that play a similar role in facilitating spaces for older people to socialise.

4.2.2 Connection to the local community

Social contacts tend to decrease as we age for a variety of reasons, including retirement, the death of friends and family or lack of mobility. Regardless of the causes of senior isolation, the consequences can be harmful, and perceived social isolation, the feeling that you are lonely, is a struggle for many older people. Being socially active and engaged in the community can promote good mental and physical health and those who have strong social networks tend to be more active, feel happier and are more supported. Having a sense of purpose and something to offer helps older adults feel more satisfied and live a fuller life.

Discussions with older participants in FODC indicate that many feel connected to their local community but increasing numbers either remain in employment or care for their grandchildren. Those who are members of a group feel more connected with their local community; however, it was reported that the age profile within these groups is increasing, creating additional challenges. Many groups are attempting to recruit the younger older person by offering different activities or even changing their names to something more inclusive.

Unfortunately, many participants in Fjarðabyggð do not feel connected to their local community outside of friends and family and fear that they are being left behind. *One participant noted, “I always feel that we are welcome everywhere, but when decisions are made regarding older citizens, no matter if it is leisure or anything else, our views and opinions are not sought”.* The participants suggested that improved access to information and being better informed about opportunities would be beneficial. They found that by being part of the PLACE-EE project they were listened to, which has aided them in being more connected to their community.

Most older citizens in LCCC indicate that they feel connected to their communities, mainly through participation in social activities and hobby groups. However, some signs of isolation and risk factors were identified, such as living in rural areas with limited transport links. Suggested improvements include better transport and social services; improved access to information and social outlets for older people; and a community buddy system, whereby people would look out for each other.

Older citizens in Skellefteå Kommun broadly agree that they also feel connected to their community; however, they believe that improving their ICT skills would help them feel better connected. As an example, a new restaurant recently opened that requires food to be digitally ordered through an app or by using an iPad in the restaurant. Some of the older citizens were discouraged by this and felt disconnected. During a PLACE-EE workshop, the younger people helped the older citizens to navigate the app so that they felt able to go to the restaurant and not be excluded by their lack of technological skills.

4.2.3 Assets that younger members of the community offer older citizens

The PLACE-EE intergenerational workshops highlighted the valuable skills that younger members of the community can offer to elders in the form of technology and ICT knowledge. Interestingly, it was apparent that many of the older citizens also appreciated learning about popular culture from their workshop partners. They enjoyed discussing social media, contemporary music, film and television, and reported that this helped them to feel more connected to society.

Prior to the first workshops in FODC, many of the older participants were nervous about interacting with the younger attendees but they found them to be extremely patient. Both groups were amazed at how much they have in common and they enjoyed working together on a one-to-one basis. One of the younger participants commented: *“I enjoyed working with older people as they are full of stories from when they were younger, as they have experienced more”*.

Participants from Fjarðabyggð enjoyed spending time with the younger cohort and found the exchange rewarding. Many indicated that their children live in the capital Reykjavik so they mainly spend time with them during the summer months. Participants suggested that teenagers and older people should spend time together as both benefit but there has to be a mutual will from both parties to benefit from the experience. One participant stated, *“I love being with young people, it keeps you young too”*. The participants in Fjarðabyggð also agree that young people can teach older citizens IT; one elder commented, *“Last year we had kids coming here from the elementary school, they taught us how to create objects with Lego on the computers. It was really uplifting to meet young people, they lifted our spirits up and we learned some new skills”*.

A majority of participants in Limerick agreed that young and old should spend more time together and that they would enjoy this. They believe that younger people can offer older people practical help with tasks such as technology, chores, as well as social help such as companionship, sharing of humour and fun.

The older citizens in Skellefteå, however, indicated that there was a lack of available spaces to facilitate them connecting with younger people. They worried that once the PLACE-EE workshops finished they would not be able to interact with young people in the same way.

4.2.4 Young people as a source of connection

Young people are often involved in their communities in a variety of ways, participating in organised community activities, including youth, sports and recreational clubs, groups and programmes. Some become involved in public life through engagement in decision-making forums in local youth organisations, voluntary and public bodies, and local and national youth councils. These activities emphasise their status as active and engaged citizens who contribute to and shape community life in rich and diverse ways. PLACE-EE highlights young people as a potential source of connection for elderly citizens.

4.2.5 Connections between communities across the world

The older participants in Limerick expressed an interest in contacting groups from the other partner countries and believed that it would provide an opportunity to share stories and learn from each other. The group highlighted the benefits of being able to utilise IT as a vehicle for connection. Likewise, the participants in FODC were very interested in contacting groups from the other areas and discussing the similarities and differences between cultures.

The majority of older citizens involved in the project in Skellefteå Kommun and Fjarðabyggð felt it was possible to make connections between communities across the world but raised the issue of language, as many of them do not speak English. They could see benefits in sharing experiences and potentially making friends, likening it to having ‘pen-pals’.



Figure 5. Intergenerational skill exchange in Skellefteå

4.3 Culture and heritage

This section will highlight examples of culture and heritage in each demonstrator area and how this is celebrated by citizens. Examples of personal artefacts provided by participants are included, alongside individual skills and assets discussed during workshops.

4.3.1 Examples of culture and heritage

The unique culture and heritage of an area affirms the identity of people and their community through a comprehensive framework of cultural sites, buildings, monuments and landmarks that have historical significance and value. This can shape and reflect the values, beliefs and aspirations of those who live there and provide a point of reference and connection between generations and communities.

In recent years in FODC, an emphasis has been placed on the heritage and people of the Lough. In 2018, Lough Erne Heritage worked with six local villages around the Lough to set up Cot Regattas; six regattas with the final in Enniskillen. Cots were once the main mode of transport around the Fermanagh Lakelands and may have been used on Lough Erne for 2000 years. The event was a great success and was used to exhibit stories and information about the culture and people of the Lough as well as getting local people involved in the Lough. This year's regattas will take place between June-August.



Figure 6. PLACE-EE participants in FODC

In Fjarðabyggð, the participants commented that Neskaupstaður used to be quite isolated from the rest of the country and as such, was very self-contained. The largest employer is the fishing trade and the area has its own pier, loading docks and engine houses. The region has changed, however, and the variety of services, including a cinema, printing, shoe smiths, smoking fish factory, milk station, fish store were more prominent in the past. There has always been a fondness for music in Neskaupstaður and it is said to be the cultural signature of Neskaupstaður. There is a long history of music in the area; the music school started 1953 and many bands, choirs and musicians have come from the region.

The participants in Limerick grouped the culture and heritage resources in their community under the themes of culture; buildings and infrastructure; sports and leisure; and crafts and skills, and suggested many examples, including traditional Irish dancing groups, walking routes and knitting activities. They discussed the town's historical landmark, Desmond Castle and Banqueting Hall, which dates back to the 13th Century and is believed to be linked to the legendary Knights Templar. The group discussed the importance of transmitting culture and heritage to the next generation, to engender a sense of identity and pride; to provide opportunities to meet new people and transfer stories; to share family history and to preserve local history.

An interesting topic that arose during discussions in Skellefteå was the decline of the local dialect known as 'Skellefteå bondska'. The dialect is specific to the Skellefteå region and was common in rural areas. Consensus among both young and old citizens was that the language would disappear within a generation, which was somewhat confirmed by the younger participants, as they admitted that they could understand some of the dialect when they heard it spoken but never spoke it themselves.

4.3.2 Preservation and celebration of local heritage

All demonstrator areas have their own unique history and celebrations, but participants fear these may be lost. All of those involved in PLACE-EE were keen to contribute to the online archive, to record and preserve the stories and traditions that are so integral to their culture and national identity.

There are three National Trust sites in FODC: Florence Court; Crom Castle; and Castle Coole, all of which are preserved and protected. The Fermanagh Geopark covers most of County Fermanagh and consists of over 30 discrete areas. The best known areas are the Cuilcagh Mountain Park and the Marble Arch Caves. Lough Erne Landscape Partnership have received funding to preserve the cultural heritage of Lough Erne through its people, stories, wildlife and buildings. Museums are key in maintaining the history of the area, as are word of mouth, folk stories and music. Fermanagh and Omagh have many local historians who have a specialist knowledge about the area, and there are also a few songs about local areas that are only known by some residents.

The largest event that is celebrated each year is Þorrablót, which is an old Viking tradition that celebrates historical gods. Traditionally there is one main Þorrablót held in each town centre in Fjarðabyggð, as well as many others held throughout the countryside. Locals eat traditional food, go over the past year in comedy and make fun of one another. In celebration of the local affinity for music in Fjarðabyggð, every year there is a four-day music festival called Eistnaflug, where many bands play metal, hardcore, punk, rock, pop and indie music. The participants applauded the work that local museums do to preserve local culture; however, they suggested that technology may be a useful aid in capturing memories, thoughts, opinions and stories.



Figure 7. Þorrablót traditional gathering in Fjarðabyggð

In Limerick, the Heritage Council works with the council and community groups to promote, protect and manage local heritage. Projects are largely dependent on volunteerism, passion and commitment on the part of the individual, and collectively as a community and society. The area is home to a number of museums, such as the Foynes Flying Boat and Maritime Museum, Glin Castle and Desmond Hall and there are also a number of heritage trails including Glin and the Great Southern Trail. The older participants suggested that they would be keen to assist in preserving local history by visiting schools to engage and educate young people.

Likewise, local heritage is preserved and celebrated in a number of ways in Sweden. The town museum is the focal point for this, with permanent exhibitions that show how life was in Skellefteå in the past and artefacts from archaeological excavations that show evidence of stone age settlements in the region. The people of the area are also key in preserving and celebrating local heritage and PLACE-EE participants have acquired materials related to the 'bondska' dialect that will be recorded in the cultural archive.

4.3.3 Personal artefacts

An integral aspect of the intergenerational workshops held in each demonstrator area was to discuss local knowledge, history, crafts and skills that are 'threatened' or in danger of being lost. These artefacts will be loaded on to a shared online cultural archive.

In FODC, discussions pertaining to artefacts highlighted the need to preserve and safeguard personal items of significance. The participants discussed how the artefacts relate to local culture and are part of a community's identity. An example of an artefact from the region can be seen in Figure 8.

Participants in Fjarðabyggð suggested that culture and heritage can provide a sense of belonging and insight as to where we come from. Material can be relevant regardless of whether it is tangible, i.e. pictures and objects, or intangible, i.e. stories and folklore, and it is important to document both for the next generation, to give them a deeper understanding of where they are from.

Participants in Limerick discussed the concept of artefacts and purported that an artefact contains an attached story that is a living link to our past. They believe that artefacts allow us to celebrate stories and thus our past culture and heritage, bringing history alive.

Fashion trends, for example, are transmitted through artefacts, and for traditions, crafts and skills that no longer exist, the artefact is evidence of that prior existence. The group brought in their own artefacts, which included photographs, newspaper articles, a medal, a jug, a framed picture, a baby's milk bottle, a ceramic hot water jar and a book. They each spent time telling the rest of the group about their artefact, what it meant to them and why they found it interesting. They were encouraged to use their digital devices to find out more information about their topic of interest.

In Skellefteå, the workshop participants felt that locally based assets, such as artefacts, should be preserved because they provide a record of how life was for generations past and how the region has progressed over time. They are important in providing a sense of identity and history to people who live in the region. A range of artefacts were gathered and documented for the archive, which reflect elements of the local culture and history that may be lost. For example, a film about the 'bondska' dialect, photographs of the town and of people working in traditional industries associated with the region, such as logging, fishing and mining, as well as objects related to sewing, knitting and other traditional crafts that are no longer popular.

4.3.4 Personal skills and assets

Older people have an important role to play in advocacy, activism and nurturing communities. Older adults can impart the knowledge they have gained throughout their lives to aid in solving community problems and promoting improved overall cohesion between generations.

Many older residents of FODC, much like in other demonstrator areas, held professional careers and, as such, have valuable skills that they could share with their communities. During the workshops, some of the older people mentored each other. Many worry about losing their skills and feeling useless. It was felt that the art of the ceili, Irish folk dancing, has diminished and with it the associated storytelling, poetry and music. Older people have many stories to tell and these should be recorded for prosperity before they are lost forever.

In Fjarðabyggð, which is a very isolated community, most of the participants previously worked in the fishing industry or agriculture, while other participants were retired teachers. There is also a nurse and a caretaker who previously worked at the hospital, which has played a vital role in Neskaupsstaður. One of the participants was a retired teacher from the

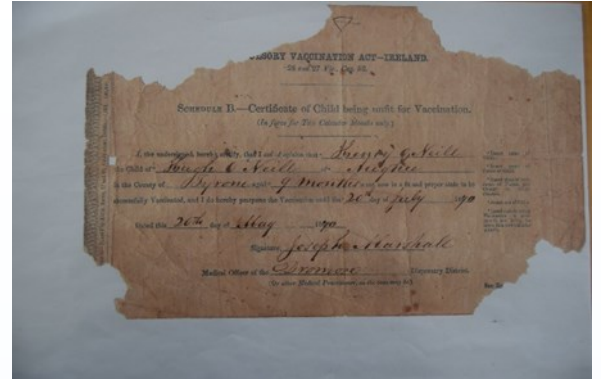


Figure 8. A historical vaccination record from FODC



Figure 9. Stories related to family history in Fjarðabyggð



Figure 10. Participants in LCCC discuss the history of Irish currency

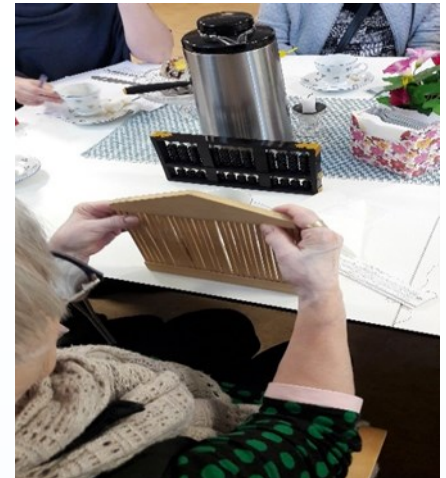


Figure 11. An artefact presented in Skellefteå

carpenter department in the local comprehensive college. He still finds time to visit the college and showcase his skills to students, and another is a retired artist who also taught art in the primary school. These examples highlight how beneficial the older cohort is in an area; they should be seen as a resource and utilised as such.

In Limerick, the participants also come from various backgrounds and they believe that the knowledge, skills and wisdom they have gained throughout their lives enables them to make significant contributions to the social, political, and environmental fabric of their communities. Many have the time to volunteer and take part in community projects. For example, one participant who studied art and literature in her youth now teaches art to active retirement groups in the demonstrator area. Another participant who used to be an engineer now aids local community groups with building projects for free as he has the time and expertise to carry out tasks associated with construction work. This is very beneficial to the local community and highlights how older people are valuable assets.

The older citizens in Skellefteå also come from varied backgrounds and have diverse knowledge and skills. In the group, there are retired science and maths teachers, language teachers, people from the mining industry and people who worked in agriculture. Therefore, a wealth of knowledge and experience exists.

4.3.5 Importance and relevance of skills and assets

All participants from the demonstrator areas agree that skills are still relevant today. In FODC, participants indicated that in the past people used to visit each other to tell stories and sing songs. Everyone knew where there was a good ceili house but alas, this art has been lost. In the past, people were more aware of each other and would notice if someone had not been seen for a few days. People feel far more isolated now; older people said that they don't feel that they can drop in on their neighbours as everyone seems so busy these days. One of the older participants said that the project had helped her by, *"Making contact with new folk (older & younger) in my area"*.

Participants in Fjarðabyggð have previously held concerns that traditional skills, such as how to skim milk; make skyr (similar to yoghurt); make wool or yarn directly from the sheep; or dry fish, would be taken over by large companies.

However, interestingly during the financial crash in Iceland 2007, the younger people began making traditional food from scratch, buying meat and fish directly from the producer and cutting out the middle-man. Knitting and other types of useful crafts also became very popular, and remain so. Hunting, and fishing in all forms, and handling prey is also very popular still to this day. The older cohort indicated that local skills are being kept alive and are still in practice, which is beneficial to the region as it helps to maintain its unique identity and character.

Working in pairs, the Limerick participants explored their individual skills and what their relevance and value are in today's world. It was found that many skills they had used in their various occupations have been replaced by digital technology and were no longer relevant today. There was a sense of huge value being ascribed to skills such as craft, i.e. knitting, baking, cooking, metal work and soldering, which, while not having an economic value due to the ease of which these can be easily purchased as either goods or services, were still skills that are worth passing down to the next generation.

Participants in Skellefteå felt that many of the skills they have are still relevant today, especially those related to specialised industries such as mining or farming. They recognised that some skills, such as dress making and knitting, had waned in popularity but were pleased that other skills specific to the region, such as älg (moose) tracking and hunting were still popular today and provided a link through the generations.



Figure 12. A former swimming champion from Fjarðabyggð

4.4 Technology

Each demonstrator site hosted a series of intergenerational skills exchange workshops, through which older people were taught how to use technology in an engaging way. This section reveals older citizen's experiences with technology and their reported changes in self-confidence following the workshops.

4.4.1 Experiences of older citizens using technology

In FODC, most of the older citizens reported owning a digital device; almost 70% had their own smart phone. Nevertheless, they admitted that they were not using their devices to full capacity.

In Fjarðabyggð, six out of nine older participants have access to the Internet at home, whereas three do not. All participants use equipment such as telephones and almost all have mobile phones, but only a few have smart phones. As highlighted in Figure 13, only one quarter of participants utilise the Internet every day or most days, 12% use it once or twice a week, 13% use it several times a month and 50% of participants never use the Internet.

Almost half (43%) of participants in Limerick reported owning a smart phone, 32% own a tablet, 21% have a laptop and 4% own a desktop computer (see Figure 14). In terms of frequency of using the Internet, 46% use it every day or most days, 27% use it once a week, 7% go online several times a month, 7% less than once a month, and 13% report never using the Internet. Participants used a variety of words to describe how they feel about computers and the Internet, including "informative", "convenient", "interesting", "scary" and "difficult". When asked what they liked about the Internet, participants mostly mentioned staying in touch and connected; being informed; and the convenience it offers. There were, however, some concerns raised regarding online safety, security and privacy.

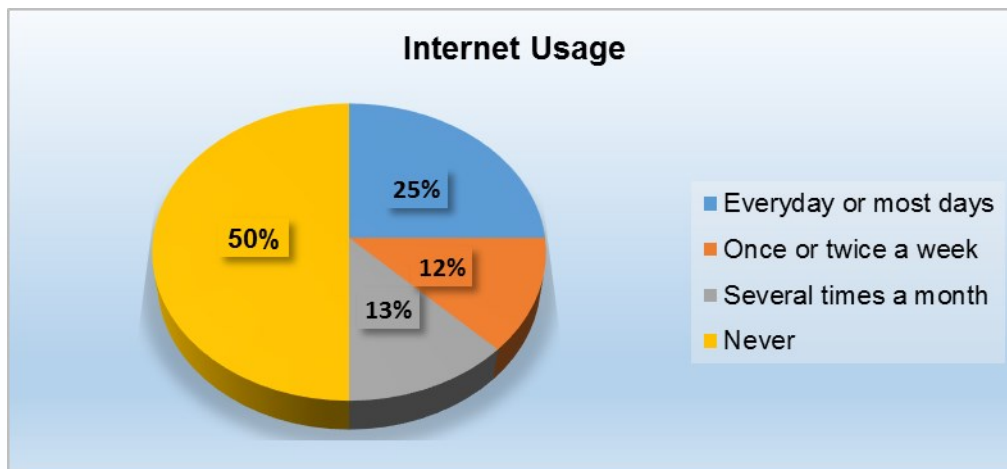


Figure 13. Internet usage of older citizens in Fjarðabyggð at the beginning of the project

In Skellefteå, there was a mixed group with different experiences, needs and aspirations towards technology. Some members of the group were relatively advanced and wished to continue developing their skills, whereas others were novices and were happy to learn basic skills, such as using weather apps and Skype or Facetime. All older participants except one owned their own devices and reported that they used the Internet every day or most days. Two members said they used the Internet once or twice a week and no members reported less frequent usage. What is noticeable is the change in the breadth of technology used in the later workshops compared to the early ones. In the first workshop, participants reported using a narrow range of services focussed on news and weather. In the later workshops, it became apparent that they were more aware of other possibilities and were more open to exploring apps and websites for health, shopping, social media and official advice.

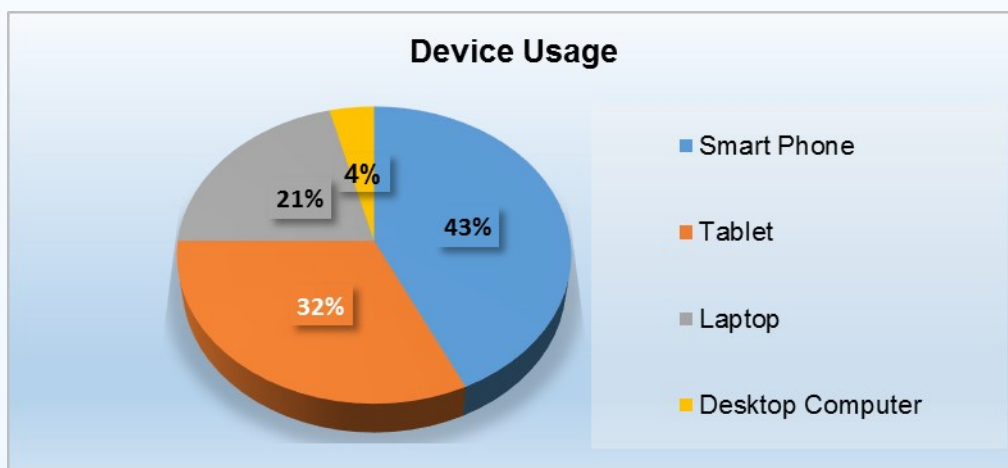


Figure 14. Device usage of participants in Limerick at the beginning of PLACE-EE

4.4.2 Confidence of older citizens using technology

There were great improvements recorded in the confidence of participants in FODC across the six weeks of the workshops. Initially, there were seven participants who said that they were not very or not at all confident but by the end of the project, this number had dropped to two. Only six participants believed themselves to be very confident at the beginning of the workshops and by then end, this number had risen to eleven. A comparison of responses can be seen in Figure 15. In addition, six participants began using a smart phone, five reported using a laptop, four used a tablet and two utilised a

desktop computer every day or most days as a result of the workshops. As an outcome of the workshops, one participant purchased an iPad and another set up their first email address. Following the course in Derrylin, the older participants created a local history group, which has continued to meet up at the same time and place. Many of these members had not belonged to any other group prior to PLACE-EE.

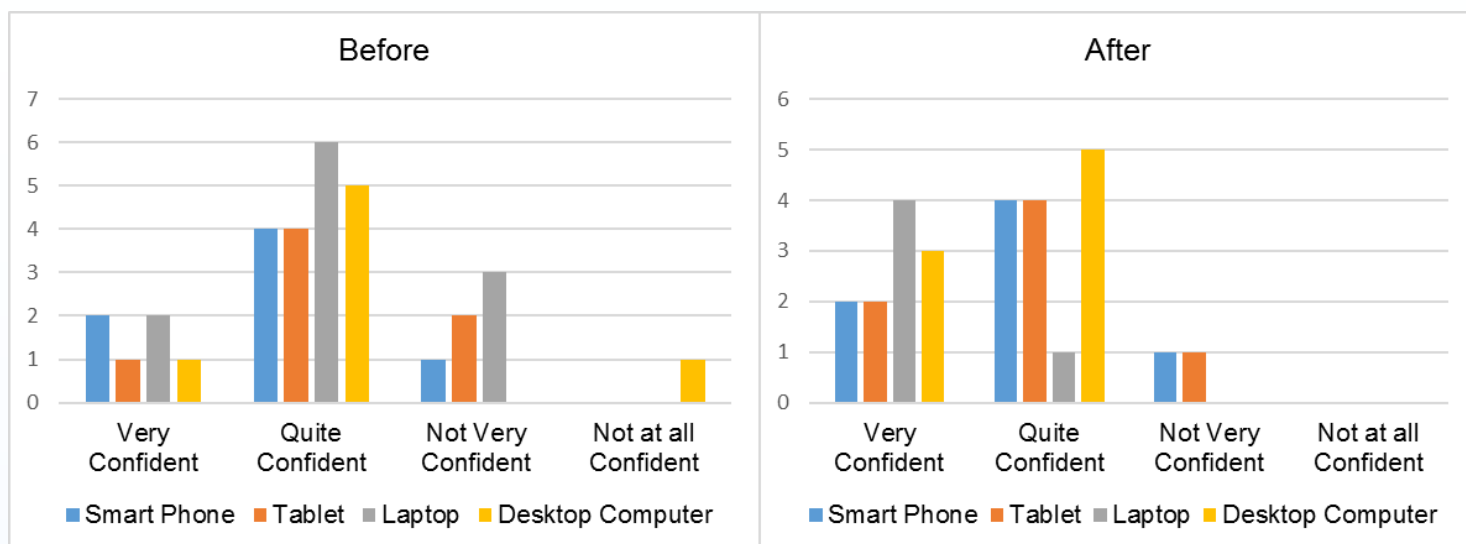


Figure 15. Confidence levels of FODC participants before and after PLACE-EE

Older participants in Fjarðabyggð are now more actively browsing the Internet, they are more secure in their usage of technical devices and are much more open-minded to new technology. As a result of the workshops, the group have grown in confidence and, as evident in Figure 16, participants are now interested in using the Internet for a wide range of activities.

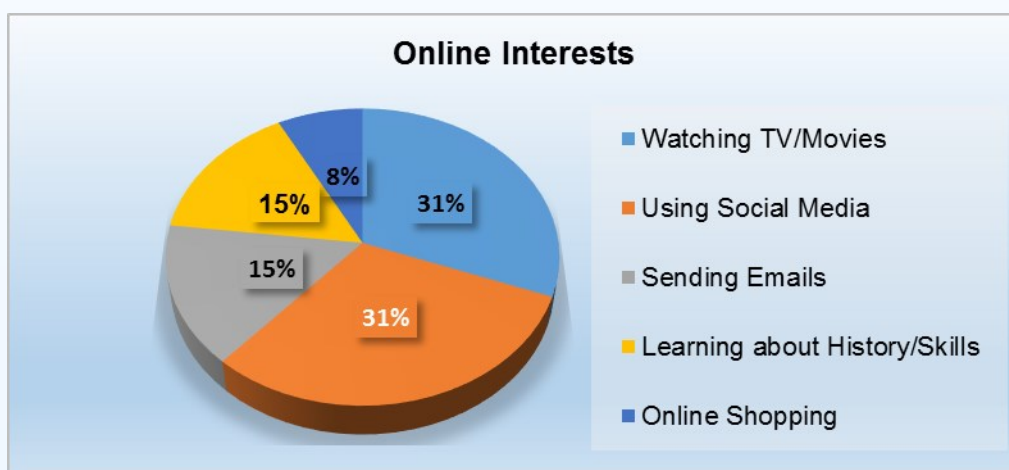


Figure 16. Online interests of older citizens in Fjarðabyggð following PLACE-EE workshops

A variety of benefits were reported by participants following the workshops in Limerick, including increased use of technology, improved confidence and a desire to continue learning. Furthermore, there was an observed increase in how often participants use the Internet. In the first workshop, 46% indicated that they used the Internet every day or most days, which increased to 71%. Also, 13% had indicated they never used the Internet but this was eliminated by the end of the project. As the workshops came to completion, 100% of participants owned a smart tablet and 80% indicated that they had increased their use of technology.

With regards to confidence, almost half (48%) of participants reported feeling quite confident using the Internet on their own following workshop participation and 36% felt very confident. However, 16% were still not confident and would like to have had more workshops to build confidence levels. Throughout the course of the project, the frequency with which participants asked for assistance using the Internet decreased and they felt less reliant on others. These reported improvements were also found to impact on how connected, informed and independent the participants felt in their everyday lives (see Figure 17).

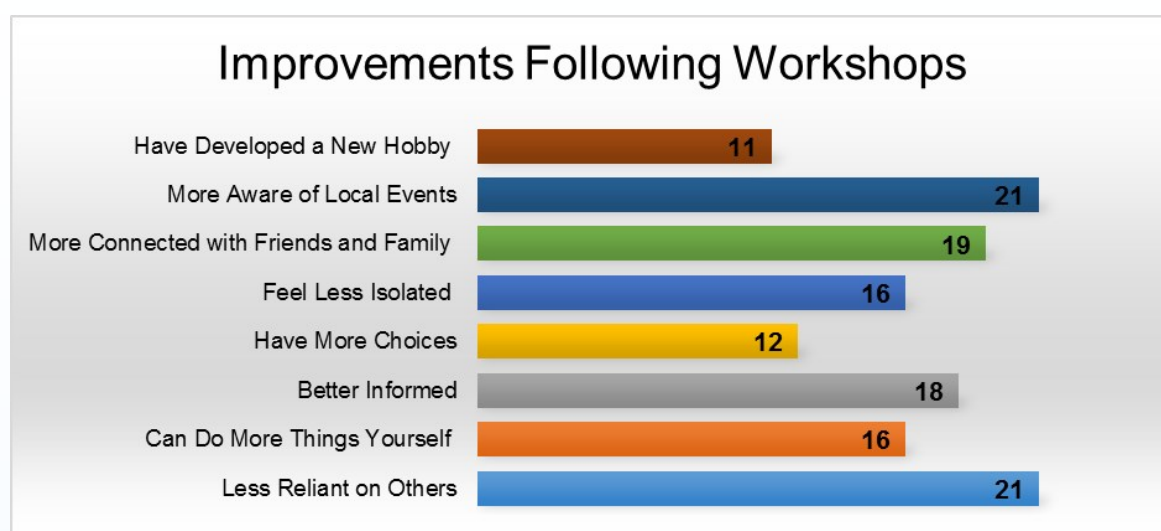


Figure 17. Improvements reported by Limerick participants following workshops

Participants in Skellefteå reported an increase in their confidence levels in using their devices. They were positive about the help they received from the younger people and said that they felt more comfortable using technology. Some members of the group also said that the workshops helped them feel more comfortable and less embarrassed when asking for help with technology and they now understand that most issues with devices can be worked out.

5.0 The needs of older citizens

Social exclusion and loneliness are increasingly prevalent in rural and remote regions of Europe. Such problems can be exacerbated for older people, whose lives are further complicated by growing health and social care needs. All of the PLACE-EE partner regions are impacted by remote, rural and dispersed aging populations, who often require additional health and social care assistance, yet the provision of preventative services can be difficult. Loneliness can affect many older people and this can have serious implications for physical and mental health. Loneliness is strongly associated with depression, cognitive decline, high blood pressure, stress and depression. Higher transport costs and limited economies of scale add to the challenge of providing health care and other goods and services, particularly in remote regions. Additionally, the partner areas are faced with declining economic activity and high levels of youth migration creating further disinvestment and depleted resources. More generally, the growing disconnect between older and younger people is socially corrosive, with a negative impact on social and cultural capital leading to social disengagement, low reciprocity, insecurity and limited exchange of skills and knowledge.

5.1 Services

The following sections highlight the issues, problems and needs of the elder citizens within the four demonstrator areas. Discussions relate to the services and amenities that older citizens feel are lacking or are unavailable to them within their areas and the barriers that they experience when attempting to access local services.

5.1.1 Availability of local services

Health, public transport and isolation are major issues within FODC and often top of the list of topics of concern for older people in consultations carried out in the district, such as recent Pathfinder Engagements, Age Friendly Consultations and Pensioners Parliament. Public transport is very limited; in rural Fermanagh, people can avail of Fermanagh Community Transport but this is not available in the Enniskillen area. The equivalent service in Omagh is Easilink; however, busses must be booked in advance through this system and should an individual be attending a hospital appointment, it is likely that they will be away from home all day. A clear concern for older people is the lack of transport to the Belfast Hospitals and Altnagelvin in Derry, as many appointments are scheduled for early in the morning.



Figure 18. Services requiring improvement in demonstrator areas

Participants in Fjarðabyggð also felt the need for better transport links, such as a shuttle between Sigfúsarhúsa and Breiðablik, and older citizens indicated that there should be a scheme in place to provide transport to local shops. There is a need for a better plan regarding leisure, which should include concerts and theatre events. There is a gymnastic facility in the basement of Breiðablik complex, which has not been properly maintained and, as the facility is utilised by older citizens, this a necessity. Elders would also appreciate a trainer or instructor to be made available, to engage with them and encourage them to be more active and attend the gym. They thought it would also be beneficial to include a handy craft schedule and have more activities specifically focused on older groups. The common area within the facility also needs to be upgraded in terms of the Internet access and the television. The group also raised concerns that there is a need for increased hospital beds in Breiðablik and that a new nursing home would be beneficial.

Participants in LCCC indicated a need for further services in their area, including age appropriate exercise opportunities; more visible policing; more community hubs and infrastructural services, such as a public swimming pool and cinema; and increased civic engagement. Most importantly, with regard to healthcare provision, it is evident that there is no access to a hospital in the demonstrator area. The group suggested that a buddy system would be well received within the community, through which people could look out for each other. They also expressed a need for more public health staff, better rural transport, better social services, more day care centres, more access to information and better access to social outlets for older people.

In Skellefteå, there is a trend whereby older people move from rural areas to apartments in the town centre to be able to access services and amenities more easily. Transport was an issue in rural areas as those who were unable to drive were

were reliant on local busses or lifts from family and friends. The participants agreed that this contributed to a sense of disconnection and isolation; therefore, there is a need for better provision of transport, especially for those living in isolated and remote places.

5.1.2 Barriers to accessing services

There are numerous factors that can prevent an individual gaining access to services in their area. It may be that they are unaware of the availability of services or that they have difficulty accessing the relevant information, and it is often the case that a number of obstacles are in play.

Transport, infrastructure and connectivity were noted as the main barriers in the Fermanagh and Omagh area. In most of the workshops that took place in Belleek, for example, participants were unable to connect to the Internet at a secondary school due to poor broadband connectivity.



Figure 19. Main barriers to older citizens accessing services

Barriers identified in Fjarðabyggð include the lack of adequate service provision and poor availability of information pertaining to services. Importantly, the elderly citizens indicated that there is no dialogue between themselves and non-governmental organisations and suggested a need for conversations between political parties and the Council of Elderly.

In Limerick, the participants discussed physical, psychological, financial, geographical, culture/language and resource related barriers to services. Many of the main services in the area are accessible online, thus requiring citizens to have access to broadband; however, some participants indicated that this is too expensive for them. For individuals who do not live in close proximity to services, public busses are not always available at times that are convenient. Cultural and language barriers also exist, as not all residents in LCCC speak English as a first language and many informational signs, leaflets and posters are provided in English. Resource barriers were also mentioned, as many health and social care facilities are understaffed.

Although it was reported that there is good access to services in the main town in Skellefteå, those who live rurally often face challenges. At the beginning of the project, the participants noted that the kommun have shifted towards providing e-service portals on their website, which, from their perspective, was a barrier to accessing services. However, after the intergenerational skills exchange workshops, many of the older citizens felt that they would feel more comfortable using e-services, especially if they could have support to show them how to use it.

5.2 Community

The following sections highlight additional issues, problems and needs of the elder citizens related to community within the demonstrator areas.

5.2.1 Improvements to the local community

Intergenerational learning initiatives have the capacity to counteract the increasing lack of contact between generations and lack of social cohesion between vulnerable and culturally diverse communities. Public and shared spaces facilitate connectedness and understanding between generations and citizens of diverse communities.

The participants in FODC would like to see changes in healthcare, a more reliable and connected transport provision, improvements to the road network and better connectivity.

In Fjarðabyggð, the participants indicated that there is a need for a new nursing home in the region. In addition, more frequent visits from the local parish church, especially over Christmas, would be appreciated. The group felt that there should be more dialogue with political parties so that programmes and initiatives can be implemented that utilise the older generation as a resource.

The participants in Limerick would like to see more shared spaces to facilitate connectedness and an increase in the number of intergenerational activities within the area. This would provide opportunities to develop social networks and relationships. The group indicated that the local authority, who are responsible for policies for children and older people, need to encourage increased cooperation between organizations at a community level in order to foster social integration, social support and equal access to resources.

The older citizens in Skellefteå enjoyed the workshops with the younger people and felt that the community could benefit from more forums where older and younger people could come together and interact.

5.2.2 Younger members of the community

In all of the demonstrator areas the older citizens were universally positive in their opinions towards younger people, both before and after the workshops. Similarly, the younger cohort within each demonstrator area recognised the need for increased intergenerational work. They understood the benefit of teaching and communicating with older people and felt a need for similar work to continue in this area so that older people feel connected and empowered.

One of the older participants in FODC stated that the project had helped her by, *“Making contact with new folk (older & younger) in my area - I am relatively new to the area”*.

In Fjarðabyggð, it was evident that older cohort were grateful for the time spent with the younger participants, a sentiment that was reciprocated by their younger workshop partners who indicated that they would like to continue working with older generations.

Participants also found that through involvement in this project, their attitudes and perceptions of other generations have been challenged. As one young participant from Limerick stated: *“I really enjoyed this experience and I did not realise how much knowledge older people have about their communities—they are a truly valuable resource”*. This experience was mirrored in the older cohort, who found the intergenerational aspect particularly enjoyable: *“This has been fantastic I did not know how much fun it would be; young people are very patient and sociable”*. The younger cohort also spent some time together creating characters of older people. They were encouraged to draw an older person on their shared sheets of paper and consider barriers that their character may face. Their descriptions included individuals with physical health problems, who are digitally excluded or at a disadvantage, vulnerable, lonely and sometimes afraid. They indicated there is a need for the government to invest funding to try to alleviate and possibly eliminate these barriers.

5.2.3 How have local communities changed?

Fermanagh and Omagh participants suggested that populations are getting older and many people now work later into life or are looking after grandchildren, meaning that there are fewer older people joining local groups. Public perception of older person groups may also be that they are not targeted towards ‘younger old people’ and so many groups are considering changing their names so as to be more inclusive. A Women's Shed has opened in Belleek, which is seen by many as a way to encourage younger old women to join, building on the success of the Men's Sheds around the district. Older people in PLACE-EE sessions expressed a desire to remain connected to their local community and thought that service providers should be looking at ways to increase awareness of the activities in the area, other than promoting everything through Facebook! The participants in FODC felt that the movement of everything onto digital is creating a very isolated society. They also discussed housing and whether there was an opportunity to create smaller houses specifically designed for older residents, which could facilitate independent living in their local area. There are very few two-bedroom houses in the district; a suggestion was to designate a few smaller houses for older people in each new development.

In Fjarðabyggð, and in fact across all of Iceland, the primary change in communities is the split between different groups of people. Only a few decades ago, everyone lived together and did everything together. Now, small children spend most of the day in day-care, older children are in school and so forth, and older participants see this as a negative change.

Youth migration was identified as a negative change in local communities in Limerick. Overall, the group felt that the impact of such migration resulted in older people being lonelier and geographically separated from family, and that communities are now bereft of the vital energy of young people and children. It was also felt that local economies are now losing economic injection due to lower population levels and that a lack of input to community social infrastructure has resulted in less vibrancy and energy in these communities. More positively, however, the group felt that migration allowed younger people better employment and travel opportunities, a chance to spread their culture and to gain world experiences.

In Skellefteå, the feeling within the group was that services, amenities and entertainment have become centralised as they have moved to the town centre. They feel that this means that there is a gap in services, particularly entertainment in the rural villages. This perceived to be a negative change, but they also recognised that there was now much more support in terms of services and things to do for entertainment than in the past.



Figure 20. Young and old participants in FODC

5.3 Culture and heritage

The following section highlights issues, problems and needs of the elder citizens related to culture and heritage within the demonstrator sites.

5.3.1 Sustainability of culture and heritage

Culture and heritage is typically understood to be an amalgamation of built structure, historical sites, and shared knowledge and customs between citizens, including stories, poetry, ceremonies, superstitions, fashion and so on. All are vital expressions of culture, and societies have long sought to protect and preserve this, for education, historical research and to reinforce a sense of identity.

In FODC, there is a concern that much of the local culture and heritage has already been lost, with many sites around the district having deteriorated rapidly over their lifetime. Many, however, do report a resurgence of interest in local culture and history in recent years, which can only be a positive thing.

Likewise, in Fjarðabyggð, older people worry that many old skills might be lost with time. Examples including the knowledge of binding books, building boats using wood, how to use web chairs, and how to make products out of milk, such as cream, butter and cheese. It is imperative that this knowledge is passed on to younger generations or it will be lost forever.

In Limerick, elders reinforced the importance of recording the past, so that future generations have an awareness of their history; to preserve local culture; and to maintain the educational process of passing traditions. They believe that citizens have fewer opportunities nowadays to tell stories at meal times, as would have been done in the past, and reinforce the importance of creating space to do so in order to instil a sense of belonging in younger generations.

As stated previously, the group of older citizens in Skellefteå felt that the local dialect 'bondksa' was likely to die out and disappear. They felt it was important to record and preserve this language as part of the history of the region. The group also commented on the fact that the local museum does a good job in preserving local history and culture.

5.4 Technology

The following section highlights issues, problems and needs that the elder citizens have regarding technology in each of the demonstrator areas.

5.4.1 Availability of technology for older citizens

Technology is, in many ways, its own life force, changing the way we interact with the world. Perhaps most notably, technology is changing the way in which the aging population is navigating the world today; therefore, it is imperative that it is available and accessible to them.

At the beginning of the PLACE-EE project, many participants in FODC had their own smart phones and tablets but were afraid of using them in case something went wrong. This project worked at increasing their confidence and the younger participants were very good at encouraging increased engagement with devices.

All participants in Fjarðabyggð understood the concept of technology but for some there were broadband connectivity issues, creating access challenges. Many also alluded to psychological barriers to technology, stating that they feared it.

The participants in LCCC were aware of the availability of technology in their local libraries, community centres and at home and by the end of the project, all had access to their own smart device. By the end of the workshops, all participants used the Internet at least several times a month; 63% reported going online every day or most days. From the offset, the group had many aspirations about technology. They all wished that they were able to do useful things like book flights, online banking, online shopping and use social media, yet felt that much of this was so complicated as to be unachievable. They unanimously said that having the help of younger people who were not related to them, and therefore would be more invested and have more patience with them, was of great value.

In Skellefteå, the group had mixed feeling about technology at the beginning of the first workshop. This was dependant on their skill level and background in using it. For example, one member was a retired computer science teacher who was comfortable with technology but still recognised the value of learning new things from younger people who may use it in a different way. Through the workshops, and through using different apps and devices and exposure to new technologies such as virtual reality, the group were able to challenge their previous thinking towards technology and felt that they were better able to access and use it.

5.4.2 Problems older citizens experience with technology

Older people face several unique barriers and challenges when it comes to adopting new technologies. These include physical challenges, as many seniors have physical conditions or health issues that make technology adoption challenging. Some may have sceptical attitudes about the benefits of technology and others may require assistance in learning how to use it.



Figure 21. Problems faced by older citizens when using technology

Connectivity was identified as a major issue for participants in FODC, highlighting the need for additional funding in rural areas to increase connectivity. Another problem faced was the fear of scams, such as hacking or identity threats; valid concerns that can be addressed through training and education. Following the workshops, feedback was mostly positive regarding technology, with participants using words such as informative, convenient, interested and easy when describing the Internet.

Similarly, in Fjarðabyggð, some participants indicated that they were afraid of technology, worrying that they would damage the computers, iPad or other devices that they are using, and they also had concerns about Internet security.

The participants were also worried that their devices are complicated to use and they found it difficult to remember all of the steps. Over the course of the workshops, however, these concerns subsided and the participants grew in confidence.

General discussions held in Limerick's initial workshop pertaining to problems about using technology indicated that participants were worried about getting lost in websites and not being able to retrace their steps. They expressed mixed emotions and beliefs about technology, with almost half (43%) believing that the Internet is informative, yet an even larger percentage (62%) holding concerns about online security. By the end of the workshops, 21 participants (70%) felt that they had developed digital skills and knowledge and 20 felt that they have more knowledge on how to be protected online.

From the early workshops in Skellefteå, it was clear that some members of the group lacked confidence in using technology because they were not used to having it in their lives. The exposure to technology they gained through the workshops and the help from the younger participants meant that this was no longer the case. There were some concerns that there would be a lack of support and no-one to help with their queries about technology after the workshops ended.

In terms of addressing the problems raised, the participants indicated that they would like to continue building their confidence when using the Internet and would like further guidance on understanding more about Internet security and how to prevent fraud online. These problems can be addressed by hosting more workshops that specifically discuss these issues and that are facilitated by IT experts. Further long-term engagement is essential to ensure participants utilise the skills they have learned to date.

5.4.3 Hopes and wishes older citizens have regarding technology

Technology has the potential to ease modern living for elder citizens and limit the risk of social and emotional isolation. All participants recognised that society has become more reliant on technology and that it is important for the older cohort to embrace these advancements so as not to be left behind. The participants were eager to continue learning more about what technology can do for them and how it can fit into their lives. It is evident that older citizens would like to develop the skills to utilise digital services; therefore, participants hope to continue their lifelong learning experience. There is also a desire to further engage with younger people as the benefits of intergenerational exchange were highlighted.

6.0 Conclusion

Digital adoption is a significant challenge for many older adults and consequently this has limited the effectiveness of the public and commercial sectors that endeavour to serve them. Age related accessibility and design limitations, digital literacy and attitudes to technology are key contributors to the reluctance to embrace technology. Citizens not connected to modern life are at greater risk of social exclusion and subsequent illness. Public and private enterprise services are being digitalised at an increasing pace, leaving a significant portion of the population with reduced access to these services. Timely access to services, independent living, quality of life and social inclusion are improved significantly for older people through low-cost interventions in ICT literacy and Internet access. PLACE-EE has highlighted the assets and resources within communities while simultaneously fostering ICT skills in older people and promoting improved social cohesion. This project helped older residents to understand how technology can enhance their lives through improved communication, access to information and services, hobbies and interests. By empowering older people with knowledge and skills to go online, it helps them to live more independently, be more active members of a community and to feel more connected to their families and the wider world. Intergenerational work is a great way to break down barriers between groups of people, to foster greater understanding and raise awareness of the unique experiences and skills that different generations can share with one another.

Older people have an important role to play in advocacy, activism and in nurturing communities. Older adults can impart the knowledge they have gained throughout their lives to aid with solving community problems. PLACE-EE has demonstrated clear benefits of learning together for both young participants and older adults and for communities at large. This includes mutual understanding, improved feelings of wellbeing and decreased loneliness. As a result of the workshops, the older citizens have reported an increase in their confidence levels in using smart devices and would like to continue their lifelong learning.



Figure 22. PLACE-EE participants, facilitators and partners in Limerick

For further information please contact via:

Website: <http://place-ee.interreg-npa.eu/>

Facebook: [fb.me/placeeeNPA](https://www.facebook.com/placeeeNPA)

Twitter: @place_ee

Email: place-ee@ulster.ac.uk



**Northern Periphery and
Arctic Programme**
2014–2020



EUROPEAN UNION

Investing in your future
European Regional Development Fund