

Together
is better!

Dreamlike
Neighbourhood older people
connect in their
community

Tools and Activities
for Dreamlike
Neighbourhoods
Online Resource Kit



The Online Resource Kit



Our Online Resource Kit presents tools and activities developed and tested together with older participants of the Erasmus+ project *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* and was contributed to by all partners.

The aim of the activities is to

- bring (older) people together
- support participants to bring in their ideas and perspectives
- motivate them to (re-)discover their neighbourhood
- inspire them to connect meaningfully, and
- empower them to start and participate in new activities based on their interests

Background: The idea behind *Dreamlike Neighbourhood*

The *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* project was dedicated to facilitating and supporting neighbourhood groups of/with older and very old people. In such groups, the participants meet regularly and support each other (re-)detecting and bringing in their ideas and talents. They make meaningful connections with each other, empower each other and actively contribute to the group and the local community.

The idea was to either support older people to set up new groups or work with existing groups that wanted to integrate new approaches and ideas and/or new target groups. The community building was supported by joint activities but was always based on the perspectives and wishes of the older people themselves. We have collected, further developed and tested many methods and tools (“activities”) that help to bring people together and develop a sense of belonging.

The Erasmus+ project *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* was carried out in four different countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Slovenia and The Netherlands) and very different settings. More information on the settings and the experiences gained in the neighbourhood groups are summarised in our *Dreamlike Neighbourhood Handbook*.

Our Handbook is available in English, German, Slovenian, Dutch and Czech on the project [website](#).

The tools and activities briefly

For ease of use and a better overview, we have organised the tools and activities from the neighbourhood groups thematically. Please click on the individual topic to go directly to the respective tools:

- Older people get together and connect
- Older people express their perspectives, contribute their knowledge, and raise awareness
- Older people explore their neighbourhood and involve others
- Older people learn and support each other
- Older people stay in contact even in times of “physical distancing”

Older people get together and connect

Bringing people together and forming an active group with them cannot be taken for granted. The experiences from the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* project show that there are some approaches or methods that help to break the ice and establish (new and deeper) connections between people. The introduction chapter deals with the question “How to reach out to older people?”

Tools and activities

- **Storytelling café (general description)**
 - Example 1: Storytelling café on travelling
 - Example 2: Storytelling café on childhood
 - Example 3: Storytelling café on diverse topics
- **Storybox**
- **Chatpot**
- **Urban discussion pot**
- **Get-to-know reflection cards**
- **Bring an item along**
- **Meeting local streets history**
- **Art and culture in dialogue**

Storytelling café

A storytelling café is a moderated group conversation that invites people to come together in a café-like setting and share their stories and experiences on a certain topic, for instance their childhood, music, travelling, etc. The method was designed as a low-threshold and participatory tool for fostering exchange between people who might otherwise not have a chance to share their life stories. The aim is to encourage people to talk and create meeting spaces.

Basically, it is important to keep in mind that there are no expectations of the outcome or conclusion of a storytelling café. In the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* project, the method was used to bring people together and encourage them to get to know each other (better), share experiences, discover commonalities and develop a sense of community and belonging.

Storytelling cafés can be organised with participants of all ages, or be age-specific or have an intergenerational focus. In the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* project, storytelling cafés were organised in an older people's club in Vienna and with a group of older volunteers of Letokruh in Prague.

Based on experiences gained in Prague and Vienna, we would like to share the following tips and tricks:

- In order to attract people, chose the title of the event well. In Austria, for instance, partners decided to call it “chatting” to highlight the non-binding and informal character of the event.
 - Involve older participants in the preparation, and agree on the topics and dates of future meetings together to strengthen the commitment.
- A welcoming coffee house atmosphere (e.g. with coffee and cake) makes it easier for participants to open up and participate.
 - At the beginning it might be helpful to discuss some basic “rules” with participants, e.g. Listening is as important as telling. All storytelling is voluntary. Narratives based on one's own life experience are treated with appreciation, they are not discussed or judged.
 - To encourage narratives some inspiring introductory questions, items, pictures or quotes might be helpful.
 - Give everyone space and time to tell his or her stories.
 - Only interrupt if necessary and then in a sensitive way (if one person is really dominating the event).
 - Allow feelings and digression.

→ Interested in some more detailed experiences from *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* partners? Please have a look at three examples of storytelling cafés from Vienna and Prague:

- Example 1: Storytelling café on travelling
- Example 2: Storytelling café on childhood
- Example 3: Storytelling café on diverse topics

→ In the following video, participants of the “Plauderei am Hofferplatz” present their “chats” and talk about their experiences (in German with English subtitles)

Example 1: Storytelling café on travelling

Setting & target group

In Vienna, the storytelling café called “Plauderei” (“chatting”), was organised with older people who are regular visitors of an older people’s club. As the club was quite new, the participants did not know each other very well.

Preparation

We actively involved older people in the preparing the chatting session and asked some participants to tell us their “travel story” on the telephone in advance (→ see also [Telephone interviews](#)). In a joint process, their individual stories were summarised in short articles and read out loud at the “Plauderei”.

Breaking the ice

To get the participants “in the mood” for the topic and to start narratives, quotes on the topic of travel and pictures were distributed around the table. Participants were invited to choose the quotes or pictures that reminded them of their travel experiences or that they found appealing.

It is quite easy to find quotes on the issue of travelling on the internet. Here are just a few examples:

“Travel is fatal to prejudice.”

– Mark Twain

“The best education is found by a clever man while travelling.”

– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

“If the whole year were a holiday, pleasure would be as dull as work.”

– William Shakespeare

Narrative phase

Based on these prompts, participants started to exchange their experiences, favourite travel destinations, travel preferences, etc. The facilitators led the conversation and asked follow-up questions to animate the group discussion. It quickly became clear that there is “the whole world” in every topic. Starting with the topic of travel, we quickly moved on to “carpe diem – making good use of the day and the time (of life)”, and to dealing with foreign cultures, etc.

Some participants did not want to read out their personal travel stories themselves (we had collected these during the telephone interviews) and we agreed to read them on their behalf which was very well received by other participants. The travel stories were very much appreciated by the other participants (applause, words of appreciation).

Closing & sustainability in the club

To signal the end of the facilitated part of the meeting, an appropriate song was played. In order to make the results of the Storytelling café visible to other club visitors, the participants created a poster with the materials and quotations from the “Plauderei”. Cards with inspiring questions about travel were placed in the club to encourage further chatting (→ see tool [Storybox](#)).



In Vienna, during regular “chats” about different topics participants revealed common and different perspectives, showed their talents and interests or got to know others better in new and surprising ways.

Photo © queraum

Some examples of inspiring questions:

- Which trip or holiday do I particularly like to remember and why?
- How has travelling changed my view of the world?
- How have my travels and trips shaped me personally?
- Do I sometimes (also) travel in my head? If so, where do these trips take me?
- What is worth a trip in my immediate surroundings?
- What is the importance of travelling or excursions for me today?

Example 2: Storytelling café on childhood

Setting & target group

In Vienna, the storytelling café, called “Plauderei” (“chatting”), was organised with older people who are regular visitors of an older people’s club. As the club was quite new, the participants did not know each other very well.

Breaking the ice

To get the participants “in the mood” for the topic and to start narratives, the following ice-breaking questions could be helpful:

- Where were you born (e.g. in a town, in the countryside) and what did you like best there?
- Where are your roots? Where did you live as a child?
- If you were to make a film about yourself. Which actor would cast you best and why?

To show the answers, a timeline could be laid on a table with string and cards, and participants could indicate their year of birth with clothes pegs or figures on this. The different places of birth could also be shown with cards.

Another suitable ice-breaking method is “The movie of my life”: Based on the question “If you were to make a movie of your life, what kind of movie would it be and who would be cast as you” participants could discuss, e.g.: “Are you James Bond?” “Maybe you’re like Scarlett O’Hara in Gone with the Wind?” “Or like Ingrid Bergman in Casablanca?” “Or more a Catwoman type?” “Would your life be a drama with Meryl Streep as the lead? Or more like a Mr. Bean comedy?”

Narrative phase

Based on the very general question “When you think of your childhood, what do you like to

think back to?” participants started to exchange their memories of their family, school, leisure time activities, etc. In our café, funny events were exchanged as were memories of difficult family circumstance, World War II. or the post-war period. For some participants, it was an emotional journey back in time.

To keep the conversation moving to new aspects of childhood, cards with inspiring questions were distributed around the table. The participants were invited to answer those questions that particularly appealed to them or about which they wanted to tell something.

Some examples of inspiring questions:

- What did my parents’ house look like?
- What was my relationship with my siblings as a child?
- Which of my relatives did I like best as a child, and why?
- What school experience have I never forgotten?
- How was I brought up by my parents (and grandparents)?
- Who encouraged me?
- What longings and dreams did I have as a child?
- What mementos do I still have from my childhood?
- What rituals and habits were there in my family of origin that I have adopted for my own laying?
- How much child is (still) in me today?

Closing & sustainability

To close the chat, we asked participants to describe their childhood in three terms or sentences. We also created a poster with quotes and contributions of participants to share the results of the storytelling café with other club visitors. Cards with inspiring questions about childhood were placed in the club to encourage further chatting (→ see [Storybox](#)).

Example 3: Storytelling café on diverse topics

Setting & target group

In Prague, the volunteers of Letokruh have known each other for several years, but thanks to the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* they have strengthened their community and came together for new joint activities. Inter alia, the project has brought a new format, the so-called storytelling café: older people met in the clubhouse to tell stories from their youth.

Letokruh realised the first storytelling café as an official start of the neighbourhood group within the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* project. The aim was to break the ice and encourage participants to communicate in the most natural way possible. Participants were asked to bring childhood photos and present the stories behind them.

The emotions and memories associated with the photos naturally connected the older people, broke down initial barriers and promoted communication. The fact that one of the volunteers

took on the role of a moderator supported the lively exchange.

Due to their great success, the storytelling cafés were held regularly on diverse topics: Together, for instance, participants “travelled” to different parts of the world and shared memories of travelling during the communist era. At that time, it was only possible to travel abroad to a very limited extent. However, if someone managed to do it anyway, it was usually connected with exciting stories and experiences. The exchange about these experiences was very entertaining.

Before Christmas, participants prepared a meeting about childhood traditions. The group shared memories of e.g. traditional meals on Christmas Eve, biscuit recipes, Christmas carols and favourite Christmas gifts.

Apart from these storytelling cafés, every now and then participants met just for the sake of meeting, without any special topic. They called these meetings “chats”. The participants themselves made an appointment, everyone could participate without registering in advance and the topic for the “chat” emerged spontaneously. These self-organised informal chats contributed to the self-confidence of the group.



Storytelling cafés are a nice ice-breaker and establish new and deeper connections between people.

Photo © Letokruh

Storybox

In order to encourage “chattings” apart from “storytelling cafés” organised by an external facilitator, the Austrian partner queraum designed the “Storybox”. It contains materials such as inspiring questions, quotes and pictures on various topics (e.g. childhood memories, cinema, music, hobbies & passions, travelling) that were discussed during the chats (→ see [Storytelling café](#)).

The Storybox is available for free use in the older people’s club. Visitors can start conversations on their own. Based on inspiring material, they get into conversation with each other very easily. Participants had the idea to use the cards for an “afternoon of nostalgia”.

Examples of inspiring questions and quotes on the issues of travel and childhood can be found in [Storytelling café on travelling](#) and [Storytelling café on childhood](#).

If you laminate the cards you also have a nice sensory experience.

Chatpot

The Chatpot is a large glass pot that can be placed in the middle of the table during a group meeting. The pot contains all kinds of questions on pieces of paper. The participants choose a random piece of paper and read the question aloud. If they want, they can answer the question. Then others respond with more in-depth questions or with their own experiences. This quickly creates a lively conversation, and the participants get to know each other in a nice way.

Examples of questions:

- What do you like about your neighbourhood?
- What do you appreciate about the area you live in?
- What are your biggest concerns about the area you live in?
- If parts of the neighbourhood were to be demolished, what would you miss most?
- What are your greatest expectations of the area you live in?
- What do you remember about your last contact with your neighbours?
- When you want to relax, which place do you like to visit?
- How do you get to the nice places in the neighbourhood?
- What kind of house would you prefer to live in?
- How are you kept informed of what is going on in your neighbourhood?
- What do you think of the green areas in and around your home?
- Are there good things that have disappeared from your neighbourhood?
- What are the nice places to have a cup of coffee with your neighbours or family?
- What has made you happy in your neighbourhood recently?
- What do you find important in life?

Urban discussion pot

Another possibility for using the Chatpot method is to fill a glass pot with research findings, such as results of research done by the neighbourhood groups in Ljubljana (U3A) on older people in urban environments:

- Whatever is going on in the city is a part of me.
- In your old age attachment to your own territory is getting stronger.
- Your own territory is not just your flat or house. Your own territory is also your housing estate, your neighbourhood, your municipality. Your own territory is public spaces where your everyday activities are going on.
- In urban spaces older people should be visible, their abilities and achievements should be visible.
- I love changes in the city. Changes for the better.
- Quality services are needed.
- Urban space should encourage older people to be present there.
- Though I like discovering what is new in the city, I also like to just sit around and observe the urban life.
- Going to town, when it is most crowded gives some older people the impression of being part of urban living.
- Some older people do not like to penetrate the world of younger, quicker generations and are withdrawing.
- All older people need to maintain visual contact with the city, through their window, through the windows of public buses.

The following questions could encourage a discussion of these quotes, statements and findings about older people in the city: So what did they say? Do you agree with the comments or what is your opinion on the issue? Have you had other experiences?

Get-to-know reflection cards

A very attractive way to spark meaningful conversations and a reflection on one's talents, interests or abilities are “provoking questions”. Based on available card sets or self-made cards about strengths, interests and abilities, people exchange their experiences and perspectives.

The following examples of questions might have the potential to inspire stories, reflection and emotions:

- The list of my strengths starts with...
- I feel strong when...
- I am especially passionate about...
- My positive characteristics are...
- Everybody has talents. Five things that I am especially good at...
- That's quite easy for me...

The cards can be used in different ways: The cards are laid out face up so that the participants can choose one or more cards to address. Or participants pick one card without seeing the questions and statements beforehand. In the next step, participants exchange their answers to the questions either in small groups (2–3 persons) or in the whole group. Each person reads their card(s) aloud and answers the questions or completes the beginning of the sentence.

Set of cards (self-made or from a commercial provider). E.g.: German: *Stärken-Schatzkiste für Therapie und Beratung* (Beltz Therapiekarten) von Falk Scholz, English: At My Best Strength Cards, Empowering Questions Cards

The method was developed and tested within the Erasmus+ project “invisible talents” and is published in the “Toolbox for organisations”. Versions in English, Dutch, German, Italian and Lithuanian are available [here](#).

Bring an item along

In this activity participants get to know each other and learn from personal stories and experiences. It is especially suitable for people who would like to get to know each other better.

In advance, participants are asked to bring an item (which, for instance, represents their favourite hobby or something very important in their life) or a photo of their favourite place in their neighbourhood. At the meeting, all participants are asked to introduce their item or photo. Perhaps participants share their hobbies, talents or favourite places. In a next step a “tour” to the different favourite places could be organised, or people could be asked to bring items representing their hobbies or talents (e.g. a poem, a photo) to one of the next meetings.

The items can be displayed on the floor or a big table or put on a wall so that they can be seen during the meeting.

Meeting local streets history

Another method to support (older) people in getting to know each other (better) is to bring them together on a topic that concerns them. The Slovenian Third Age University, for instance, facilitated exchanges on the history of streets in the neighbourhood:

Depending on the composition of the group (e.g. whether participants already know each other or not), an ice-breaker exercise can be helpful in getting people acquainted. Mutual short interviews in pairs including some funny and harmless questions, such as shoe size, hobbies or desired travel destinations, can promote a pleasurable exchange.

To start the exchange about local history, the facilitator shares photos, newspaper articles and other artefacts on streets and public spaces in the neighbourhood. The participants look through the materials, exchange ideas and then report on their learnings in the group.

This method encourages learning new things about familiar streets and places, exchanging memories and sharing knowledge.

Tip: It helps if the facilitator has some in-depth or professional knowledge from the field of old age, active ageing, transactional analysis, town problematics, etc.

Art and culture in dialogue

In creative activities, such as storytelling based on drawings or reciting own poems, people connected at various, sometimes very personal, levels.

Photo © Loes Hulsebosch



“Values and inspiration” are important areas of life, particularly as we get older. Values and inspiration can be found in nature, music, religion, but certainly also in art and culture. In the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* group Bouwlust in The Hague, art and culture were inspirations for lively exchanges. Here are some concrete examples:

- **Paul** travelled a lot – professionally and private. He has always been interested in local customs and collected art objects from countries all over the world. During one of the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* meetings, he brought along art objects from Africa. He showed them to the participants and asked which one they preferred and why. This encouraged inspiring conversations about a wide range of topics associated with the items and brought a new spirit and openness to the group. Paul appreciated that participants showed interest in his stories and other group members benefited from learning about other perspectives and exchanging experiences.
- There was also a lot of creative talent in the group. **Liesbeth**, for example, writes poems, especially poems for children. When she recited some of her poems very passionately, participants listened breathlessly and with admiration. This experience inspired the participants to share their feelings and thoughts about what poems can do for people. It was fascinating to see how many other topics participants came up with due to this little activity.
- **Ria** writes and illustrates children’s books. She regularly took a book along to show it to the group. Ria also brought trial versions of illustrations to collect feedback from the group on whether it fits the text or not. The exchange and discussions in the group gave Ria confidence and the group members felt that their contributions were worthwhile.
- **Paul** is a passionate hobby painter. On one occasion, Paul brought a large painting of a bullfighter.

He was unsure about it, but in the group, he felt comfortable sharing it and getting feedback.

- **Bea** and Ine originally come from Surinam and moved to the Netherlands after Surinam's independence. In Surinam, Bea used to work in a prison and loves to talk about her work there. For example, together with the prisoners, she made beautiful cloth rugs, which gave them a sense of pride and self-respect. Bea was also proud of it and shared this feeling with the group. Bea and Ine showed the group how to make Roti, a traditional Surinamese dish. The joint cooking and eating as well as the conversation about different cultures connected people in a special way.



Exchange on different cultures and traditional meals during joint cooking sessions in the neighbourhood group in The Hague.

Photo © Loes Hulsebosch

Older people express their perspectives, contribute their knowledge, and raise awareness

In the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* project, participants had the chance to be seen and heard and thus raise awareness on the presence and contributions of older people in the various activities. This may be realised via the media, at meetings with stakeholders, at events or in the public space.

Tools and activities

- Public storytelling café
- Discussions with architects, urbanists and other professionals
- Participation in research on senior-friendly city
- Shifting perspectives: From studying the city to studying themselves in the city
- International street event: Round table
- Shaping exhibitions
- Shooting videos

Public storytelling café

In Austria, queraum – together with participants of the neighbourhood group – organised a public open-air storytelling café. This was part of the “Day of Mindfulness”, organised by the initiative [Mindful 8th](#) (German only) in the 8th district in Vienna.

Together with the group participants, the project team prepared inspiring questions, quotes and little stories, and invited visitors to the Day of Mindfulness to join them. The public storytelling café was organised as an open format – everyone who was interested could stop and listen and/or sit down and join the discussion. In this way, the “Plauderei” became a public event and reached out to people in another district.

Participants of the neighbourhood group facilitated the public storytelling café, got in touch with other people, shared their experiences and exchanged views on the neighbourhood. As feedback shows, the active participation in the public event was very enriching for our participants. For them it was a special experience to go to a neighbourhood other than their own and become active and visible in public. The participation also had a positive effect on group dynamics: the participants organised their “journey” themselves and met outside the club for the first time.



At the Day of Mindfulness project participants facilitated a storytelling café and encouraged an inter-generational exchange on “dream” neighbourhoods on a lively square in the 8th district of Vienna.

Photo © queraum

Discussions with architects, urbanists and other professionals

The neighbourhood group Bouwlust in The Hague contributed their views and ideas to an urban development project in their district. The houses in the post-war district, The Hague South-West, on the outskirts of the city are in urgent need of renovation. Some homes will be renovated, but many will also be demolished and replaced by new constructions. The large nursing home next to the meeting centre on Randveen in Bouwlust will also be replaced.

The municipality organised consultation meetings to inform people about the various phases of the project. However, as these meetings took place in the evenings, hardly any older people attended them. Older people feared that their voices would not be heard.

For this reason, the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* group invited policy officers and project managers from the municipality and the housing corporation to one of their group meetings.

Before the meeting, the framework conditions were jointly defined. The exchange was planned as an open group discussion. It was agreed that there would be no lecture with PowerPoint slides or similar. The project leaders were asked to come into the group with an open mind and with the intention of learning from the older people.

The project managers brought prints of the plans to the meeting and explained them to the participants. They had the chance to bring in their perspectives and give feedback. Issues discussed were inter alia “safety” and “accessibility”. For example, participants considered that the planned semi-underground parking was not age-friendly or safe. Furthermore, participants made suggestions regarding the planning of facilities, such as the health centre, day nursery and the cafeteria. They were planned to on the out-

side of the apartment building with the entrance on the main street. Participants said they would rather see these on the inside, facing the neighbourhood. From their perspective this would give more of a neighbourhood feeling, security and ease of use. This approach was very new to the project staff. It turned out that they think more in terms of financial feasibility than in terms of an empathetic living environment for residents.

The meeting was an example of how dialogue between the municipality and the residents can be improved. In a small setting, almost everyone feels safe providing an input and being heard. The project managers came to the residents instead of the other way around, and residents were given the stage.

Participation in research on senior-friendly city

The Hague joined the World Health Organization's network of age-friendly cities in 2014. The municipality regularly launches monitoring discussions to investigate how older people experience their neighbourhoods. There is a focus on a different issue on each occasion. The recent monitoring was on "safety".

Workshops were held in various districts of The Hague, organised by The Hague University of Applied Sciences. In Transvaal, the workshop was linked to the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* group in the community centre Mandelaplein. The neighbourhood group mainly consists of men with a Moroccan migration background. As the participants do not speak Dutch very well, an interpreter was present.

To encourage a lively discussion, the researchers prepared some key questions on participants' general perspectives, their experiences and possible solutions to make the neighbourhood safer. The open and low-threshold format encouraged participants to share their experiences and ideas. The following issues were discussed: safety at home, safety in public spaces and pollution of streets. Furthermore, participants also made suggestions, such as possibilities to report crimes and vandalism anonymously or information and trainings on safety issues in community centres, mosques or coffeehouses. They also suggested joint walks with representatives of the city, the police and older people. In this way, certain issues and possible solutions could be discussed directly on the spot. Participants indicated that they would like to be visible in the neighbourhood as "helpers" to keep the neighbourhood liveable, for example with a logo visible on their jacket.

While the workshop was a good opportunity for the community to gather information and feedback from older people, it also allowed the municipality to reassure older people that their opinion counts and is valued.

Shifting perspectives: From studying the city to studying themselves in the city

The Slovenian Third Age University has been conducting studies in architecture and urbanism for at least three decades. During the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* project some of its study groups turned into *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* groups which allowed their members to focus on various aspects of older peoples' living in their neighbourhoods. Members of these groups discussed about themselves in the city: How does the city / the neighbourhood impact us and how do we impact the city?

Examples of the topics proposed and addressed by the neighbourhood groups:

- What is a dreamlike neighbourhood in our eyes (what should / could be there)?
- Accessibility and availability and distribution of public toilets.
- How to turn public toilets into places of culture and learning? The Kranj example.
- Gender equality in the city and in old age.
- Green surfaces with regard to older people.
- Safe-ageing model, but also cultural and social model of ageing in the city
- System of meaningful places enabling quality ageing in place
- Destroying or upgrading the city?
- What if one cannot leave one's home: what needs to be done?
- Importance of territorial capital (what makes living in a neighbourhood pleasant and easy?)
- Transport in the city
- Why (older) people should or should not oppose monofunctional neighbourhoods and harmful gentrification of town areas?

Project partners from the Slovenian Third Age University summarised the group members' thoughts and included them in articles that appeared in several Slovenian national papers, specialised magazines such as *Outsider*, *Bauhaus*, *Hiše* and on the national TV. In addition, a radio programme was aired with the participation of older students and members of the neighbourhood groups.

International street event: Round table

In cooperation with the specialised magazine *Outsider* members of one of Ljubljana's neighbourhood groups organised an open-air round table. Older people shared their thoughts, research findings and recommendations on quality neighbourhoods. The event was open to both an invited audience and passers-by and was covered by the media who were invited.

Have a look at the article on the street event [here](#) (in Slovenian only).

“Together is better”, a round table at a neighbourhood group’s international event.

Photo © Janez Marolt



Shaping exhibitions

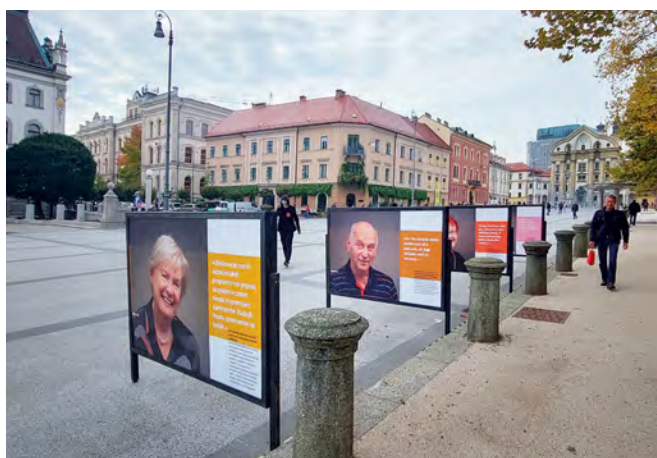
In the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* project, visibility was very important. Apart from public events (→ see [international street event: Round table](#) and [Public storytelling café](#)), articles (→ see [Shifting perspectives: From studying the city to studying themselves in the city](#)) and videos (→ see [Shooting videos](#)) older people were supported to share their thoughts in public exhibitions.

In cooperation with the Society of Architects of Ljubljana and the City of Ljubljana the neighbourhood group of the Slovenian Third Age University shaped most of the events taking place during the Month of Urban Space which – on their own initiative and the initiative of the group’s mentor – was devoted to old age in the city. Participants contributed to an outdoor exhibition and an exhibition in the central City Gallery. They contributed both to the concept and the development of the exhibitions that also included a detailed overview of organisations and of interesting examples of older people’s participation. The exhibitions enabled both professional and general audiences to learn more about what constitutes a quality urban environment in the eyes of older people, according to both their experience and their own research findings.



Older, bolder and creative. Some of the authors of the exhibition in the central City Gallery opened by the vice-mayor of Ljubljana, himself an architect.

Photo © Janez Marolt



What’s the place to go to in Ljubljana? An exhibition of the neighbourhood groups (in cooperation with the Society of Architects of Ljubljana) on one of Ljubljana’s main squares. The outdoor exhibition enabled both professional and general audiences to learn more about what constitutes a quality urban environment in the eyes of older people, according to both their experience and their own research findings.

Photo © Meta Kutin

Shooting videos

Participants of neighbourhood groups in Ljubljana and Vienna contributed two video projects:

In the film *City 65+* which was screened at the opening of the exhibition *City 65+, Between Retreat and Urbanity* participants of the neighbourhood group in Ljubljana shared their ideas, needs, thoughts of their neighbourhoods and age-friendly cities and their exploratory learning findings related to older people's living in the city. They also worked on the script of the film.

The film *City 65+* can be watched in Slovenian with English subtitles [here](#).

In Vienna, participants of the “Plauderei am Hofferplatz” showed in a short video what they bring to the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* project. They tell about great encounters and lots of fun at the Plauderei.

Watch the video “Plauderei am Hofferplatz” in German with English subtitles [here](#).

Participants of the neighbourhood group at the pensioners club Hofferplatz in Vienna sharing their perspective on the “Plaudereien” (chats) in a short video.

Photo © queraum



Older people explore their neighbourhood and involve others

There are various ways of exploring the neighbourhood as the following examples show:

- Changing places and topics
- Visiting and analysing new developments
- Outdoor study encounters
- Exploring virtual reality
- Contributions to Earth Day
- Moderated group walks through Prague

Changing places and topics

The neighbourhood group at Letokruh explored different places and learned about new developments in the urban environment in Prague. Each group meeting was realised at a different place in the neighbourhood. The choice of location was linked to a thematic content. Experts and stakeholders were invited to some of the meetings. Initially, group facilitators of Letokruh proposed places and topics to the participants. After a few meetings however, the participants themselves came up with ideas for further activities (e.g. tour through the historical part of the city, guided by an older volunteer) and contributed thematic inputs.

To give a concrete example: The group visited one of the highest and biggest commercial buildings in Prague and met its developer and architects afterwards. Participants took the chance to propose some ideas for the future development of the city district (e.g. space for older people to do sports, more parks and greenery, a café for older people or a better navigation system). These experiences gave them the feeling that their perspectives are relevant and heard.

The feedback of participants showed that the format worked well and enabled older people to explore their neighbourhood, express their perspectives and bring in their talents and knowledge. All of this led to a greater awareness of their own worth, to stronger bonds with each other and to greater independence and courage. We believe that the journey is the destination and that opportunities for meeting up and discussing diverse topics are key to the empowerment and long-term functioning of the community.

Visiting and analysing new developments

In Ljubljana, the neighbourhood groups from the Slovenian Third Age University visited and analysed the new Cukrarna Cultural Centre (ex-Sugar Factory) in the Poljane area, Kiosk (a newly renovated street building designed by Jože Plečnik), the newly built square of Prekmurske brigade in the same neighbourhood, the square in front of the Poljane Grammar School and the renovated building of the grammar school. They found out that the area was mainly devoted to schooling and education and as a result they suggested a programme of cooperation related to the local area between different educational institutions, U3A included.

Outdoor study encounters

The neighbourhood groups particularly treasured their numerous outdoor study encounters. Discussions on the terraces of coffee shops, in parks and other contact zones, visiting cultural institutions and public spaces in the Poljane neighbourhood, etc.

Older people should be informed about current changes in the town area.

The neighbourhood groups from Ljubljana visiting Cukrarna

Photo © Meta Kutin



Exploring virtual reality

On one of their excursions, the neighbourhood group of Letokruh visited a virtual reality game room. Initial uncertainty about the new environment and equipment was very quickly replaced by curiosity and a desire to try the unfamiliar. Bringing virtual reality closer to older people and also reassuring them that this other reality also has something to offer was a completely new experience and led to a lengthy and lively discussion afterwards.



Their visit to a virtual game room opened up a completely new topic for the participants of the neighbourhood group in Prague.

Photo © Letokruh



Every day you can live another reality. Jirka "jumping from a skyscraper".

Photo © Letokruh

Contributions to Earth Day

The Municipality of Prague 4 was one of the major supporters of Letokruh and *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* in Prague. Together, an eco-logically oriented event was organised. On *Earth Day*, the neighbourhood group went to a nearby forest to collect garbage in order to improve their environment. Their activity benefited not only the environment, but also themselves because it led to chatting, and getting to know each other.

On Earth Day, participants in Prague did community work. This not only benefited the environment but the group dynamics also.

Photo © Letokruh



Moderated group walks through Prague

In Prague, the neighbourhood group met regularly for walks around the city. Initially staff of Letokruh organised the walks and provided short inputs. After a few tours, the participants started to arrange the walks themselves and established a WhatsApp group to share dates, invite participants as well as to exchange photos and ideas for upcoming tours. One of the group members took on the role as guide and prepared tours to different parts of the capital, focusing on monuments, historical sites and stories connected with them (e.g. Prague Castle, Small Town, St. Agnes Monastery, Vyšehrad, etc.).

The walking tours became very popular, and more and more people joined the group. Participants enjoyed discovering new places, learning about their city, sharing experiences, spending time together and actively moving around their neighbourhood.

Experience shows that it is very important to tailor the walks to people's abilities and special needs. If people with disabilities are involved, make sure that benches are available, or the route is accessible for wheelchairs or walkers.

Older people learn and support each other

Neighbourhood groups are a great ground for learning – from each other and from external experts. Activities to support older people to learn and support each other are:

- Peer learning
- Learning by doing
- House of Identity, taking a broad view of ageing from all areas of life
- Network tool “Good for Each Other”
- Technology in daily life – Sharing experiences and concerns in a comfortable environment

Peer learning

In Ljubljana the prevailing methods used in the neighbourhood group were dialogue and dialogical learning as well as peer learning within study circles. At each session, dialogue was encouraged by an article, a video or a TV talk show, an exhibition, a discussion of current events or exploratory learning. Group members proposed and selected issues that were of interest to them. Articles from newspapers and specialised local magazines about new city projects, renovation works or plans for the future were chosen. Reading about new city projects, for instance, led to many controversial opinions and lively discussions. The results of the discussions were summarised in written form and shared with the general public.

Peer learning. Ljubljana through their eyes and knowledge: Neighbourhood groups started learning about the urbanity of their neighbourhoods, current developments there, as well as the stakeholders responsible for conceptualising public space. D. is “teaching” his group colleagues.

Photo © Meta Kutin



Learning by doing

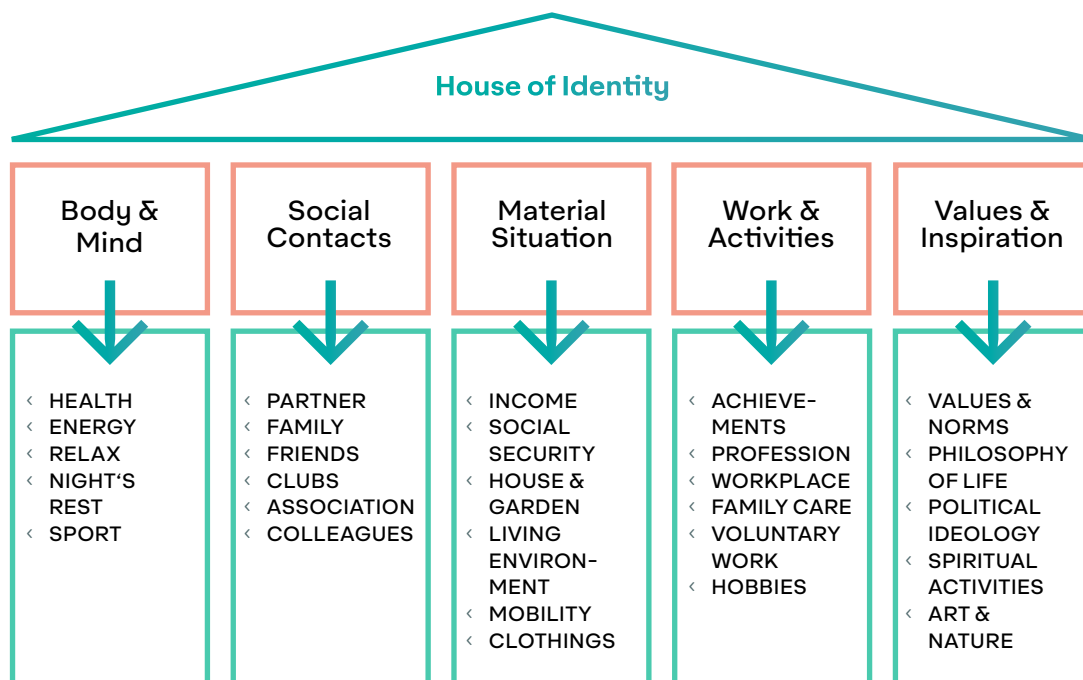
One of the groups in Ljubljana chose research/exploratory learning as a way to explore the neighbourhood and learn from each other. In a research project the participants focused on the past, present and future of the Poljane neighbourhood, the area where the Slovenian Third Age University is located.

The participants consulted archive materials, collected old postcards of the area, searched for audio-visual material and walked through the neighbourhood while discussing the physical and social environment and identifying the most valuable views.

In their exploratory learning, the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* groups followed a number of steps:

- 1) **They analysed their own interests:**
They were encouraged to jot down their impressions and write about their personal experience of the area. Members of the research groups, for instance, described what they met on their way to the U3A building (“What interesting things did you notice when coming to university?”).
- 2) **Their findings were put into thematic clusters.**
Various combinations of single writings and stories appeared. They were combined in such a way that experience and recollections were connected also to some current spatial thematic.
- 3) **They collected information and data regarding the selected topics.**
Single topics were enriched by personal stories of anonymous townspeople recruited through personal social networks (relatives, friends, ex co-workers, neighbours...). Ways of collecting the data were adapted to single respondents: oral interviews or writing their own stories and recollections. Photos were taken of the district and buildings. Recent renovation of the Poljanska street was discussed. Findings were recorded.
- 4) **Personal stories, put in clusters, binding single topics with formal data**
Stories were then studied from different perspectives. By inserting theoretical knowledge and data from professional literature and studies, individual stories became more credible. Members of the groups went to libraries, archives, museums, cultural centres and the national radio and helped each other immensely in searching for literature, etc.
- 5) **Public campaigning:**
Members of the neighbourhood group contributed to the conceptualisation of an exhibition, wrote a film script (they had to learn how to write one) and shot a film. Participants also participated in a TV film on older people’s flats and accessibility of the public space. Furthermore, they helped each other in preparing a street event. At a round table they discussed their perspectives and findings with students of architecture and architects. (→ see [International street event: Round table, Shaping exhibitions, Shooting videos](#))

House of Identity, taking a broad view of ageing from all areas of life



Source: Figure based on *Huis van de Identiteit*, Houben, P. (2009). *Interactief levensloopbeleid*. Amsterdam: SWP.

A very inspiring method tested in the neighbourhood groups was the “House of Identity”. The basic principle is “taking a broad look at your situation and your environment”. We are not used to this, often busy with only a small piece of the puzzle. The result is that potentially important sources of growth and strength are missed. The concept defines five basic life domains, in which people develop throughout their lives and become who they are. The five life domains together form the “house of identity” (Petzold, Houben, 2002, 2009, Van Gennip, 2009.) The figure below visualises this. It is a house with five rooms.

What are these five rooms about?

Body and mind

The “Body and mind” room deals with subjects such as movement, sexuality, appearance, muscle strength and mental well-being. The body and the psyche can be threatened; it is important

to maintain physical and mental health. Examples of questions people may ask themselves are: Do I eat healthily? Do I exercise enough? Can I relax? Am I satisfied with my memory? Can I use modern media?

Social contacts

The social contacts room represents the social network, the relationships within which people live, such as family, friends, neighbours and associations. Here people ask themselves questions such as: Do I ever feel lonely? Do I have nice contacts? Do I experience support? Do I give support?

Material situation

In the material situation room, the subjects are income, a roof over one’s head, a home with sufficient comfort and a safe environment. The questions are: Do I have a suitable home? Do I live in a nice neighbourhood? Do I use the services to

which I am entitled? Am I sufficiently mobile to be able to participate in society?

Work and activities

The room for work and activities is the place to start talking about the things that people undertake. Think of (voluntary) work, “having something to do”, being creative. A good theme is generativity (Erikson et al. 1971).¹ Generativity is the will to produce something, to leave something behind that is of value to other generations. What can I contribute? Do I want/need a paid job/work? Is volunteering something for me? Am I there for my neighbours when they need me and are they there for me? How do I shape my role as an informal carer: can I still manage or is there a risk of overburdening?

¹ Erik H. Erikson, Joan M. Erikson, Helen Q. Kivnick (1994) Vital Involvement in Old Age New York, London: New York, London. W.W. Norton and Company.

Values and Inspiration

The values and inspiration room is about having ideas and values that give you spiritual support or that you want to realise during your life. Examples of questions are: What do I find important? From what do I derive meaning? Does religion still inspire me? What do I see when I look back at my life? Do I enjoy art and perhaps practice it actively?

A good conversation about “participation and meaning” touches all areas of life.

In all these domains, participants in the dialogue can ask themselves:

- How am I doing?
- In which room(s) do I feel strong?
- In which room(s) can I learn things? Can I invest and grow?
- In which room(s) do I have to accept loss?
- In which room(s) should I adjust my ambitions and give myself more rest?



In the Hague, participants in the neighbourhood groups learned from each other by exchanging their dreams and wishes.

Photo © Loes Hulsebosch

Don't shut yourself up in one room.

People who experience a deficit in one of these rooms sometimes search for a long time for improvement within the same room. They lock themselves up in one room. An illness is diagnosed, and the idea is often that only the doctor can solve it. Someone becomes unemployed and looks for years – often in vain – for exactly the same job with the same salary. Someone finds themselves alone and puts all their efforts into finding a new partner. In this way, people often “muddle through” in vain, taking too narrow a view of their own options.

In the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* groups in The Hague, working with the House of Identity has inspired many different subjects for further discussion. Subjects such as sleeping badly, assertiveness when visiting doctors, activities in the neighbourhood, how the health insurance system works, becoming digitally stronger, etc.

The method encourages looking for new possibilities around the question of participation and significance in the broadest possible way.

Network tool “Good for Each Other”

In Bouwlust (The Hague) two community workers invited the neighbourhood group to try the network tool “Good for Each Other”. The network tool was developed by care cooperatives in the Netherlands and is about organising care and support on a small scale.

The network map helps to gain insight into your social network. Under the guidance of community workers, the group worked on various topics:

1. **Daily things: household/garden, finances, transport, shopping/cooking, computers, pets.**
2. **Social life: sociability, hobby.**
3. **Good conversation: conversation partner**
4. **Care: medical**

For each topic the participants filled in the name of at least one person who supports them and added what they would like to do for someone in their network. This exercise generated a lot of discussion because it was challenging for some of the participants to fill in the form. In a next step, the following questions were discussed:

- **Do the people you mentioned in the form know that you think you can count on them?**
 - › **Have a talk with them and discuss what you can and want to do for each other.**
- **Do you have empty spaces on the map?**
 - › **Discuss in the group how you can strengthen or expand your social contacts.**

The “Good for Each Other” network card is a great tool for reflecting on your social network and getting an idea of where you could start to strengthen or expand your own social network.

Technology in daily life – Sharing experiences and concerns in a comfortable environment

In the Dutch groups, questions were repeatedly asked about the use of mobile phones and other technical devices. It became obvious that older people are facing a huge digital gap.

In almost every part of their lives, they have to communicate digitally: with the bank, with authorities, doctors and the pharmacy, with health insurers, travelling, about Covid security, ordering in a restaurant with QR codes, digital shopping, etc. Many older people can hardly keep up with how quickly things are changing.

As our experience show, it makes sense to take up these issues in groups. Group meetings can be used to learn about new technical aids, discuss specific questions and practise digital skills together. The knowledge and resources of participants can be used: Someone might be familiar with a digital tool, someone else might be very familiar with how to use another one. Together you will get much further!

There are also many digital tools for older people that are less well known. For example, memory assistance, when it is time to take medication. Or social robots and apps to keep in touch with others or that remind of activities during the day. We have noticed that older people like to be involved in these things and find them useful as long as they fit in with their daily activities and their needs. To give two concrete examples:

At the Saffier care centre in The Hague north, neighbourhood Benoordenhout, a loan service for digital aids has been started. Several resources and aids have been shown to the participants of the neighbourhood group. The participants, for instance, have been able to experience virtual reality glasses and ended up in the Ferris wheel on the beach of Scheveningen

or on the district bus to the library. Our participants found this experience very instructive and inspiring.

Participants of the Transvaal neighbourhood group received a tablet on loan. During the *Dreamlike Neighbourhood* meetings, they continuously practiced all kind of things, such as planning routes, taking public transport, looking up information.

Continue to live independently as long as possible: technology helps people to have control over their own life. As experience shows, learning from each other is really stimulating!

Older people stay in contact even in times of “physical distancing”

The pandemic was a challenge – not only for the project, but also and especially for the neighbourhood groups. The teams had to search for new ways of making contact and staying in touch – ways that may also be helpful in the future (without a pandemic).

→ Telephone interviews

→ WhatsApp group

→ Online Zoom meetings and discussions

Telephone interviews

In Austria, the start of the Storytelling cafés had to be postponed due to COVID-19. To stay in contact with the (potential) participants and involve them actively, queraum had to think about alternative ways.

The project team decided to facilitate telephone interviews and asked participants of our neighbourhood group about their individual “travel stories”. Basically, they made sure that the atmosphere during the conversations was informal. However, a few general questions to start the conversation were prepared. For example: What travel experience do you remember fondly? What are the favourite places or places that give you energy? As in the face-to-face chats, however, we quickly moved from one topic to the next. The telephone conversations were therefore a good opportunity to get to know the participants and to “warm up” together for the “Plaudereien”.

The stories were made into short articles that queraum used in the face-to-face Storytelling cafés as soon as it was possible to meet again in person.

WhatsApp group

The COVID-19 pandemic motivated the project team of Letokruh to set up new forms of communication for and with their older volunteers. The idea was to give them the opportunity to connect and communicate, and to support and motivate each other (also) in times of distancing and isolation.

As soon as it was clear that face-to-face meetings were not possible, the participants of the neighbourhood group established a WhatsApp group. Participants accepted it very well and used the group to stay in touch. Also later, when participants met in person again, the WhatsApp group was used to promote joint activities, share text and image documentations of group meetings and joint excursions (e.g. guided city tours). Participants adopted this channel to the extent that they send each other birthday wishes, send invitations to their own events and theatre performances, and are their own content creators and moderators of the group.

The project team observed that a group can “grow together” via digital means and use this momentum in real life to make closer connections and be active together. This is also confirmed by the experiences in The Hague: one participant has been sending an inspiring saying to the whole group via WhatsApp every day and thus brightening up the start of everyone’s day.

Online Zoom meetings and discussions

In Ljubljana older learners and members of the neighbourhood groups continued online their regular studies on urban theories and their own role in the city, as well as the meetings and discussions concerning neighbourhoods. This took place after they and their group leaders were trained to use Zoom and other conference services. The groups also organised an international conference with U3As in Zagreb and Frankfurt on the topic of the city and their own research processing model.

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