

**COMMUNITY-BUILDING IN LATER LIFE AND
THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
University of East London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

School of Social Sciences

December 2018

ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the capabilities of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in community-building in the context of a rural retirement community, and considers the notion that ICTs can transform the patterns of social participation in later life. Drawing on the symbolic interactionist perspective and using ethnographic and narrative approaches, I look into the ‘material’ and ‘virtual’ aspects of community participation of older people, and the assumption that ICTs have the potential to enhance civic engagement in later life. A special emphasis is placed on how ideas about the contribution of ICTs to community-building meet the community practices in a particular location, and what these practices are.

The project is informed by the following research questions: ‘What is the role of ICTs in defining and maintaining community for people in later life?’ and ‘How does engagement with ICTs in later life shape the construction of collective identities?’ The use of ethnographic and narrative methods enabled the production of data that, along with depicting individual experiences, also highlighted the context where collective identities are produced and sustained, and where meanings are created. I explore long-standing and relatively recent community structures and practices, as well as the development of new ones, with a particular focus on those facilitated by or emerging through the use of ICTs.

I consider the utility of ICTs for enhancing community participation in one single location, and discuss how ICTs are geographically embedded and developed by community members and groups. Of specific interest are the relationships between the processes of community-building and the construction of collective identity, including its spatial and demographic aspects. Particular attention is paid to the significance of locality as part of creating meanings about the community, and the role of community practices in construction of shared identity with a focus on those enabled by ICTs. Symbolic interactionism provides the framework for exploring how older people’s understanding of community translates into the creation of actual physical and virtual spaces.

This thesis contributes to the body of knowledge about old age and technology by looking at the use of ICTs by older people from a micro-perspective. It brings a unique level of understanding of how older people engage with ICTs in the context of community-building, which was made possible by employing ethnographic and narrative methods and the extended immersion of the researcher in the setting. My research is a step towards identifying and understanding whether ICTs can enable greater civic participation in later life, and if being ‘digitally included’ can improve the quality of life and the community engagement for older people.

Keywords: older people, later life, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), community-building, collective identity

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, ZEMFIRA KHAMIDULLINA, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my original research.

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I confirm that:

- 1.! This work was done wholly while in candidature for a research degree at the University of East London;
- 2.! Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- 3.! Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given;
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADSL	Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line
ANT	Actor Network Theory
BT	British Telecom
CAQDAS	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CD	Compact Disc
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc (formerly Digital Video Disc)
FTTP	Fibre to the Premises
JP	Justice of the Peace
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
Mbps	Megabits per Second
NeSS	Neighbourhood Statistics Service
NOMIS	National Online Manpower Information System, an ONS trademark
Ofcom	The Office of Communications
ONS	The Office for National Statistics
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
QDAS	Qualitative Data Analysis Software
R	Programming language and free software environment for statistical computing and graphics supported by the R Foundation for Statistical Computing
RAF	Royal Air Force
STS	Science and Technology Studies
UEL	University of East London
UK	The United Kingdom
UREC	University Research Ethics Committee
WI	The Women's Institute

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been a long four-year journey that culminated in this thesis, and I am very grateful to those who supported me along the way.

I would like to thank my original supervisors, Dr. Bethany Morgan-Brett and John Griffith, who left the university, but generously continued to provide support, encouragement and feedback. My acknowledgement goes to the Director of Study, Prof. Molly Andrews, who joined this project mid-way and followed it through to its conclusion. Not only has she encouraged me to reach my academic potential, but also provided pastoral support when I needed it. The other person who made this thesis possible is Phil Rees, the guardian angel of all PhD students at the School of Social Sciences, who helped me from day one of my doctoral journey until his last day in the job. A special thank you goes to Robin Stinson, now retired subject librarian, and Clare Bayley, UEL's Royal Literary Fund Fellow, for all their help.

I am forever indebted to my research participants, who generously shared their time and let me into their lives, first as neighbours and then as good friends. Thank you for inviting me to your homes, cooking me meals, driving me to the station, fixing the electricity and leaving firewood – anonymously! – at the doorstep in the dead of winter. This thesis would not have been possible without you, and I owe you so much. I have learnt what community spirit is about, and what it means to belong, and I will take these lessons and carry them wherever life's journey takes me from now on.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family, Mum, Dad and Rashid, who although distant, always encouraged and supported me throughout this project. A big thank you goes to my in-laws, Pennie and Warwick, for their help and providing much-needed comic relief. This thesis would have been less coherent if it was not for my stepson Harry, who has kindly read it and made some great suggestions. Finally, I am eternally grateful to my husband Jim, for putting up with me throughout this thesis, and never doubting that I would finish it. You have supported and comforted me through the most trying times, and I would not have made it without you. I am looking forward to the rest of our – thesis-free – life together.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction to the chapter

The prevalent perception in public and academic discourse is that digital technologies have the potential to connect people, bring communities together, promote civic engagement and combat isolation, particularly for older people. The overarching aim of this thesis is to explore whether Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) indeed have the potential to enhance social participation in later life, with a particular emphasis on how ideas about the contribution of digital technologies in community-building meet community practices in a particular location, and what these practices are. The project is informed by the following research questions: ‘What is the role of ICTs in defining and maintaining community for people in later life?’ and ‘How does engagement with ICTs in later life shape the construction of collective identities?’

To answer these questions I immersed myself in an isolated retirement community, living side-by-side with its members and taking part in their community-building efforts for a total of thirteen months. In my fieldwork, which took place between January 2016 and February 2017, I used ethnographic and narrative methods to explore both the long-standing and relatively recent community structures and practices, as well as the development of new ones, with a particular focus on the practices facilitated by or emerging through the use of ICTs. I also explored how ICTs were geographically embedded and developed by community members and groups, and looked into the relationships between the processes of community-building and construction of collective identity, including its spatial and demographic aspects. Particular attention was paid to the significance of locality as part of creating meanings about the community, and the role of community practices in the construction of shared identity with a focus on those enabled by ICTs.

The use of ethnographic and narrative methods in the fieldwork enabled the production of data that, along with depicting individual experiences, also highlighted the context within which collective identities are produced and sustained, and where meanings are created. To understand how people’s perception of community translates into the creation of actual physical and virtual spaces, this study draws on the symbolic interactionist

approach, which underpins my exploration of symbolic meanings that people ascribe to the community and the role of ICTs in community-building. Symbolic interactionism provides a framework to explore the nuanced interplay between the material and virtual aspects of community participation, and how they relate to people's individual experiences. This made it possible to capture not only how people understand community, but also how they 'do' community.

This thesis contributes to the body of knowledge about old age and technology by looking at the use of ICTs by older people from a micro-perspective. It brings a unique level of understanding of how older people engage with ICTs in the context of community-building, which was made possible by employing ethnographic and narrative methods and the extended immersion of the researcher in the setting. My research is a step towards identifying and understanding whether ICTs can enable greater civic participation in later life, and if being 'digitally included' can improve the quality of life and the community engagement for older people.

1.2. Definitions

The title of this thesis, *Community-building in later life and the role of Information and Communication Technologies*, encapsulates some of the most disputed categories in public and academic discourse. What is 'community' and what do we infer by 'community-building'? When does 'later life' begin? (and what does 'old age' mean?) How do we define 'Information and Communication Technologies', given the dizzying speed of their development? Even though all of the above terms are widely used, there seem to be no common definitions. Below I discuss how I use the terms in the context of this research and outline some of the debates around the concepts.

1.2.1. Community

By the turn of the 21st century, sociologists had produced ninety-four definitions of community, with the 'unit of analysis varying from families, to groups, and to populations' (Chávez 2005, p.316). More recently, community has been increasingly viewed as imagined or constructed in cyberspace rather than exclusively being place-based (Roberts 2011; Dowds 2016; Ruggeri & Young 2016; Philip et al. 2017). Insightful discussions on how to conceptualise community have been provided by many

commentators, Davies (2003), Hyland and Bennet (2005), Gilchrist (2009), Phillips and Wong (2016) amongst them. It is beyond the remit of this dissertation to present the extensive debates around the concept, although ideas relevant to this research are discussed in Chapters Three, Six and Seven. I must admit that useful as it was in developing my understanding and knowledge of various approaches, the desk research into the meaning of community conducted at the start of this project could only take me so far. As I progressed from the review of literature and immersed myself in fieldwork, the richness of data and diversity of people's experience of community life led me to abandon attempts to limit myself to only one of many concepts of community.

Instead, my focus shifted to exploring how real, flesh and blood individuals constructed community through their everyday – often quite mundane – practices. Although community had different meanings for older people in this project, the overarching theme across the narratives was the association of community with a certain geographic area and shared activities in that area. With this in mind, for the purposes of this thesis, I loosely embrace the definition of community as ‘a group of people living in a certain geographical area, often sharing a common culture, values and norms, and who are placed in a social structure according to relationships which the community has developed over a period of time’ (Koelen et al. 2016, p.140). Also, I draw on Davies' depiction of community as ‘built upon face-to-face and multi-stranded personal relationships that supported a homogeneous collectivity with a cohesive social structure’ (2003, p.1) and Cohen's understanding of community as a construct that encompasses ‘a commonality of forms (ways of behaving) whose content (meanings) may vary considerably among its members’ (1985, p.20).

1.2.2. Community-building

Given the ambiguity and complexity of the concept of ‘community’, it is unsurprising that there is no absolute definition of what ‘community-building’ is, notwithstanding it being widely used in the public discourse. The United Nations define it as ‘a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems’ (United Nations n.d.), and this perspective proved relevant to my study. Equally useful is the approach within which the process of community-building is viewed as important as the results (PeerNetBC n.d.). In the course of my fieldwork I came to appreciate that Frank and Smith's understanding of community-building as ‘the

planned evolution of all aspects of community well-being (economic, social, environmental and cultural)' (1999, p.6) did not necessarily reflect the realities of life in the village. Activities contributing to community-building were not always 'inclusive and equitable', 'well-planned' or 'holistic and integrated into the bigger picture' (*ibid.* p.6).

As discussed in Chapter Seven, most of the community-building in the village was attributable to a nucleus of older residents with a strong volunteering ethos, whereas other villagers were either disinterested or deliberately disengaged from what they thought to be cliquy endeavours. Some of the efforts were indeed 'well-planned' and meant to 'generate solutions for common problems' in alignment with Frank and Smith's understanding of community-building (1999, p.6), e.g. the refurbishment of the Village Hall. Others originated from private spontaneous initiatives, for example, inviting villagers to watch a rugby match together in the village café, or starting quiz nights to raise money for a charity. With this in mind, in this study community-building is understood as processes initiated by the members of the community, at the grassroot level, which bring people together, drawing on the local expertise, and which may or may not be supported by the entire community.

1.2.3. Collective identity

Another notion used in this thesis, which is linked with 'community' and 'community-building', is 'collective identity'. Similar to the concept of community, collective identity has no common definition. In the context of this research I use the terms 'collective identity', 'community identity' and 'shared identity' interchangeably to refer to people's connection to and identification with the broader community, which can be expressed in what Polletta and Jasper term 'cultural materials - names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on' (2001, p.285). I also draw on Haartsen et al.'s (2002) discussion of localised shared identity as a social construct, which can be explained in cultural terms (by referring to landscapes, or local music bands), or identified with economic activities present in the area (e.g. farming), or associated with local heritage (local history or 'authentic' local products).

As discussed in Chapter Six, there is a strong association between locality and socialisation in the study village, and participants in this project demonstrated that they place a significant value on their geographical location, which is much more than a mere

backdrop for social interactions. The local landmarks, such as the waterfront, the church and the Village Hall have an enduring symbolic meaning for people, and most community structures and practices are centred on or related to the landmarks, images and symbols, such as the village mascot. With this in mind, in this study, collective identity is explored through the lens of localised communal practices, anchored in interaction and shared activities within a particular locality. Furthermore, co-construction of shared identity is viewed as the process of conventionalising, where the connection between the symbol (e.g. the village mascot) and the meaning ascribed to it is established.

1.2.4. Information and Communication Technologies

The definition of technology has always been elusive, and can be traced to the Greek word 'techne' meaning 'skills in arts'. The Renaissance concept of technology as a study of arts, such as glass-making, persisted throughout the Industrial Revolution and eventually came to denote 'the sum total of systems of machines that underlie a civilization' (Nye 2006, p.13). In the 20th century, technology also came to encapsulate electronic and, later, digital devices such as telephones and computers, and became an all-encompassing concept for anything mechanical, electronic and digital. The ever-changing nature of the latter makes it almost impossible to frame the concept or define the scope of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

In the broadest possible sense, ICTs can be defined as any tool or system containing a microprocessor chip, which can include anything from laptops and smartphones to microwaves, electric toothbrushes and burglar alarm systems (throughout this thesis I use the term 'ICTs' interchangeably with 'digital technologies', 'new technologies' and 'information technologies' to avoid repetition). At the early stage of the research project my focus was on the ICTs as defined by Ofcom, i.e. the Internet, personal computers, mobile phones and smartphones, television, radio, CDs, DVDs, Blu-rays, and portable media players (Ofcom 2016b; Ofcom 2015). During the fieldwork it became apparent that although the concept of ICTs covers a wide range of technological systems, the focus needed to be made on the systems and services that were relevant to everyday lives of older people in the village.

It is important to note that interviewees had different terms of reference for digital technologies. Most frequently ICTs were associated with personal computers and the

Internet, however, satellite navigation systems, printers and other devices such as digital hearing aids and blood pressure measurement devices were also regarded as technology¹. The diverse experiences with ICTs among interviewees implied that ICTs had different meanings and functions in their lives. With this in mind, it made sense in my research to regard ICTs as affordances made available to people through their use, rather than specific hardware or software. Such an approach is in line with Olson et al.'s (2011) study of the diffusion of technology and ICTs adoption patterns by different age groups and the concept of participant-generated definition of technology proposed by Hill et al. (2015) in their study of older adults' experiences and perceptions of digital technology.

1.2.5. Later life

The terms 'later life' and 'old age' are used interchangeably throughout this thesis to denote the 65 and over age bracket. Personally, I prefer the term 'later life' as it appears to have fewer negative connotations and social prejudices than 'old age', which can be associated with frailty and disability. Fully appreciating that the over 65 group is not homogeneous, and there are significant variations across the age range, in my research I use the age of 65 as a benchmark for the start of later life. In doing so, I am cognisant of the 'young-old' (aged between 60 and 70 years) versus 'old-old' (aged over 70 years) distinction and the debates around the Third Age and the Fourth Age (Higgs & Gilleard 2015). Although demarcation of old age varies in different cultures and societies, in the UK it is the age of retirement², and it is commonly used in statistics for stratification of life stages. The chronological age 65+ was one of the criteria in recruitment of interviewees in this study, which is further discussed in Section 3.5. There are differing approaches in demarcating old age, e.g. measuring cognitive age or using frailty as an indicator (Orimo et al. 2006). I had no means or necessary qualifications to use either of the methods, therefore, for the purpose of this study, chronological age was used as the criterion for inclusion. Also, in this thesis I do not refer to participants as 'elderly', 'aged' or 'old', instead, I use such terms as 'older people', 'people', 'villagers', 'individuals', 'interviewees', 'respondents'. Unless stated otherwise, the term 'people' applies to people

¹ See Penhaker et al. (2007) and Green et al. (2008) for discussion of life function measuring devices with embedded microprocessor systems and their communication features.

² The current state pension age in the UK is 65 for men. Under the Pensions Act 2011, women's state pension age will increase to 65 between April 2016 and November 2018. From 2019 the state pension age will increase for both men and women to reach 66 by October 2020 (Department for Work and Pensions 2017).

over 65 years old, who I interviewed or encountered with in the course of my fieldwork.

1.3. Organisation of the thesis

Chapter Two of this thesis sets the context of the research by reviewing the cross-disciplinary literature and the debates around the use of ICTs by older people, with a particular focus on issues of digital literacy, digital inclusion, digital empowerment and digital divide in later life. I outline the two perspectives in the existing literature on the use of ICTs in later life: the ‘enabling potential’ of digital technologies, once the obstacles for the use have been overcome, and their ‘dividing potential’ contributing to marginalisation of older people, who are on the ‘wrong side’ of the digital divide. I draw on these two approaches to discuss the literature relating to assistive technology and inclusive design and the issues around old age and the design of user interfaces. I proceed to outline the debates on the generational differences when designing ICTs for older people, which suggest that ‘unfriendly’ interfaces, including those of social networking services such as Facebook, are among the barriers to adoption and the continuing use of digital technologies.

Subsequent sections of the chapter discuss the debates regarding the extent to which ICTs can ‘fix’ social issues related to ageing, empower older people and enhance their social participation through engaging in online ‘communities of choice’ rather than social relations in traditional communities. My discussion focusses on the debates around social media and its assumed potential to enhance social interaction in later life, and is organised into the following sub-themes: solutions based on existing platforms such as Facebook, and those uniquely designed for older people. The review of literature serves as the basis to frame my research in terms of methods and approaches that allow an enriched understanding of older people’s experiences in rural locations, their use of ICTs and the role of the latter in community-building.

Chapter Three provides a rationale for the research design and setting, and presents the qualitative research methods used in the study and the sampling strategy. In the opening section I outline the research design and provide a context for the ensuing discussion. The following section sets out the rationale for drawing upon ethnographic approaches and highlights some of the debates surrounding ethnographic studies. Subsequent sections discuss the sampling strategy used in the study and how a narrative approach can be

complimentarily deployed alongside ethnographic methods. I conclude the chapter by discussing the challenges of narrative inquiry and the symbolic interactionist approach that underpins the study.

In Chapter Four I discuss my ethnographic fieldwork and its challenges, and reflect on the role of reflexivity and the ethical issues encountered in the course of the project. My primary concern is to discuss the experience of exploration, and how my position of a 'perfect outsider' might have influenced my findings. I start by relating how I established my presence in the community, and then proceed to discuss issues related to participant observation and the positioning of the researcher. In subsequent sections I turn to the ethical considerations prominent in this project and reflect on the ethical issues of fieldwork more generally. The chapter concludes by outlining the procedures of management and organisation of fieldwork data.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven of the thesis present the ethnographic and narrative interview data collected during this study and discuss the findings. Chapter Five explores the 'digital landscape' of the retirement village, highlighting the new dimensions of Web 1.0 (non-interactive, e.g. community website) and Web 2.0 (interactive, e.g. Facebook). In the analysis of the data I draw on the symbolic interactionist approach and the technology domestication theory to bring forward the micro-perspective of older people's daily experiences. I discuss how research participants use email in the context of community-building, and its alignment with the existing communication infrastructure and networks. Also, I consider the use of other ICTs, such as mobile phones, SatNav etc. and how older people create meanings about them.

The focus of Chapter Six is the long-standing and relatively recent community structures and practices, with a particular focus on those facilitated by or emerging through the use of ICTs. I consider the potential of digital technologies in enhancing community participation and discuss how it is geographically embedded and developed by older people in the village and various community groups. The symbolic interactionist perspective of community and collective identity is employed in discussion of the significance of locality in creating meanings about community. I discuss the relation between social participation in the village and its ageing demographics and the connection between ageing and community involvement.

Chapter Seven explores how community practices in the village are geographically embedded and developed by older people who live there. My particular focus is how ideas about ICTs' contribution to community-building in political and academic discourse meet the actual practices in a particular location. Also, I look at how people's understanding of community shapes the construction of collective identity. I discuss how older people's attitudes to ICTs are linked to the meaning of the community in their lives. I conclude the chapter by exploring how mundane 'hands-on' aspects of creation of community, such as volunteering around local landmarks, bring people from different backgrounds together and shape collective identity in the village.

Chapter Eight discusses the findings of this study in relation to the existing literature and debates around the use of ICTs and community-building in later life. I look at the parallels and divergencies between the findings of this study and the prevalent perceptions and discourses on the utility of ICTs in old age. I conclude by outlining the contribution of my research project to the existing body of knowledge in the subject area.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction to the chapter

As we move towards an ever more Internet-connected society, issues of access, paths to digital engagement and empowering practices for the rapidly ageing population are becoming more and more prevalent in society. Official reports on digital literacy among older people in the UK suggest that it stands at an alarmingly low level in the over-65 age group (ONS 2018; ONS 2017; ONS 2016a), and national charities warn that older people are more likely to be cut off from government services, shops and communities because of a lack of digital capability, confidence or knowledge (Independent Age 2010; Age UK 2013; Age UK 2016). Whilst the situation is changing (see Appendices 1 to 4), it remains true that older people's enthusiasm for digital engagement has remained fairly limited, and uptake levels are low³. In 2016 Ofcom reported that almost two thirds of over-75 and a third of 65-74 were still not using the internet (Ofcom 2016a).

Although in their everyday lives older people are exposed to a wide range of technologies, the evidence suggests that they are less likely to adopt them than younger people (Ofcom 2015; Ofcom 2016b). Various reasons have been offered to explain such limited engagement, e.g. lack of IT skills and knowledge, privacy concerns, low relevance to older people's lives, and limited potential to act as catalysts for off-line interactions (Ryu et al. 2009; Gibson et al. 2010; Righi et al. 2012), however, the phenomenon is still under-researched. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the literature and the debates around the use of ICTs in later life, and to see how the question of why older people are slower to adopt new technology, despite its potential to improve the quality of life, has been addressed by academics and practitioners in the area.

³ Research commissioned by the Government Office for Science suggests that although 'digital catch-up' does occur, as cohorts who have experience in using new technologies, e.g. the Internet, enter older age groups, this is balanced by the increasingly rapid pace of technological change (Government Office for Science 2016).

The literature review for this study proceeded in two waves: the initial ‘scoping’ and the subsequent more ‘targeted’ review in the later stages of the project. The ‘scoping’ review enabled me to identify theoretical works, research papers, policy documents and reports produced by charities around the issues of ageing and the relation between age and technology. It also helped frame my inquiry, shape the research questions and the design of the study. Once I progressed to empirical fieldwork, I expanded the scope of literature to include online and off-line resources related to the study community, and the research that resonated with my own findings, e.g. on local digital archiving. I present the results of the two-wave literature review in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

2.2. General overview of the literature in the field

The starting point for the literature review was academic publications available through peer-review research databases. The initial scoping evidenced that there is an ever-growing amount of research exploring how older people interact with and adapt to ICTs. The relation between age and use of ICTs has been widely discussed within many disciplines, including such new sub-disciplines as digital anthropology (Horst & Miller 2012), media ecology (Coleman 2010); and research has been undertaken on the issues of digital exclusion in general (Dempsey 2009; Seale & Dutton 2012), digital literacy (Morris 2007; Morris et al. 2007) and digital inclusion of older people (Abbey & Hyde 2009; Green & Rossall 2013). Also, considerable literature has built up around the themes of digital empowerment and digital divide in later life (Billon et al. 2009; Steyaert & Gould 2009; Hacker et al. 2009; Wong et al. 2009; Brandtzæg et al. 2011; Helsper 2012; Várallyai et al. 2015), older people’s access to technology (Bunyan & Collins 2013), barriers to such access (Bach et al. 2013), possession of hardware (Haight et al. 2014) and inclusive design (Abascal & Nicolle 2005).

There is no shortage of quantitative studies exploring the relation between age and technology, and attempting to make sense of quantitative survey data (Billon et al. 2009; Brandtzæg et al. 2011; Taipale 2013; Pick et al. 2015; Várallyai et al. 2015). Typically, such studies pursue only a limited set of questions. For example, Billon et al. (2009) and Várallyai et al. (2015) use statistical methods to look into the factors contributing to ICTs use by older people in Europe. Várallyai et al. apply factor analysis to explore underlying dimensions contributing to the digital divide in one particular country (Hungary), whereas Billon et al. apply correlation analysis to perform a multi-dimensional study of

determinants of ICTs adaptation in Europe as a whole. In the UK, Bunyan and Collins (2013) attempted to make sense of quantitative data obtained from a residents survey by Portsmouth City Council in 2007 to quantify the association between digital exclusion and explanatory variables.

In their recent book Garattini and Prendergast discuss the limitations of such approaches and warn against falling into generalisations and ‘easy explanatory categories’ (2015, p.2) inviting us instead to view technologies in a much broader cultural and social landscape. Prof. Ernest J. Wilson, who consults for the World Bank and the United Nations on communications and public policy, argues that ICTs studies ‘fail to analyse the micro-behaviours, interests and incentives of real flesh and blood individuals’ and ‘no flesh and blood human beings pop up in these pages’ (Wilson 2006, p.219). With the evidence from quantitative surveys alone, it is very easy to fall into stereotypes about general digital illiteracy of older people, which are reinforced by the media, typically showing them through a ‘lens of decline and diminished value’ (World Economic Forum 2012, p.8).

The media’s caricatured portrayal has created a distorted view of old age and resulted, in many cases, in low expectations of older people (*ibid.* p.25), that extend into all areas of life, including the use of ICTs. Academia is not immune to stereotyping, and scholars speculate about older people being generally apathetic about technology (Mossberger et al. 2003, p.122), being less likely to perceive the Internet as essential to their lives (Sourbati 2009), and being more likely to have technophobia (Neves et al. 2018), thus reflecting the widespread ageism in society. An illustration of such an approach comes from Shelley et al. (2006) who, based solely on a structural equation model analysis from a random survey sample (n = 478) across the entire US, concluded that for the older generation ‘the use of Internet technology is somewhat episodic’, and the very thought of ‘making serious use of IT is filtered and sometimes blocked by feelings of technophobia and IT inadequacy’ (Shelley et al. 2006, p.38).

Also, there seems to be an assumption in the literature that digital illiteracy of older people will be effaced over time. The common argument in the digital divide debate is that it is going to repair itself as younger, more IT-literate sections of the society grow older. This approach is exemplified by Kavanaugh and Patterson who argue that ‘younger individuals, who have enthusiastically embraced the Internet, will continue to lead the way in information technology use. Discrepancies in access and skills based on age will

disappear over time' (Kavanaugh & Patterson 2002, p.342). A new sub-discipline, gerontechnology, challenges this assumption. The emergence of gerontechnology (or gerotechnology) evidences the growing interest in the relationship between ICTs and the life course. Harrington and Harrington define gerontechnology as 'the study of technology and aging for ensuring good health, full social participation, and independent living throughout the entire life span, however much it may lengthen' (Harrington & Harrington 2000, p.2).

Despite the common argument that 'future cohorts of older adults will have grown up with the Internet and with computers' (Charness & Boot 2009, p.257), the underpinning idea of gerontotechnology is that perceptual, cognitive and psychomotor decline will continue to happen in later life and age-related changes will continue to occur as people get older. On the physical side, the changes include, but are not limited to, visual acuity, difficulties perceiving colours and high-pitched sounds, increased difficulty with coordination due to arthritis and other conditions (Fisk et al. 2009). These factors may affect the physical ability to use technologies that were not originally designed with older people's capabilities in mind. There is conclusive evidence that abilities are strong predictors of technology adoption by older people, and commentators agree that age-related changes need to be accounted for in design (Abascal & Nicolle 2005; Sokoler & Svensson 2007; Burrows 2013; Hammad 2017).

2.3. Enabling and dividing potential of technologies

In the current political discourse, new technologies are often presented as a means to tackle problems related to social isolation and loneliness in the ageing population (Department for Work and Pensions 2012a; Independent Age 2015; Older People's Commissioner 2016). New technologies are viewed to have the potential to facilitate communications and improve quality of life and enhance social connectedness for older people who face 'diminishing social networks, changed patterns of interactions with family, moving to a new place with new neighbours, and the loss of a spouse' (Sokoler & Svensson 2007, p.298). In a similar vein, in the academic domain, ICTs have been argued to have the potential to tackle the issues of digital exclusion of senior citizens (Mordini et al. 2009; Robertson & Wilkinson 2010; Jenkins & Mostafa 2012; Damodaran & Olphert 2015).

Such views represent the enabling potential discourse in the literature, where technology is seen as the way to solve the social issues in later life. The review of academic and policy documents suggests that the use of ICTs in later life is generally viewed from two perspectives: either the enabling potential of digital technologies, once the obstacles to their use have been overcome, or their dividing potential contributing to marginalisation of older people, who are on the ‘wrong side’ of the digital divide. The works which draw on the enabling approach viewing ICTs as a prerequisite in today’s life, tend to embed a problem-solution narrative, where technologies are seen as a technical fix to social problems such as isolation and loneliness in later life. Computer-mediated social connection and its benefits, discussed in Sum et al.’s study (2008) of the Internet use and its impact on well-being in later life, is typical of the debates around the potential of ICTs to increase social connectedness.

The dividing potential perspective in the literature, where older people are often represented as marginalised and on the ‘wrong side’ of the digital divide, is exemplified in the work of Ginsburg (2012). She argues that the battles that were fought for ramps, elevators, Braille signage and visual signs for visually impaired, now have to be extended to the digital world to make it accessible to all citizens. Ginsburg’s arguments concur with Goggin and Newell’s discussion of access to new technologies, whereby they ask the question:

As we interrogate our technologies, and see them as reflecting the values and lived social policy, we propose that society dare to ask: whom do I count as a member of my moral community, and whom do I exclude in the everyday taken-for-granted technology and use? Whom do we disable in the scramble to the networked digital society?’ (Goggin & Newell 2003, p.154)

Also, the review of the literature suggests that limited research has been done to explore the social aspects of the use of ICTs in later life from the perspective of people’s experiences. There is no shortage of literature where the use of ICTs by the older generation is explored as an abstract social phenomenon rather than the lived experience of real people. Typical examples of such research include Mordini et al.’s work (2009) on ethical issues of ‘e-inclusion’ of senior citizens, Taipale’s analysis (2013) of the socio-demographic factors affecting the use of e-government services by older people, Klecun’s overview (2008) of projects aiming to bridge the digital divide, Hacker et al.’s study (2009) of the empowerment associated with the participation in online governmental

systems, and Pick et al.'s research (2015) into the relationship between ICT use and social capital and societal openness.

These works are representative of the 'enabling potential' discourse, where ICTs are viewed as the 'fix' for social issues, and older people are seen as a homogeneous, marginalised group in need of rescue by digital technologies. These studies generally draw on a simplistic dichotomous divide between older users and non-users, and serve as an example of the enabling machine approach, with little consideration of older people's individual experiences with technology. Such an approach is critiqued by Richardson et al. (2005), who warn against focussing too much on 'the national economic and government-based benefits of ICTs and more on 'people-centered [...] social, emotional and informational benefits to individuals and communities' (2005, p.240). A different perspective on the role of digital technologies in older people's lives can be found in studies that look into the social aspects of ICT use in later life, notably, in White and Weatherall's study (2000) of the changes in older people's societal interactions brought by computer-mediated communications.

2.4. Assistive technologies and inclusive design

In addition to the enabling potential and disabling potential perspectives, there seem to be two other distinctive approaches in debates around technologies for older people: assistive technology and inclusive design. The inclusive design approach places an emphasis on involving older people in creating new systems and technologies and improving the existing ones. Within this approach older people are considered as innovators as well as consumers (Peine et al. 2014; Dowds 2016). Technology is seen as having the potential to facilitate access to health-related information and socialising with family and peers, although some commentators argue that older people are very rarely involved in designing the technologies and systems (Abascal & Nicolle 2005; Fisk et al. 2009; Burrows 2013). Assistive technologies are intended to allow older people to stay in their homes as long as possible and to reduce the need for full-time residential care, and are defined as 'an umbrella term for any device or system that allows an individual to perform a task they would otherwise be unable to do or increases the ease and safety with which the task can be performed' (Cowan & Turner-Smith 1999, p.325).

One of the concerns in the literature related to assistive technologies is older people's privacy, which can be a barrier to their adoption. On one hand, the development of enabling environments is seen as 'welcomed because it can increase personal control' (Peace et al. 2005a, p.204). On the other hand, home care solutions for older people with chronic conditions often involve remote monitoring, which can lead to loss of privacy. Caine et al. (2006) found 'certain privacy concerns' around the use of video monitoring equipment in a home environment, e.g. in the bathroom or bedroom. Interestingly, Beach et al. (2009) offer evidence that concerns for privacy among older people are mitigated by the level of impairment, and people with current disabilities are 'significantly more accepting of sharing and recording of information' than people without disabilities (2009, p.5). These findings suggest that concerns about privacy vary depending on the situation, and that there is still much controversy around the use of assistive technologies.

2.5. Digital literacy and learning in later life

Alongside development of assistive technologies, much attention in the literature has been paid to improving older people's IT literacy, which is seen as a means to improve computer self-efficacy in old age. The general consensus is that learning needs in later life differ from those in earlier life stages, and older people may have certain cognitive, perceptual and physical limitations preventing their engagement with ICTs (Craik & Salthouse 2000; Morris 2007; Damant & Knapp 2015). For instance, reduced vision and such age-related conditions as presbyopia, 'the reduced ability to focus on objects that are a short distance away' (Mayhorn et al. 2004, p.193), contribute to difficulties that older learners may face in IT classes.

Furthermore, chronological age is commonly associated with deficit in coordination and decline in the ability to control motor function, which manifests itself in difficulties in learning how to use input devices such as a mouse and a keyboard (*ibid.* p.194). Some studies found older people had particular difficulties in manipulating the mouse: pointing, clicking, double-clicking, and dragging objects on the screen (Walker et al. 1997; Smith et al. 1999). However, a US study involving 400 older people in a computer classroom environment showed that 'physical limitations had no effect on the elderly's (*sic*) ability to learn. People with arthritis were still motivated to punch keystrokes and make the computer respond' (Chin 2010).

Another often-cited obstacle to learning how to use ICTs is that older people believe that digital technologies have little relevance to their lives. Feist et al. (2010) report that the perceived usefulness of ICTs decreases with age: in their study 12 per cent in 55 to 64 age group responded that ICTs have no use in their lives, compared to 18 per cent in 65 to 79 age group and 44 per cent of those aged over 79. Other studies also established that the relevance and ‘added value’ of ICTs was an important factor for older people to engage in IT training (Hennessy 2010; Xie et al. 2012; Seale & Dutton 2012). In a similar vein, Mayhorn et al. argue that for IT training in later life to be successful, it is necessary to establish ‘what goals older adults wish to accomplish, what skills need to be taught’ (2004, p.186).

Cognitive processes associated with old age, such as decline in perceptual speed, memory and spatial ability⁴, were also found to have an impact on learning in later life. Such a decline is linked to the ability to keep up with the pace of instruction. Research by Morrell et al. (2000) provides evidence that older people need more time to complete computer training tasks than younger people, and the pace of classroom instruction has to accommodate the needs and age-related limitations of older learners. Mayhorn et al. further argue that teaching formats need to ‘emphasise step-by-step directions on the procedure required to perform a task’ and that ‘long procedures that include a large number of steps might seriously tax working memory, which is the ability to simultaneously store and process information in memory’ (2004, p.195).

The benefits of classroom-based training for older learners have been a subject of much debate. Whilst some view these initiatives as a means to improve computer self-efficacy in later life (Woodward et al. 2011), there is evidence to suggest that such an approach does not suit everyone. On one hand, Czaja et al. (1989) argue that classroom-based instructor-led training is well suited for people with no previous IT experience. On the other hand, Tetley et al. (2015) suggest that the classic teacher-learner instruction approach can be too inflexible, and older people often withdraw from such formal training programmes. Another drawback of this approach is that once the training is completed, the acquired IT skills tend to degrade following periods of non-use (Mayhorn et al. 2004). This resonates with Buse’s assertion that for older people computer competence can ‘only

⁴ General ability to manipulate images or patterns mentally.

be learned through practical experience’, the lack of which accounts for why ‘many older people find computer training courses unhelpful’ (2010, p.1005).

Alternatives to formal classroom-based learning include informal peer-learning, which requires ‘new and innovative pedagogical approaches that recognise adult learners as knowledge builders and creators, not just recipients of transmitted knowledge’ (Tetley et al. 2015, p.40). This approach was deployed in the Opt-in Project, which looked into how informal learning alongside others in a sociable environment might affect older people’s engagement with ICTs. The emphasis was made on ‘shared learning in an attempt to move away from traditional teacher-student distinction’ (*ibid.* p.42) during a series of workshops where older learners were involved in ‘facilitated play’, problem-solving games, and activity sessions with tablets, mobile phones, Nintendo Wii, Xbox Kinect, dance mats, haptic in-the-dark navigation system etc. Importantly, the knowledge shared in the workshops was two-way rather than unidirectional.

Participants in Tetley et al.’s study reported positive effects of intergenerational, family-supported and peer-supported learning, comparing it favourably to formal training. Their experiences suggest the ‘importance of practice and ‘everyday’ learning that works with the person’s individual current state of knowledge and learning pace’ (2015, p.52). Other studies, including Eisma et al. (2004) and Godfrey and Johnson (2009), also found intergenerational and peer support to be more beneficial and ‘natural’ than formal classes. Although research in the area is still limited to small-scale studies, learning with peers has been increasingly viewed as a way to enhance older people’s confidence in using digital technologies and their computer self-efficacy.

Similar beneficial effects of peer learning in later life were reported in the contexts different from IT education. Clark et al. (1997) suggest that peer learning of a subject of common interest in a small group leads to intellectual stimulation and increases understanding of the subject. Clark et al.’s study links the success of peer learning with the ability to contribute to the process: ‘learning from the knowledge and experience of others, and participating in well-informed discussion, are valued above all else’ (1997, p.751). Notwithstanding the benefits of such an approach for older people’s well-being, initiatives around lifelong learning and learning in the community tend to have an emphasis on employment skills in the 50 to 65 age group, which resulted in gaps in the provision for older learners over 65 years old (HMI for Education and Training 2012).

Generally, state-supported lifelong learning initiatives focus on subject areas leading to attainment of qualifications (*ibid.*). This is often irrelevant for people past employment age, and can account for the fact that enrolment in lifelong learning programmes drops dramatically in the over 70 age group. Enrolment records in the over 65 age group show that people still want to learn, however, they are more interested in their hobbies, health and well-being, rather than formal qualifications (*ibid.*). It seems fair to say that lifelong learning programmes need careful consideration to achieve their ultimate goal of contributing to independence, self-fulfilment and continued social engagement in later life. In the UK, such an approach to lifelong learning is championed by The University of Third Age, which emphasises sharing knowledge without formalised courses or links to established universities (U3A n.d.).

2.6. The social dimension of technologies

Technology has wide-ranging functions in society and reflects social, cultural and economic values. Wherton et al. argue that technologies ‘cannot be viewed in isolation, but must be considered within the broader context of existing social routines and practices and the way in which technologies can support them’ (2015, p.118). Sadly, there seems to be a cultural gap between young designers and older users of technologies, which is ‘particularly wide when developing ICTs intended to facilitate social interaction’ (*ibid.* p.112). Development of technological solutions rarely takes into account the needs of older people, even if they are specifically designed to promote well-being and social connectedness in later life. However, it would be unfair to say that no attempts have been made to rectify the situation.

Considering that television plays an important role in older people’s lives (Goot et al. 2012; Hilt 2013) some developers turned their attention to the potential of TV-based applications. One example of such an application is Photostroller, which allows viewing of photographs retrieved from Flickr with the use of a remote controller (Gaver et al. 2011). TV-based solutions aimed to digitally engage older people are discussed by Karahasanovic et al. (2009) who explore how additional features on televisions can be used to create and share content. However, SmartTVs were found to present the same challenges as other new digital technologies, i.e. confusing interfaces and difficulties in operating due to age-specific conditions such as visual impairments and arthritis (Coelho et al. 2015).

The need to account for the generational differences when designing for older people is becoming increasingly recognised (Gibson et al. 2010; Burrows 2013; Gomes et al. 2014; Wherton et al. 2015), and one of the common concerns in the literature around ICTs and old age is the design of user interfaces (Coelho & Duarte 2016). As of today, social network services have standardised interfaces, which allow very little flexibility for ‘non-typical’ users – those who have impairments, or those who do not have sufficient IT skills. The Facebook interface in particular has been argued to be unusable by impaired, and non-intuitive for older users (Gomes et al. 2014; Coelho et al. 2015). There is evidence to suggest that ‘unfriendly’ interfaces are among the barriers to adoption and the continuing use of social networking services, which resulted in a number of recommendations on simplifying the interfaces (Gibson et al. 2010; Norval et al. 2014).

One of the recommendations is to use an easy-to-understand language and avoid computer jargon, which assumes prior knowledge of IT and some technical background. Another recommendation is to introduce easy-to-understand privacy options, given that older people often refer to privacy concerns as one of the many barriers to embrace ICTs (Gibson et al. 2010; Norval et al. 2014). There is a generally accepted view that online privacy is of extreme importance for older people, and privacy settings should be simple to use and control (Xie et al. 2012; Hope et al. 2014; Neves et al. 2015). It has to be noted here that some commentators, Coelho and Duarte (2016) among them, warn that changing interfaces can be disruptive for users and need to be implemented carefully.

The paradigm of Facebook and similar social networking services is to meet new people and make new friends (Facebook 2017; Vero 2018; VKontakte 2018; Qzone 2018). Burke et al. (2011) explored the relationship between age and the use of social networks to establish new contacts, and found that it is younger people who use the affordances of the technologies to meet people online; whereas for older people establishing new contacts seems unattractive, and is referred to as the reason for not using Facebook. For younger people, most notably teenagers, online interactions are ‘lightweight’, immediate but short-lived, and rarely allow for self-reflection (McAndrew & Jeong 2012; Lambert 2013; Alhabash & Ma 2017). Older people seem to favour ‘heavyweight’ communications, which require dedicating time and effort, and may serve as tool to strengthen meaningful relationships.

Achenbaum and Bengston (1994) found that older people have a tendency to purposely disengage from certain off-line relationships so they can preserve their time and energy for those considered to be most meaningful. This is consistent with Vroman et al.'s (2015) findings that older people tend to reject online tools which are associated with knowing new people and avoid functions enabling making new contacts. Similar findings are reported by Norval et al. (2014) who found that friend suggestions are disliked by older people who use Facebook. Coelho and Duarte (2016) recommend that 'new friends' functionalities for older users should be avoided altogether or made optional.

This tendency to favour the existing off-line contacts in the online world was described by Harley et al. (2014), who looked into how older people played computer games via Facebook. Their findings suggest that people who played traditional games like Bingo and Scrabble online, preferred to play with people who they already knew locally. Equally, Harley et al. found that 'much of the activity through Facebook extended local connections by engaging in interactions relating to real world spaces and places' (*ibid.* p.48). The same applied to DropBy⁵, an online community for older people, which people joined in the hope of sustaining existing relations in the local area rather than making new online contacts (*ibid.* p.43). This seems to support the consensual perception that older people generally use ICTs for connecting with family and important others. Lindley et al. (2009) and Harley et al. (2014) discuss this phenomenon from socioemotional selectivity perspective, which describes 'the tendency among older adults to gravitate towards emotionally meaningful and pre-existing contact with family and friends as they get older' (Harley et al. 2014, p.42). Lindley et al. suggest that older people see communication as 'a means through which skill should be demonstrated and personality expressed' (2009, p.1693), which is very different from the 'lightweight' interaction afforded by new technologies and enthusiastically embraced by younger people.

In general, IT-based communications for older people seem to fall into one of two categories: either based on existing social network services (like Facebook) or uniquely designed for older people, although the latter 'tend to expire shortly after being launched' (Coelho et al. 2015, p.112). Examples of such 'expired' solution include Enmesh, an iPad application designed for older users to view and share photographs and related comments (Waycott et al. 2013), and a range of projects developed under the EU Ambient Assisted

⁵ www.dropby.co.uk

Living Joint Programme. The projects funded under the initiative included Co-LIVING and ELDER-SPACES (virtual community networks accessible through televisions), 3rD-Life (a three-dimensional virtual environment where an older person's 'avatar' can meet with other people's avatars, ExCITE (robotic devices that support webcam interaction) and many others (Active and Assisted Living Programme 2009).

Irrespective of the amount of funding that went into these technologies (the Ambient Assisted Living invested 60.9 million euros into developing ICT-based approaches for 'advancement of social interaction of elderly (*sic*)') (Wherton et al. 2015, p.111), researchers report a high withdrawal rate among older users. Wherton et al. (2015) champion the need to devise ways to progress from design to deployment of the technologies 'in-situ', and Taylor et al. warn that 'little is done to assess the impact and legacy of these deployments' (2013, p.1). Taylor et al. (2013) further argue that consideration has to be given to how the new digital solutions integrate into and impact on people's everyday lives in the long term, when the projects end, and invite to reflect on the issues around handing over technology-based solutions to people and communities in an ethical and sustainable manner.

Integration of technologies into people's lives is a focus of domestication theory, which suggests that all technology starts as 'wild', and gets 'tamed' through negotiations and everyday use, and eventually stabilises with an established role and function. There are differing approaches within the theory, for example, Silverstone et al. (1992) identify four phases that the technology goes through before it becomes domesticated: 1) appropriation, 2) objectification, 3) incorporation and 4) conversion, in other words, how technologies find their way into people's home and routines, how their uses are established, and how they become part of people's lives. Domestication is an approach that brings forward the micro-perspective of daily routines rather than the grand narratives of technological progress (Karahasanović et al. 2009; Ask 2016).

One example of domestication of ICTs is using mobile phones and the Internet, the truly revolutionary developments of the last decades, for such mundane purposes as posting pictures of food on Instagram. Discussing domestication of technology, Haddon (2011) focusses on how people, both individually and collectively, deal with ICTs at the micro-level, 'sometimes rejecting the technologies, at other times working out how exactly to fit them into their everyday routines' (2011, p.312), and on how ICTs are experienced in

their daily lives, and what they mean to people. Haddon's take on domestication closely aligns with Silverstone et al.'s argument that technologies can only be understood 'as they emerge in the practices of institutions and individuals' (1992, p.26).

To be sustainable, technologies must meet the needs of the users and fit easily into their everyday lives. There is evidence to suggest that solutions specifically designed for older people are not relevant or usable for younger family members (Gibson et al. 2010; Gomes et al. 2014; Muñoz et al. 2015). Muñoz et al. point out that 'although there are some social solutions that are suitable for elders (*sic*), they are usually not comfortable for the other members in their families, producing an interaction deadlock' (2015, p.57). Therefore, an approach based on existing social network services, like Facebook, which involves adapting the technologies to the need of older people, seems to be more sustainable in the long term.

Gomes et al. found that Facebook's native application 'does not meet senior users concerns, like privacy and family focus' (Gomes et al. 2014, p.1) and designed a prototype taking into account older people's recommendations, with a specific focus on family-related content. Gomes et al.'s study (2014), involving ten older participants, provided evidence that their older people-specific prototype facilitated interactions and enabled activities through content publishing, content visualisation and events management. Another example of a solution based on the existing social networks is Tlatoque, a lightweight client of Facebook, running on a digital frame or a tablet PC. The client generates a web feed file containing the last four days of photographs posted on Facebook by relatives of the older user. Tlatoque was designed to enable older people to browse their family members' photos and status updates, thus assisting integration and engagement with the younger generation (Mtentori 2012).

Despite exposure to new technologies in their everyday lives, research suggests that older people tend to favour the traditional means of communication such as telephone conversations and hand-written letters (Lindley et al. 2009; Abbey & Hyde 2009; Coelho & Duarte 2016), even while they appear to recognise the usefulness of email. Dickinson and Hill (2007) note that for older people email can mitigate the effect of long distances and time zones in ways that hand-written letters and telephone calls cannot. In 2011, Dutton and Blank reported that the level of email use among senior Internet users was 94 per cent, which was similar to the level of use by employed people (99 per cent) and

students (100 per cent) (Dutton & Blank 2011).

Interestingly, the speed with which emails are delivered can be seen as a negative aspect, as older people feel that they demand quick responses, and do not leave time for reflection. Communications in later life are appreciated if they are meaningful, personalised, and allow for a certain level of intimacy (Lindley et al. 2009). Handwriting and telephone conversation provide a greater personalisation and are regarded as a ‘more focused, intense means of communication’ (*ibid.* p.1699) than such ‘lightweight’ ways as texting, emails or social networking. This resonates with ideas suggested by Aoki and Woodruff (2005) that communication technologies offer the potential for significant social difficulties. Modern devices, e.g. mobile phones, support ‘lightweight’ interactions through instant messaging or push notifications, with little regard how they address users’ social needs, and older people do not seem to appreciate the affordances of mobile phones and find them intrusive (Zhou et al. 2014).

The social needs of older people and how technologies can meet them, should be viewed in the context of the changes or loss of social roles and relationships in later life (Hooyman & Asuman 2008) and the decreasing size of social networks (Charles & Carstensen 2010). Roberts et al. (2008) point out that social networks transform over a lifetime, both in terms of people constituting the network and their importance. The reasons are varied and include, but are not limited to, the demise of the spouse and friends (Antonucci & Akiyama 1987) and dissolution of friendships because of the difficulties in performing reciprocal roles (Litwin 2000), or geographic displacement caused by a move to a care facility or closer to their family. Retirement is also believed to have a significant effect as work plays big part in development of social networks (Francis 1991). Once retired, people may find it difficult to increase their social network outside their locale because of limited mobility, age-specific disabilities or reduced income. For them the importance of their neighbourhood and local community is likely to become stronger (Peace et al. 2005b).

2.7. The intersection of age and class

Class is ingrained into the fabric of the British society, and needs to be given due consideration in debates around ageing and life course. An intersectional approach provides a useful perspective in exploring the relationship between class and age, and

whether social class may be a factor in engaging with technologies in later life. The concept of intersectionality was originally introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) as a way to explore oppression of African-American women, and was later adopted by social scientists to explore how gender, age, race and class intersect and shape people's experiences. Since the Crenshaw's pioneering work, intersectionality has been increasingly used to explore the differences that became structured into daily lives and behaviours (Calasanti & Giles 2018).

For instance, social class was found to influence how older women perceive their bodies. Dumas et al. suggest that different social classes have different ways of managing bodily decline in old age, and there is 'a strong contrast between the disadvantaged and privileged women's relations to their bodily appearance' (2005, p.897). In Dumas et al.'s study women from a working class background were 'generally satisfied with their appearance, given the constraints imposed by their conditions' (2005, p.897), whereas women from a privileged background 'accorded a high value to bodily appearance practices' (*ibid.* p.298). Dumas et al. conclude that 'a higher social position does not necessarily bestow an advantage in preparing and equipping an older woman to face age-related losses (*ibid.*).

On the other hand, higher economic and cultural capital correlates with a greater 'time horizon' which affects actions and decisions in later life, including investments in practices with long-term returns, e.g. maintaining physical activity and good health. Research has indicated that social class, education and cultural capital are linked to health in later life and the associated health inequalities (Darin-Mattsson et al. 2017), although education shows a weaker correlation with health than income (Avlund et al. 2003). Those from more privileged classes and higher incomes have better access to health care and tend to lead healthier lifestyles, whereas people from less privileged backgrounds do not have the same opportunities, which results in accumulation of health inequalities over the life course (Marmot 2002).

A similar correlation was found between social class and use of ICTs in later life. Maldifassi and Canessa's study showed that 'the main variable influencing IT use and perception is social class: the higher a user's social class, the more positive their perception of IT and the more frequent their use' (2009, p.273). These findings concur with Selwyn and Gorard's argument that studies of ICT use in old age 'tend to overlook

the fact that ICT-using adults are also those who are already relatively well set in the offline aspects of their lives’, and they ‘tend to help those older adults who need it least – i.e. those who are already well off, well connected and well informed’ (2008, p.3). Although research on the relation between social class and use of ICTs in later life is limited, it infers that digital technologies *per se* do not constitute a means of empowerment, and need to be explored in the context of people’s individual circumstances.

2.8. Technologies and social participation in later life

One of the areas where digital technologies have the potential to improve the quality of later life, is participation and connection with community. The perception that living in good neighbourly communities contributes to the quality of later life is strong in the UK, as elsewhere (Godfrey 2004; Peace et al. 2005b; Schaie & Uhlenberg 2007; Pastalan & Schwarz 2013; Independent Age 2014), and connection with the community has long been argued to be important to well-being in later life and senior citizens’ welfare (Kavanaugh & Patterson 2002; Selwyn et al. 2003; Bedney et al. 2007; Plowman et al. 2009; Prosper 2011; World Economic Forum 2012; Department of Health 2013; Damodaran & Olphert 2015). Having said this, digital engagement can be of particular value in rural areas, which are most affected by an ageing demographic.

In the UK, older people account for 42.8 per cent of the population in rural areas, and for comparison, the figure in urban areas is 32.7 per cent, evidencing that rural areas have a greater proportion of the older population (ONS 2012b, p.4). There is broad recognition that digital technologies have the potential to play a key role in achieving more sustainable rural societies and building communities in rural areas (BERR 2009; Commission for Rural Communities 2009; Commission for Rural Communities 2011). Nevertheless, little research has been done that would specifically focus on the role of new technologies in community-building in later life for rural areas and communities. It needs to be acknowledged though that attempts have been made to capture a broader picture (Wales Rural Observatory 2013; Plowman et al. 2009).

Importantly, the studies that look into older people’s experiences with ICTs in the context of community-building, generally draw on data generated in urban settings (see e.g. Abbey & Hyde 2009; Roberts 2011). One of the recent works that explores digital

engagement of older people in a rural area is Dowds's study (2016), which looks into how ICTs can enhance the sense of involvement with the local community for housebound older people in remote settlements in Scotland. Dowds' study ties in with the research by Ryser and Halseth (2011), who suggest that social networks are important in promoting independence and delay institutionalisation of older people in rural areas in Canada. Back in 1988 Krout argued that living in small communities had positive implications for well-being and social connectedness (1988), however, more recent UK data suggest otherwise.

Remote rural areas in the UK have the highest ratio of vacant properties and second homes, which are not occupied for months of a year (ONS 2012a). For older people living in remote rural areas this may mean a lack of familiarity and infrequent encounters with their neighbours. Instead, they are surrounded by strangers for part of the year (Philip et al. 2015). The situation in rural areas is further exacerbated by a lack of regular public transport or access to a car. According to the 2012 Rural Proofing for Health report (2012), 35 per cent of pensioner households in rural areas in England have no access to a car or a van. These circumstances, combined with the natural age-related chronic conditions and reduced mobility, limit older people's ability to get out and about.

In view of the above, social engagement for older people in rural areas can be laden with difficulties. Dowds (2016) points out that in rural areas there have been fewer opportunities to engage in face-to-face interactions due to a decline in rural community hubs, including post offices, church services and pubs. Also, out-migration of younger people due to unemployment means that older people now have fewer relatives living nearby, and social visiting reduced (Walsh et al. 2012). With this in mind, it is unsurprising that in academic and public discourse ICTs are perceived as a means to enable older people to stay connected with the community and benefit from participating in community activities (European Union 2014). Over the years, a number of ICT-based solutions have been introduced to encourage older people to stay connected with their communities.

One of the projects that has been piloted to see if ICT-based solutions can help older people stay engaged with the community was Brunette et al.'s study (2005). The team used a set of technologies named Meeteetse to create a connection between older people's homes and their community centre. Similar to Tlatoque (see Section 2.5), Meeteetse

utilised digital frames and touchscreens to deliver news about upcoming community events and display photographs of past events. In addition to digital frames in people's homes, Meeteetse incorporated a digital camera and a large public display in the community centre. The aim of the project was to enhance social well-being and encourage involvement in community events for people who were isolated by the effects of old age, and the research team believe that Meeteetse lowered barriers for participation in the community (Brunette et al. 2005).

Another attempt to use ICT-based solutions to enhance connections between older people within local communities was made by Taylor et al. (2013). The team designed the Wray Photo Display and deployed it in the local post office to digitally share community news. Digital engagement with the community was further explored in Harley et al.'s study (2014) with a focus on how the local context affects digital engagement among older people. Their findings suggest that the importance of digital technologies was in generating opportunities for face-to-face encounters and in strengthening personal connections. Importantly, Harley et al. (2014) provide evidence that social networking services were used primarily by older people as means to organise face-to-face meetings.

These, and other ICT-based solutions, may be viewed as a means to tackle the decline in community engagement. Carroll and Rosson (1996) reported that Blacksburg Electronic Village, a website created to enhance participation in community life, stimulated communication between residents and increased membership in community groups. Yet, such a view is not unanimous. The study by Wellman et al. (2001) suggests that online interaction only supplements face-to-face communications without increasing or decreasing it. These contrasting findings add validity to Wherton et al.'s argument that we 'need to observe how technologies are used in real contexts' (2015, p.118).

Few studies have provided open and reflective accounts of lived practices of people in specific local rural contexts, of real flesh and blood people who 'are spoken of, about and for, but seldom speak' (Roberts 2011, p.23). As Krout noted almost two decades ago, 'the study of ageing [...] overlooks the variability found within the aged (*sic*) population in urban and rural areas, and instead focuses on those aspects that sat the aged (*sic*), as a group, apart from the rest of society' (Krout 1988, p.103). The understanding of the motivations for the use of technology cannot be comprehensive if we rely solely on statistical data and surveys, where older people in rural areas are often viewed as a

homogeneous group, and the focus is made on statistical indicators such as income, housing, transportation etc.

Harley et al. (2014) point out the role of digital technologies to provide opportunities to connect with local communities. Their study explores the use of social network services amongst a small group of older people in the context of their existing relationships in the local community, and emphasises the importance of ‘hyperlocal initiatives to connect local and online communities’ (Harley et al. 2014, p.42). One of the issues addressed in the study was whether older people translated local practices to online communities. Harley et al. also examined motivations for older people to engage with online communities and suggested that ‘online communities were used to bridge the online and local worlds’ (*ibid.* p. 45).

Their findings are consistent with Giorgi et al.’s (2011) work highlighting the potential of ICTs to generate real-life encounters and with Michailidou et al.’s (2015) study of the preferences for online and off-line support, where they argue that older people rely on off-line means of communication and physical presence. Coelho and Duarte (2016) further suggest that for older people to embrace the communication potential of ICTs, ‘the line between online interactions and off-line interactions should be very thin’, and ICTs need to be able to ‘boost off-line interactions’ (2016, p.202). This concurs with Harley et al.’s findings that social networking sites and online communities are used ‘to establish new local community connections through the Internet but with an emphasis on face-to-face meeting as an ultimate objective’ (2014, p.47). As noted earlier in Section 1.2.1, the concept of community is a disputed one, and overlaps with the notion of neighbourhood, which can be viewed as a geographically localised unit with considerable face-to-face interaction among members.

Peace et al. discuss the concept of the near-home environment, which ‘stretches typically from the dwelling-place to a point at which the home-dweller feels that he or she has left his or her neighbourhood’ (2005b, p.297) and define neighbourhoods as ‘geographical areas with personal and social meaning related to materiality of the environment.’ They also point out that ‘the boundaries of neighbourhoods, especially as experienced by individuals, are not simple’ and may be contracted due to mobility issues (2005b, p.299). While suggesting that technologies, such as mobile phones or mobility aids may have an ‘ameliorating effect’ (2005b, p.299), Peace et al. also point out that ‘alongside trans-

spatial engagements with family and wider communities through technology (telephone / television / internet), for many (most?) older people, *actual* engagement in material and social neighbourhoods is still essential to well-being and self-identity' (2005b, p.314).

Peace et al.'s discussion of the near-home environment resonates with Harley et al.'s (2014) findings about the role of physical and virtual spaces in encouraging or discouraging community engagement. In their study, specific locations and contexts are highlighted as being important for 'communal feelings to take root' (*ibid.* p.47), and shared experience of the physical neighbourhood (e.g. dealing with rubbish collection) is identified as a factor contributing to social cohesion. Such places as pavements, bus stops, local shops are viewed as 'catalysts for community engagement' (*ibid.*). Importantly, local community centres are regarded as the focal place for communal activities, both informal, like meeting over a cup of coffee, and formal, such as local council meetings and other forms of civic engagement.

Civic engagement is another concept for which no common definition seems to exist. It can include anything from membership in political unions to participation in clubs or religious organisations, to philanthropy and volunteering. Stafford (2015) points out that the boundaries between civic engagement and social engagement may be blurred and considers whether engagement with friends and family can be viewed as civic engagement. Keeter et al. provide a useful definition of civic participation, which includes 'community problem solving (whether informal or not), regular volunteering for a non-electoral organisation, active membership in a group or association (including donating money), or participating in fundraising or other form of charity' (2002, p.9).

Interestingly, in ageing studies, later life can be associated with volunteering, although the UK Civil Society reports that in the UK the rate of volunteering in the 65-74 age group is lower than in the 16-25 group and the 35-49 group (41 per cent, 49 per cent and 45 per cent, respectively), and is the lowest in 75+ group (32 per cent) (UK Civil Society 2016). These figures give an interesting perspective to the argument that older people are known to have a high level of involvement in community organisations and civic engagement (Lie et al. 2009). Regardless of statistics in individual countries, civic participation in later life is generally associated with significant individual and societal benefits (Morrow-Howell 2010; Mike et al. 2014), and research links healthy ageing to social participation (Garattini & Prendergast 2015; Prendergast & Garattini 2015), where ageing is discussed

‘as, and within, a community as opposed to within individual trajectory’ (Prendergast & Garattini 2015, p.17) drawing on findings from the AdvantAge Initiative.

Considering the importance of digital engagement and civic participation for older people, it is surprising that very little research addresses the role of digital technologies in local community-building in later life. Peace et al. emphasise the importance of neighbourhood as ‘a point of attachment to society for most older people’ and invite us to reflect how neighbourhoods can help them to remain socially engaged (2005b, p.114). As discussed above, older people are generally reluctant to form online relationships with new people. Therefore, online connections with the immediate neighbours and the community may be the way forward to ensure that older people enjoy the benefits of being digitally engaged without the - perceived or otherwise - discomfort of the World Wide Web.

One of the attempts to explore the issue was made by Wallace et al. who look into how local communities can be created through online and off-line interactions, and how ‘social relations are played out in new forms through digital interactions’, and discuss ‘re-embedding’ of social relationship within a locality (2017, p.426). The authors make a very interesting point that ICTs can play an important role in the ‘re-embedding’ process, given that the community can be represented and ‘imagined’ online in different ways (*ibid.*). Out-migration of younger people and in-migration of retired people resulted in new forms of social relationships in rural communities and changed the community life (Stockdale et al. 2013). These changes are reflected in how people create a sense of community and social integration at a local level.

Social integration is another disputed notion, and is defined by Wallace and colleagues as ‘the way in which individuals are connected to the local community through social networks, social capital, a sense of belonging and working for the common good’ (2017, p.430). Social networks are viewed as one of the ways to develop social interaction (Keenan & Shiri 2009; Parady et al. 2018), and can be operationalised through communal activities and groups situated in the community (Fernback 2005; Weijs-Perrée et al. 2017). The sense of belonging and identification with the locale is another aspect of social integration, which can manifest itself as shared cultural and historical heritage. Tait et al. (2013) argue that cultural heritage is linked to construction of place identities, and digital technologies have been increasingly important in this domain. Communal events have

also been argued to contribute to the sense of belonging and identification with the locale and community (Bostock et al. 2016; Duffy & Mair 2018).

Working for the common good can also be viewed as a form of social integration, which can manifest itself in volunteering in community events, participating in community groups or engaging in local projects. Wallace et al. provide interesting evidence of using ICTs to ‘bridge social divisions and self-consciously create an online cohesive community presence’ and to ‘re-embed social relationships’ (2017, p.8). They further argue that ICTs have the potential to encourage local social cohesion, foster a sense of social integration and enable a sense of identity (*ibid.*). Peace et al. (2005b) discuss how people identify themselves with the place they live and reasons for the sense of attachment, which ‘usually included effective networks of local support (kin, friends, neighbours) and familiarity with material environment’ (2005b, p.311).

New technologies as a means to encourage community awareness have been explored in a number of studies, including Wellman (2005) and Lewis and Lewis (2012). The role of the Internet in local communities is addressed by Carroll and Rosson (1996) and Hampton and Wellman (2003) in their studies of Blacksburg Electronic Village and Netville online communities, respectively. Technologically mediated ways of connecting and integrating with people are further examined by Prendergast and Garattini, who suggest that older people are positively embracing ‘emergent and newly available forms of sociality’ (2015, p.18). Stafford notes the potential of projects that encourage a connection to the neighbourhood and to the local community to ‘pull in users who do not necessarily want to connect with the global internet community’ (2015, p.35).

Regardless of the potential of the new means of social integration, it is important to remember that for older people, the neighbourhood ‘continues to be a significant point of attachment to society’ (Peace et al. 2005b, p.314). In his 2009 work *Elderburbia*, Stafford argues that communities should become more than just a location, but also a place where collective memories can be sustained and where meaning can be cultivated (2009). Stafford also emphasises the value of collective memory as a vital cultural resource and discusses creation of spaces where memories like scrapbooks, wall hangings, mementos or plaques, can be traced (*ibid.*). Stafford’s arguments tie in with Tait et al.’s research (2013) into the ways digital technologies can facilitate the production and communication of cultural heritage. In their work Tait et al. explore how ‘information and artefacts can

be digitised, catalogued and archived' (2013, p.3), drawing on a study of a community-managed digital heritage initiative Hebridean Connections⁶.

Tait and colleagues discuss the role of social media for collaborative community heritage and suggest that digitisation projects fall into two categories: led and funded by the state at a national level or run by community volunteers at a local level. Examples of nationwide initiatives include the UK Culture Grid⁷ and Scran⁸, which can be viewed as an attempt to support national unity and foster what the former prime minister David Cameron termed 'a sense of shared national identity' in his speech at the 2011 Munich Security Conference (Cabinet Office 2011). On the other hand, community heritage projects imply 'the active and ongoing involvement in the source community in documenting and making accessible their history *on their own terms*' (Stevens et al. 2010, p.68).

Whilst contributing to the creation of national heritage, local digital archives also have the potential to 'challenge dominant historical and cultural discourses' (Tait et al. 2013, p.9). Waterton and Smith (2010) suggest that nationwide heritage projects can be influenced by nostalgic ideas about local rural communities as collectives with shared communal history, whereas it has been increasingly acknowledged that 'communities are not homogeneous, there will be conflicting interests', and that the 'emotional life of community' has been neglected (Ledwith 2011, pp.35–37). Regardless of these divergent interests, rural areas have been linked with a strong identity of people with place, which draws on distinctive cultural norms, practices, customs and knowledge (Bell & Jayne 2010). Together, they form unique 'place identities'.

Whilst local digital archives seem to have the most potential for creating a sense of shared 'place identity', other forms of online engagement can also contribute to community engagement in later life. Harley et al. point out the potential of social networking sites and online communities such as Facebook and DropBy⁹ to reinforce local bonds amongst older people, and suggest that greater attention should be given to hyper-local initiatives (2014, p.50). This emphasis on hyper-local use of ICTs is also discussed in Hu et al.'s

⁶ The archives of the Outer Hebrides local historical societies (www.hebrideanconnections.com)

⁷ www.culturegrid.org.uk

⁸ www.scran.ac.uk

⁹ www.dropby.co.uk

study (2013) of Whoo.ly, a web service based on Twitter posts that provides neighbourhood-specific information about events, people and places. In their study Hu and colleagues argue that content generated by and for community can ‘raise people’s community awareness, and potentially foster their sense of community’ (2013, p.1). This evidences that there is a perception in the literature that community feeling can be created or facilitated through online interactions, which concurs with the mainstream understanding that ICTs can boost interaction and enhance social participation in later life.

2.7. Summary

The review of literature suggests that in the current political and academic discourse ICTs are often viewed as a remedy to social problems, including isolation and loneliness in later life. Digital technologies are perceived as a means to enable older people to stay connected with community and benefit from social participation. However, there is little research that specifically focusses on the role of ICTs in community-building in later life. Furthermore, limited research has been done to investigate the social aspects of use of ICTs from older people’s perspective, and very few studies provide open and reflexive accounts of actual practices in specific local contexts. Despite the ever-growing amount of research exploring how older people interact with and adapt to ICTs, the majority of studies draw on quantitative data, leaving out the broader cultural and social dimensions of the phenomenon.

My research adds to the literature on the digital divide, digital exclusion and digital empowerment in later life by exploring experiences of real people in a specific location. It is informed by the following research questions: ‘What is the role of ICTs in defining and maintaining community for people in later life?’ and ‘How does engagement with ICTs in later life shape the construction of collective identities?’ Rather than contemplating an abstract phenomenon of ‘e-inclusion’ of senior citizens or trying to make sense of survey data, the purpose of my study is to provide empirical evidence on the role of ICTs in the community context.

My aim is to look beyond the ‘enabling potential’ or ‘dividing potential’ perspectives in the literature, and to veer from the simplistic dichotomous view of an empowered older ICT user as opposed to marginalised non-user. To achieve this I explore the social routines and community practices of older people in a retirement village and investigate

how ICTs can facilitate them. This study is a step towards identifying and understanding what kinds of empowering practices can ensure equal digital participation for older people living in remote locations, and what are the possible paths to broader digital inclusion in later life.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction to the chapter

In this chapter I discuss the research setting and the research methods deployed in the study. In the opening section I outline the research design and provide a context for the ensuing discussion. Section 3.4 sets out the rationale for drawing upon ethnographic approaches and highlights some of the debates surrounding ethnographic studies. The sampling strategy used in the study for identification of interviewees is presented in Section 3.5. I discuss how narrative approach is used to complement ethnographic methods in Section 3.6. I conclude the chapter by discussing the challenges of the narrative inquiry and the symbolic interactionist approach that underpins the study.

3.2. Research design

In terms of research design, this study draws on the framework suggested by Robson (2002), who discusses five aspects of practical real-world research in social sciences, namely, research purpose, research type, research strategy, research methods and data analysis. Robson argues that in terms of the purpose of research, it can be exploratory, descriptive, explanatory or emancipatory¹⁰ (*ibid.*). As established in the previous chapter, there is a gap in understanding the role of ICTs in community-building for older people and how engagement with ICTs in later life might shape the construction of collective identities. The purpose of this research is to explore how ideas about the contribution of ICTs to community-building meet the actual community practices in a particular location, and what these practices look like. This study does not set out to prove or disprove the existing ideas and concepts, rather, it is to build a more comprehensive picture based on rich empirical data.

Therefore, the purpose of this study can be defined as exploratory and explanatory, implying that it seeks to provide insights about largely unexplored phenomena, i.e. the role of ICTs in community-building in later life, rather than descriptive or emancipatory, which would imply collecting data on pre-defined categories or variables. Robson further

¹⁰ Emancipatory in this context refers to creating opportunities and the will to engage in social action.

sub-divides research into flexible (inductive and evolving, typically small-scale and often conducted in natural settings) and non-flexible (theory-driven, typically large-scale and focussing on generalisability). My study has a flexible design, which fits better with its purpose, given that it is not theory-driven. Allowing modifications as the research progresses and evolves, the flexible design employed in my study offered more freedom in collecting data. Typical examples of studies employing flexible designs are case studies, ethnographic research and grounded theory.

In general, this project has the typical features of an ethnographic study, i.e. the selection of a group, organisation or community of interest or concern, immersion of the researcher in the setting and use of participant observation (*ibid.* p.80). Furthermore, my project has certain features of a case study as discussed by Robson, i.e. selection of a situation, individual or a group of interest and collection of information through a range of data collection techniques, including observation, interview and documentary analysis (2002, p.80). The grounded theory approach does not fit the purpose of the study, as I do not seek to generate new theories regarding the relationship of ICTs and later life, as grounded theory would. Therefore, in terms of research design this project is an ethnographic study with some elements of case study such as interviewing and documentary analysis.

In terms of research methods, this study relies on ethnographic and narrative methods, making use of in-depth interviews, participant observation and other ethnographic approaches. The research methods are discussed in depth in Section 3.4 'Ethnographic methods' and Section 3.6 'Narrative methods'. The 'Ethnographic methods' section provides the rationale for choosing particular methods, and outlines specific techniques used in the research, e.g. ethnographic tours, physical mapping and network mapping. Furthermore, I discuss the use of online and off-line resources and online ethnography in this study, and related ethical considerations. In these sections I argue that the research methods deployed in this study enable an empirical inquiry that 'investigates contemporary phenomena within a real-life context, when the boundaries between the phenomena and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used' (Yin 2009, p.18).

The last aspect of the research design as suggested by Robson (2002) - data analysis - is discussed in detail in Section 4.3.4. Being a qualitative study, my project produced a

significant amount of unstructured data, which can be analysed using various individual methods, or a combination of methods. In this thesis I use thematic analysis to organise and structure data and identify patterns, and narrative analysis to interpret the collected data and find meanings using symbolic interactionism as the framework for data analysis. Further detail on how data is analysed and the challenges encountered during the process are provided in relevant sections of the thesis.

3.3. Research setting

The choice of the research site was linked to the purpose of the study - to explore the role of ICTs in defining and maintaining community for people in later life, and how engagement with ICTs might shape the construction of collective identities. In order to achieve this aim, the research needs to be based in a relatively isolated, geographically circumscribed and relatively self-contained unit. These conditions appear to be met most closely by rural village communities. The tradition of community studies has always been strong in rural sociology, where communities are generally viewed as spatially delineated and relatively isolated from the broader society (Stacey 1960; Williams 1956) and usually depicted as 'built upon face-to-face and multi-stranded personal relationships that supported a homogeneous collectivity with a cohesive social structure' (Davies 2003, p.1).

This is very much a mainstream approach in ethnography, which focusses on the study of social interactions, behaviours and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations, and communities (Agar 1986; Atkinson & Hammersley 1995; Creswell 2007; Robson 2002). Rooted in Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) and Alfred Redcliffe-Brown (1922) studies of small, rural (and often remote) societies in the early 1920s, this approach is now widely applied in studies of urban communities, which seem to follow the rationale behind rural community studies and tend to focus on spatially demarcated units, for example, ethnic neighbourhoods (Gans 1962; Whyte 1955) or industrial communities like mining or metalworking (Dennis et al. 1969). More recently, the concept and rationale behind community studies have been used in urban ethnography, notably, by Philippe Bourgois (1995) and Mitchell Duneier (1999), along with many other researchers in their studies of social life (see, e.g. Urbanites n.d.).

In my own project the study site was selected both to represent a greater number of older people (discussed in Section 3.5) and for its relatively isolated location. The community is categorised by the Office for National Statistics as a ‘hamlet or isolated settlement’¹¹. The village has a significant proportion of people aged over 65 living in detached homes¹². The number of people living in the village permanently is about 160, of which about 60 per cent are people over 65 (the figure was provided by the village council, and differs from the 2011 Census figure). In addition, the area has a high Dependency Ratio of 65.5 (compared to the average UK Dependency Ratio of 54.3)¹³, which indicates a greater proportion of people who are not of working age, or are not working or paying taxes. Arguably, the village can be viewed as a naturally occurring retirement community¹⁴.

The demographics of the village reflect more general trends in the UK, and even more so in Wales, where the proportion of older people (aged over 65) is predicted to grow by 28.5 per cent by 2030 (Watt & Roberts 2016). For comparison, the total population is expected to grow by mere 5.6 per cent within the same period (*ibid.*). In a way, the village offers a vision of the soon-to-come ageing society, with an ever-increasing percentage of older people (ONS 2016b), which is expected to reach 16 million by 2030 (Sullivan & Frost 2013). It is widely recognised that this demographic shift presents social, economic and political challenges (Harper & Walport 2016; Independent Age 2014; Department for Work and Pensions 2012b; ONS 2015a; World Economic Forum 2012), and that we need to understand the nature and implications of the ageing population in many aspects of our lives, including provision of care, built environment, lifelong learning and use of ICTs.

The use of technology is acknowledged to be an important aspect of community-building in later life (Age UK 2015; Heinz 2013; Park 2012; Dahmen & Cozma 2009). The research setting offers ample opportunities to explore the role of ICTs in defining and maintaining community for older people, including such aspects of community-building

¹¹ Providing the reference would compromise anonymity.

¹² Providing the reference would compromise anonymity.

¹³ Providing the reference would compromise anonymity.

¹⁴ NORC, naturally occurring retirement community – a community which is ‘not planned for older people, but which over time comes to house largely older people’ (Hunt & Gunter-Hunt 1985). NORC are argued to be well-suited to promote healthy ageing, including independence, socialisation, and community living in later life (Bedney et al. 2007; Prosper 2011).

as socialisation, education, recreational activities and volunteering. The village residents are actively involved in various community projects, ranging from the Gardening Club to the Dramatic Club and the History Group. The latter conducted interviews within the community to collect oral memoirs of residents under the Oral History Project aiming to ‘strengthen the communities’ sense of place and pride in their locality’¹⁵. In addition, the local Women’s Institute put together an illustrated book of the history of the area to record and preserve documentary and photographic memoirs and narratives of the residents¹⁶.

Additionally, the village is located in the vicinity of an environmental education field centre which is used as a research base for outdoor learning and fieldwork for environmental professionals and students in geology and marine science. The established presence of researchers in the area together with my personal experience suggested that the village residents were no novices when it came to research projects, and would generously share their knowledge about the community, as well as personal and family histories. All these features made the village an opportune place for my research and suggested that the residents had a specific sense of community, affecting integration and communication patterns, including engagement with ICTs.

The resources, facilities and services in the community are limited or sporadic and sometimes non-existent. For example, post office services are only available through a mobile post office, which serves the village for an hour twice a week. Similarly, the mobile library is only available once a month. The nearest supermarkets, medical practices and rail service are located in town {A}¹⁷, approximately 20 km from the village. Road closures are quite common, both due to road works and extreme weather conditions. Extended power outages caused by strong winds are a common feature of the village life, as the power supply and telecommunication lines are above ground suspended from poles, making transmission rather patchy. The mobile phone signal is unreliable or non-existent, with black spots for reception, and is even worse indoors. The village residents rarely use their mobile phones and instead use their landlines for communications (discussed in Section 5.4).

¹⁵ Providing the reference would compromise anonymity.

¹⁶ Providing the reference would compromise anonymity.

¹⁷ The use of special symbols, e.g. curly brackets, is discussed in Section 4.3.3.

Interestingly, the village enjoys a relatively advanced broadband technology, and most households can get access to ADSL broadband with the maximum speed of 17 Mbps. There are two exchanges in a 10-km radius of the village (owned and maintained by Openreach¹⁸), and they are fibre enabled, which can ensure a headline speed of up to 76 Mbps. The residents of the village have quite a wide choice of broadband providers, although the list is limited to those who rely on Openreach's broadband network infrastructure, e.g. BT, Plusnet, TenTel (BroadbandExposed 2016). Superfast fibre broadband is not available yet, although the area is currently in scope for the rollout of FTTP (Fibre To The Premises) under the Superfast Cymru¹⁹ programme, which brings access to high-speed broadband to the areas that telecoms companies have decided are not economical to rollout to (which covers over half of all premises in Wales) (Welsh Government 2016).

The village has its own website (discussed in detail in Chapter Five), which serves as the gateway to individual websites of the community groups and societies. For a settlement with only 160 residents, the village has a surprising number of community groups. The most notable ones are the local Women's Institute (founded in the 1920s, meeting fortnightly), the Dramatic Club (founded in the 2000s, now staging its thirteenth performance), the Sailing Club (founded in the 1950s, hosting a number of regattas every year, overseeing moorings in the bay and running the Sailing Club facilities), and the History Group (founded in the 2000s, meeting monthly). Significantly, the village residents are usually involved in more than one community group. One person can be the churchwarden, the council clerk, the school governor and a member of the Women's Institute. In terms of my research, such a sprawling network offered an exciting challenge of assessing network ties as discussed by Whitehead (2005) and the building of the village networking map. The geographic, demographic and social features of the village made it an appropriate setting for my study.

3.4. Ethnographic methods

The rationale behind employing ethnographic methods is two-fold. First, ethnographic methods offer unique opportunities to explore and experience the local practices and

¹⁸ <https://www.homeandbusiness.openreach.co.uk>

¹⁹ <https://beta.gov.wales/go-superfast>

dynamics of village life ‘from within’. Ethnographic methods enable researchers to study in-depth how ‘people live, experience and make sense of their lives and their world’ (Robson 2002, p.89). Isabel Emmett, who conducted her social anthropological study of a North Wales village in 1950-60s, championed the need to ‘observe, understand and record what people actually did, rather than what they said they did; by living among them and joining in their activities rather than sending out questionnaires’ (Emmett 1964, p.ix). During my research in a setting similar to Emmett’s study, I came to realise that to capture and interpret the diverse and nuanced facets of individual and community life the researcher needs to spend considerable time observing the practices and exploring the experiences of real people, looking outward from the particular community to wider issues.

Exploring and describing the social world have long been central to ethnographic enterprise (Hardin & Clarke 2012), and its underpinning approach is that people’s experiences are socially organised, which requires examining both individual experiences and how social relations shaped them (Brewer 2000). It is thought that small-scale studies offer the opportunity to identify common patterns in a broader social world, for example, Brewer (2000) argues that social processes are reproduced at the level of people’s everyday lives. With this in mind, in my research I endeavour to explore the role of ICTs in defining and maintaining community for people in later life, hoping that the insights produced in the small-scale study will contribute to the general understanding of the phenomena and shape future research in the field.

In a largely unexplored domain, like the use of ICTs by older people in rural communities and, more specifically, the role of ICTs in defining and maintaining community in later life, ethnographic studies are essential, and we cannot rely exclusively on statistical surveys to capture a holistic picture. The importance of ethnographic research in developing new knowledge is widely acknowledged, despite the common criticism that it is impossible to ‘say with precision, and in advance, what specific events they [researchers] are going to study’ (Frankenberg 2003, p.xv). Reflecting on the value of ethnographic research, Michael H. Agar wrote:

Ethnographers are less interested in knowing exactly what comes next and more taken with understanding what just occurred [...] This understanding occurs in a variety of ways, although all of them involve a connection between something said or done and some larger pattern’ (1986, p.16).

The use of ethnography as a research method is not unproblematic, and within the literature there are criticisms aimed at whether ethnographic accounts can legitimately represent social reality and whether they can contribute to practice, either political or occupational (Hammersley 1992, p.2; Carr & Kemmis 1986). Yet another well-worn critique is that if the researchers do not intend to make comparisons between the studied community and other societies, ‘their work would be almost pointless’ (Emmett 1964, p.x). In the field of ethnography comparative studies have created interesting arguments about comparability and generalisability, and over decades commentators have pointed out the difficulties in comparing different ethnographic studies that were supposedly about the same thing. Devereaux, Naroll, Kirk and Miller addressed the issues of comparability and generalisability of ethnographic studies decades ago (see Devereaux 1967; Naroll 1970; Kirk & Miller 1985), yet the question ‘What good are they?’ can still be heard in present-day academia.

I fully appreciate that focussing on a particular setting makes it problematic to transfer the findings onto a wider population (McGloin 2008; Simons 2009), and my findings may not reflect the experience of people in different contexts. Recognising the limitations of ethnographic studies, I strongly believe that their emphasis on exploring the nature of social phenomena, rather than testing hypotheses about them, makes ethnography, together with narrative inquiry, the right tools for my project. In my research I operate under the assumption that my study will contribute to the development of knowledge in the field, and they can be used by broader academic community and also practitioners, and inform the development of future policies related to the role of ICTs in promoting healthy ageing, including independence, socialisation, and community living in later life.

The second reason for employing ethnographic methods was to facilitate immersion in the setting. When little is known about an issue, an intensive analysis of the subject matter within a real-life setting can offer useful insights made possible by employing ethnographic methods. My interest in exploring the role of ICTs in defining and maintaining community for people in later life required a holistic exploration of people’s views and actions. I believe that to achieve this aim, the researcher needs to be engaged and involved with the community he or she is studying. The importance of immersion in the study community is emphasised by Whitehead (2005), and building rapport with the community is recognised as a very important aspect in recruiting interviewees (Hennink

et al. 2010). Feagin insists that ‘nothing can be accomplished without first entering a community in order to collect data’ (2013, p.20), and my fieldwork experience testified to that.

Furthermore, community-building cannot be captured as a ‘still image’, and instead needs to be explored as a process as it unfolds. Therefore, an in-depth study was essential, and to conduct such an intensive study I needed to be immersed in the setting. Given the complex nature of social processes, such as community-building in later life, one of the aims of my project is to provide rich, holistic insights into people’s views and actions, as well as the locations they inhabit, through the collection of detailed observations and interviews. Spradley (1980) argues that elements included in observations are: space (physical layout of the place(s)); actor (range of people involved); activity (a set of related activities that occur); object (the physical things that are present); act (single actions people undertake); event (activities that people carry out); goal (things that people are trying to accomplish); and feeling (emotions felt and expressed).

In my project I endeavoured to capture as many observational dimensions as possible, fully recognising that some of the data are unlikely to fit in an 80,000-word thesis. Ronald Frankenberg believes that the generation of rich data is essential for in-depth understanding of social phenomena and argues that it may seem pointless only to ‘social scientists, wedded to a positivist misunderstanding of science [*who*] mistrust the understanding power of anthropologists because they cannot say with precision, and in advance, what specific events they are going to study’ (Frankenberg 2003, p.xv).

3.4.1. Ethnographic tours, physical mapping, network mapping

Endeavouring to capture as many observational dimensions as possible in my study of the role of ICTs in defining and maintaining community for people in later life, I used such methods as initial ethnographic tours, physical mapping and assessing network ties. Ethnographic tours and physical mapping proved to be invaluable in learning the history and, most importantly, the social geography of the community. The village with only 160 residents has a noticeable divide between the relatively new population and the longer-standing community, which was made visible throughout the ‘mapping’ of the village. For this exercise, I used digital maps of the area and edited them to add information

relating to the properties, the residents, their background, the duration of residency in the village, the community involvement etc.²⁰

Assessing network ties and building the networking map also provided useful insights into the social life of the village. Significantly, the residents are usually involved in more than one community group. As was discussed above, one person can be the churchwarden, the council clerk, the school governor and a member of Women's Institute. In terms of my research, such a sprawling network offered an exciting challenge of assessing network ties (Whitehead 2005), and the building of the village's networking map was an on-going process that could never be completely finalised. The network map, which evolved throughout my study, was a useful tool in exploring the community ties and social dynamics, and helped in exploring how older people use ICTs in their community engagements and validating data from interviews.

3.4.2. Online and off-line resources

The study of online resources is an established research technique (Blank 2008; Murthy 2011) and I used it extensively in the initial stages of my research. Online data were a useful addition to the data collected using the methods discussed in the previous sections. I started by availing myself of the range of online information that existed on the area and the community. I studied statistical data available from national and local level sources, e.g. national censuses, Neighbourhood Statistics (NeSS), Official Labour Market Statistics (Nomis), County Council documents, media publications, maps (both in open domain, e.g. Google maps and those available by subscription, e.g. Digimap²¹, which proved very useful in physical mapping of the study setting). The village website proved useful in terms of listing the community groups and providing links to their respective web pages.

The study of off-line resources - what Robson terms 'secondary data analysis' in ethnography (2002) – and can also be viewed as part of literature review, was a very important part of my project. Among the off-line sources the most useful were the village monthly newsletter, notices and fliers on the Village Hall notice board, and a local history

²⁰ Including the maps as an appendix to the thesis would compromise anonymity.

²¹ <https://digimap.edina.ac.uk>

book published by the WI²². The local newsletter offers a wealth of information about the village life and the services and activities available in the community. For the village residents the newsletter is the go-to directory for local services and other community matters. For example, after a storm, I found myself without electricity, landline, and all other means of communication. Without being able to go online and find the emergency services numbers, I went to a neighbour to ask for a local electrician's number. As a lifelong resident of the village, he had the latest newsletter readily available in the kitchen and looked up the number. (In the end I did not have to use it because the neighbour insisted on checking what was wrong himself first. It turned out that the outage was caused by the main fuse panel which had tripped and the problem was solved by resetting the switch).

The newsletters were very helpful in building the network map and in the physical mapping of the community, and perusing older issues of the newsletters helped me to trace the creation and development of community groups and see whether they used ICTs to communicate and disseminate information. Examination of past newsletters, data from interviews and my observations suggest that landline phones are the preferred method of communications related to village life. Anecdotally, even a computer troubleshooting advert in the newsletter did not specify an email address or other means of electronic communications, just a landline number. The use of landline telephones in the village is discussed in more detail in Section 3.3.

The other useful source of information was a book published by the WI about the local history, community groups and the area in general. It is a very well-constructed piece of research, and the book proved an invaluable source of information about the history of buildings, including the castle, the church, the lighthouse, the windmill, limekilns, etc. Putting my research in a historical context was a truly fascinating endeavour, and discussing the history of the buildings helped to build rapport with the villagers who appreciated my interest in the local area. Approaching the woman who coordinated the research and publication, and discussing the book got me in the good graces of the History Group.

²² Providing the reference would compromise anonymity.

Another source of information about the community life was the Village Hall notice board. Throughout my fieldwork, I checked it regularly for upcoming events, and this is how I was able to join the local Film Club who only advertised their events there. The club meets weekly in winter and autumn when the Village Hall is less busy and daylight does not interfere. The selection of movies is very peculiar, and people get to choose films to show by drawing lots. Joining the Film Club proved very useful in making contacts with the local people and observing how they used, or struggled to use, digital video projection and other digital video equipment. Other resources that I used for secondary data analysis were the parish newsletters and fliers etc. distributed in the village.

3.4.3. Digital (or online) ethnography

Digital (or online) ethnography was also used in my research, subject to limitations and considerations set out further below. As discussed in detail in Chapter Five, the traditional sources of data in online ethnography, such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, forums or chatrooms etc. are used by the older people in the village very sparingly. In interviews some people admitted that their Facebook accounts were set up for them by their children or other younger relatives, and they spent very little time on social media. One of the few village events that got relatively broad coverage on Facebook, was the Pirate Day discussed in Section 5.2.3. The preferred method of disseminating information relating to community activities is by landline and email, and members of respective community groups have their own mailing lists. I was in correspondence with many villagers, but for ethical reasons cannot use private emails as a source of online ethnography.

Over the course of my research, I was mindful that the ethics of online research is a grey area with much uncertainty (Davies et al. 2016), and that there are no detailed prescriptive guidelines for online ethnography. This is particularly true for social networking sites. Given the ambiguity of regulations in the area, and after careful deliberation, I made a decision to avoid online contact via Facebook with research participants who had their own pages and never made posts that could have evoked responses from the villagers. Equally, older people in my project never contacted me on Facebook or any other social networking site, and used email or landline instead. It is my hope that more specific regulations in the area of online research ethics will be made in the near future.

In order to keep updated on what was posted by the local businesses and community groups, I followed their respective Facebook pages and checked their websites regularly. To this end I compiled a list of Facebook pages and websites²³ and visited them on regular basis, usually two to three times a month. This enabled me to monitor what was published, how many people ‘liked’ and ‘followed’ the pages, and if the count changed over time. Furthermore, as I was writing-up my research, I was careful not to include verbatim quotes from online sources given that they can be easily traceable through a basic Google search engine. In addition, I slightly changed the names of local businesses, community groups and their publications, online and otherwise, in order to make them unsearchable.

The study of online resources and online ethnography were useful in exploring the extent of the online presence of the villagers. I was able to see how activities of the older people’s community groups were featured on the Internet, and how the villagers digitally engaged - or did not engage - with the community. Online resources proved very useful in conducting interviews, and based on my preliminary knowledge I was able to offer topics which were most relevant for a particular interviewee. For example, preparing for an interview with the Commodore of the Sailing Club, I researched the activities of the Club and observed dinghy racing, regattas, sailing training sessions etc. I also looked into the online presence of the Club and the coverage of its events on the Internet. This interview turned out to be one the most enlightening in terms of the role of particular activities in community-building. This proves Atkinson’s point that ‘if you know that the person has a certain kind of life experience or expertise, it would be wise to research that area’ (Atkinson 1998, p.29).

In the next sections I discuss sampling of interviewees and the use of narrative methods in my research.

3.5. Identification of interviewees: sampling strategy

The sampling of interviewees for my study was informed by the research questions and aim of the study, which was to explore the role of ICTs in defining and maintaining community for people in later life, and how engagement with ICTs might shape the construction of collective identities. I adopted a purposive and snowballing approach to

²³ Including the list of Facebook pages and websites as an appendix to the thesis would compromise anonymity.

recruit the interviewees who were likely to contribute to my understanding of the issues and provide rich information relevant to the research questions (Bryman 2012). For me it was important to recruit older people who would have appropriate experiences that would illuminate and inform my understanding of the issues. Eighteen people aged between 65 and 91 years old were interviewed in this study. In recruitment of interviewees I considered the following criteria for inclusion:

- Aged 65 and over²⁴
- Living in the community
- English speaking
- Participating in community activities
- No established cognitive impairments
- No severe physical impairments preventing giving consent

While being mindful of the fact that the village is located in Wales, and Englishness / Welshness factors might be of importance for the study, I also acknowledge that the area is predominantly English-speaking. It has been long known as ‘Little England beyond Wales’, having been English in language and culture for many centuries, despite its remoteness from England (Owen 1994). This is very much in line with the demographics of the village: 100 per cent of the registered households have English as a main language, and only about 6 per cent of all villagers can speak Welsh (compared to the average of 19 per cent in Wales), and in the age group 65 and over the figure is only about 1 per cent²⁵. With this in mind, I did not make a specific point of diversifying the sample in terms of Englishness / Welshness, although four of my interviewees were native to the village (one of them returned there after spending much of his career in England and abroad). Importantly, my sample includes people who were born and raised in the area and, at the same time, belonged to different social strata, as discussed further below.

Furthermore, I endeavoured to maintain the ‘gender equality’ in the sample – among the eighteen interviewees nine were women and nine were men, as it was representative of the village population. In terms of racial diversity, the sample could hardly be diversified,

²⁴ As discussed in more detail in Section 1.2.5, ‘old age’ is not easily defined, and its demarcation varies in different cultures and societies. In this research I use the age of 65 as the lower boundary, and the research participants were mostly retired but still active and relatively independent 65+ years old.

²⁵ References to ONS sources detailing demographic features of the village were purposely omitted to ensure anonymity.

given that almost 100 per cent of people in the village are identified as ‘White: English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British’ or ‘Other White’²⁶. In terms of religion, diversification of the sample does not seem particularly relevant, since two thirds of the residents identify themselves as Christian and the other third do not identify themselves with any religion²⁷. Therefore, it seemed reasonable to look into diversifying the sample in terms of class and cultural capital rather than people’s racial, ethnical or religious background.

I aimed to generate a sample that to the extent possible included people from all the strata, although demarcation of social class in the UK is much debated, and ascribing people to a particular class is not straightforward. For the purpose of the sampling in this research project I used Savage et al.’s seven class model (2013), which measures class according to the amount and kind of economic, cultural and social ‘capitals’. This classification subdivides the UK population into ‘Elite’, ‘Established Middle Class’, ‘Technical Middle Class’, ‘New Affluent Workers’, ‘Traditional Working Class’, ‘Emergent Service Sector’ and ‘Precariate’. I referred to Savage’s lists of most over-represented occupations in the seven classes to define where an individual might fit. For, example, most typical occupations for the ‘Traditional Working Class’ include: medical secretaries; legal secretaries; electrical and electronic technician; care workers; cleaners; van drivers; electricians; residential, day and domiciliary carers (Savage et al. 2013, p.232). So, when I interviewed a village resident who used to be a van driver, I ascribed him to ‘Traditional Working Class’.

The interviews conducted in the beginning of my fieldwork were with the older people who can be ascribed to as ‘Elite’²⁸, ‘Established Middle Class’²⁹, and ‘Technical Middle

²⁶ References to ONS sources detailing demographic features of the village were purposely omitted to ensure anonymity.

²⁷ References to ONS sources detailing demographic features of the village were purposely omitted to ensure anonymity.

²⁸ Elite - typical occupations: chief executive officers, IT and telecommunications directors, marketing and sales directors, functional managers and directors, barristers and judges, financial managers, dental practitioners, advertising and public relations directors.

²⁹ Established Middle Class - typical occupations: electrical engineers, occupational therapists, midwives, environmental professionals, police officers, quality assurance and regulatory professionals, town planning officials.

Class'³⁰ according to Savage et al.'s (2013) seven class model. Among them were a retired senior manager of a major UK retailer, a retired judge, a higher education teacher, etc. Finding common grounds and building rapport with them was relatively easy, and I feel safe to say that older people from these subgroups were sympathetic to my research, willing to help and often served as first-in-chain contacts.

Recruiting interviewees from other subgroups proved more challenging. For example, it took several months to arrange an interview with Gareth (68)³¹, the local (recently retired) plumber. Although Gareth was one of my immediate neighbours and always volunteered to help – drive me to the supermarket or the train station, help with restoring electrical supply after an outage caused by a storm etc. – the idea of giving me an interview seemed to be something that he had to prepare himself for. It was my usual practice to tell my potential interviewees what questions I was going to ask, e.g. their background, experiences with ICTs, community involvement. It transpired that in preparation for our interview Gareth conducted a research of his own, trying to find out as much as possible about the history of the community.

In another instance it took several months to arrange an interview with Phillip, a 91 year old computer-savvy villager, who used to be an electrician and a van driver, and now is one of the churchwardens. My first attempt to arrange an interview (after I was introduced to Phillip by the village vicar) proved unsuccessful – Phillip said that he could not contribute meaningfully to my project, that he knew little about computers and that he was no expert on digital technologies. It was only after I spent considerable time in the village and earned some credibility with the residents, that I felt confident enough to make another attempt. This time I asked my other interviewee, who was involved in the church activities and was friendly with Phillip, to put in a good word for me, and this time it worked. The interview was one of the most interesting in the project and provided rich material about the community and its past activities, e.g. the village fête, from the perspective of someone who had lived there for six decades.

³⁰ Technical Middle Class - typical occupations: medical radiographers, aircraft pilots, pharmacists, higher education teachers, natural and social science professionals, physical scientists, senior professionals in education establishments, business, research, and admin positions.

³¹ Names and some details of research participants were changed to ensure anonymity.

To my regret, it proved impossible to interview farmers living in the outlying farms. Although I was introduced to some of them, my interactions with farmers were limited to attending big events, such as St. David's Supper or Pirate's Day or being in the council meetings or the café at the same time. Farmers, who continue working after 65 and also manage campsites on their land in summer time, seem to have less involvement with the community and its activities, although many of them are active on the local council and keep in touch with other villagers, particularly other councillors, via email. As for other subgroups in the Savage et al.'s classification, i.e. 'Emergent Service Sector'³² and 'Precariate'³³, recruiting interviewees did not seem feasible: the service industry in the village is limited to the pub, which employs younger people, and the prices of property prevent people from 'Precariate' subgroup from living there.

In retrospect, I can see that at the outset my research was underpinned by the 'empowered ICTs user' discourse, and I, somewhat inadvertently, created a sample of people who, on the one hand, used ICTs regularly, and, on the other hand, were prepared to share their experiences with me. I can appreciate now that during my early days in the village, people heard through the grapevine that I was asking questions about computers and some villagers, less adept with ICTs, were reluctant to be interviewed because of their perceived IT illiteracy. Reflecting on what I would have done differently, I would suggest shifting my initial focus from the 'enabling potential' of ICTs in community-building to considering if they had done anything radically new in relation to social engagement. Such an approach could have generated a more representative sample, with a greater proportion of people who were less IT-literate although equally community-minded.

Nevertheless, I believe that I generated a diverse sample of older people aged between 65 and 91, which was balanced in terms of gender, and includes older people from different social strata with different background. Pen portraits of the interviewees are provided in Appendix 5.

³² Emergent Service Sector – typical occupations: bar staff, chefs, nursing auxiliaries and assistants, assemblers and routine operatives, care workers, elementary storage occupations, customer service occupation, musicians.

³³ Precariate – typical occupations: cleaners, van drivers, carpenters and joiners, caretakers, leisure and travel service occupations, shopkeepers and proprietors, retail cashiers.

3.6. Narrative methods

Narrative research has many forms, uses a number of analytic practices rooted in different disciplines, and can be employed by researchers in different ways (Andrews et al. 2008; Herman 2007; Porter Abbott 2008). Aiming to address the ambiguity and complexity of individual experiences and a person's understanding and interpretation of events in his or her life, narrative research often draws on life histories, interviews, notes, journals, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, photo, video and audio recordings (Plummer 2001; Rose 2013; Stanley 2016). In my research, I used in-depth one-on-one interviews, making use of what Bauer termed 'narrative interviews', 'in-depth interviews with specific features' (1996, p.2). The conventional 'question-response'-type interviews imply that the interviewer selects the topics, orders the questions and uses specific wording in the questions. In narrative interviews, instead of asking a predetermined list of questions, interviewees can be asked to give a detailed account of their experiences or events (Bauer 1996; Jovchelovich & Bauer 2000).

Bauer (1996) argues that narrative interviewing allows eliciting the interviewee's perspective and reducing the influence of the interviewer. In the course of my project, whenever possible during interviews, I tried to elicit stories, offering questions such as 'What can you tell me about your day-to-day life at the moment?', 'What can you tell me about your social life at the moment?', 'What do you think about the role of computers in people's lives?', 'Please tell me about your experiences with computers', and from there letting people talk freely without interrupting (the interview topic guide is attached as Appendix 9). It needs to be mentioned here that in some instances interviewees expected me to ask specific questions and would not come up with stories until they thought the 'official' interview was completed, and only then relaxed and went into 'story-telling' mode.

3.6.1. Narrative data collection

I conducted interviews with eighteen respondents, and was able to arrange eleven follow-up interviews to further explore issues and themes arising from transcribing and analysing the initial interviews (Andrews et al. 2008). Follow-up interviews were meant to get a longer story and to examine particular issues in more detail. For example, in an interview with a woman who ran the committee supervising the upgrade of the Village Hall, she

was telling a story about how the Hall got refurbished and the role of the community members in the process:

The first application was to Big Lottery. But the design for the Hall at that time was very ambitious. And it was going to cost something just under a million pounds. And it didn't make sense with the size of the population, even incorporating the wider community, still didn't make sense to spend – for Welsh Government – to spend all that money, or for the Lottery to spend all that money. We were turned down. Then we reduced, well, our sight. (Beth, 76)

Only during the process of transcribing did I pay attention to the comment about the Welsh Government involvement in the process. To discuss the issue in the follow-up interview with Beth, I looked up the documentation related to the bidding process, and it transpired that one of the requirements for the project to be funded was to 'provide community IT access, broadband access and/or IT training to aid digital inclusion' (Welsh Government n.d.). I followed-up on this particular (and many other) issues in the subsequent interview to further explore the role of ICTs in community-building, including fundraising for community projects.

Recognising that it is impossible to predict how a particular interview will unfold and what kind of stories the interview might elicit, I am convinced that each interview is unique and requires thorough preparation on the side of the researcher. It is insufficient to merely have a 'one-size-fits-all' topic guide, and I was drawing on Atkinson's (1998) recommendations for life story interviews and Bauer's (1996) guidelines for conducting narrative interviews. According to Bauer, narrative interviews typically include the following distinctive phases: preparation, initialisation, narration and questioning, and small talk. Preparation for interviews was of the utmost importance for my project, and prior immersion in the setting proved invaluable in identifying themes to explore in interviews and establishing rapport with the interviewees, which Atkinson believes to be the 'basis for success in the endeavour' (1998, p.28).

The initialisation phase in interviews involved telling people about my research project and my background, with the information leaflet and consent form (Appendices 7, 8 and 12). Also, I explained what themes / topics I would like to cover in the interview, and, in some instances, showed visual aids, such as printouts of news articles or photographs. For example, a printout of a news article (BBC News 2016) about the imminent closure of 130 bank branches in Wales (Appendix 11) triggered many interesting stories about

older people's experiences with online banking. In another instance, preparing for an interview with a woman who recently won the Volunteer Award, I printed out photographs of the event from the Internet and asked her in the interview to tell me about volunteering in the village, its role in community-building, and how ICTs were used to support volunteering.

The use of visual aids during the initialisation phase proved very useful in eliciting the interviewee's stories and experiences and helped produce rich data. Bauer further argues that during the initialisation the topic needs to be 'experimental to the interviewee' (1996, p.6) which is likely to present a detailed account, and needs to be broad enough to cover many events or experiences spaced in time. This approach proved useful on many occasions, for example, when asked a very broad question about the role of the Village Hall in community life, the interviewee gave me a very interesting and detailed account of various events that took place on the premises over the years, and the activities of the community groups which the Hall houses, and her personal involvement in the events and the activities.

When the interviewees were interested in the topic, the interviews progressed smoothly into the main part, where the most important thing was not to interrupt the narration and abstain from any questions until the interviewee paused, and only then offer questions to probe if the interviewees had anything to add. Atkinson maintains that it is important to 'allow the person to hold the floor without interruption as long as he or she wants or can on a given topic or period of his or her life' (1998, p.31). It was not always easy to restrict myself to listening and non-verbal signals of listening, like 'Hmm...' or 'Interesting...', and transcriptions of interviews show that in many instances I interrupted the flow of the narrative by questions that I could have asked later. In retrospect, I think I could have handled some of the interviews much better, if the follow-up questions had been limited to the events or experiences mentioned in the story. Reflecting on the interviewing and the transcription process helped me refine my interviewing skills in subsequent interviews.

Bauer emphasises the importance of small talk as the concluding part of an interview (1996), and my own fieldwork testifies to that. Some of the most illuminating stories in my project were told after the voice recorder was switched off, and the interviewees relaxed over a cup of tea and went into a 'story-telling' mode, sometimes bordering on

gossiping. Interestingly, in one instance an interviewee asked me to stop the voice recorder to share a gossip about a neighbour and their alleged infidelity. Recognising that contextual information provided during the small talk can be very important for analysing the interviews, I summarised content of non-recorded interviews in my fieldnotes³⁴.

3.6.2. Challenges of narrative methods

It has been acknowledged that narrative research presents many challenges for the researcher. Livholts and Tamboukou argue that ‘unlike other qualitative research perspectives, narrative research offers no strict frameworks or definitive methodological moves’ and that narrative research is ‘a craft, an open process where concepts, questions and even methods and theories take up form and generate new thoughts, themes, ideas and questions in the making’ (2015, p.7). My fieldwork evidences that strongly. One example illustrating that narrative research requires a flexible approach was the use of a timeline in this project (Appendix 10). The timeline, which I developed initially for interviews, showed dates when various technologies, such as personal computers, mobile phones etc. were first introduced.

The idea was to produce a ‘thematic’ biography that would be narrated along the timeline in the context of interviewees’ particular circumstances. However, in the two interviews where I piloted the timeline, it caused more distraction than insights, because the interviewees got side-tracked, trying to remember when, for example, they first encountered digital television or used a digital hearing aid. In the latter instance the interview had to be paused, because the interviewee insisted on finding the documents related to the hearing aid to show me, and insisted that their spouse joined the search. These, and many other examples from my fieldwork testify that narrative research offers no ready solutions and requires an open and flexible approach, through which new themes and ideas can be generated.

Despite the many challenges, in my research the use of narrative methods offers a humanistic and interpretive perspective to the exploration of social phenomena, and, in the words of Andrews et al., gives ‘external expression’ to ‘individual, internal representations of phenomena - events, thoughts and feelings’ (2008, p.5). As noted by Lieblich, narrative is a way of ‘constructing a cohesive account of one’s past and present,

³⁴ Including the fieldnotes as an appendix to the thesis would compromise anonymity.

in the context of one's culture and time' (2014, p.73). Human experience can be considered as 'an ongoing process of life story formations by which individuals make sense of their lives and the world around them' (*ibid.*). In this study it was essential to explore how individual stories were becoming part of wider narratives and were producing 'larger and more general, though still situated, narrative knowledges' (Squire et al. 2008, p.12).

With this in mind, I draw on Squire et al.'s argument that 'Without overextending its remit, or treating personal narratives as universal theories, research on narratives as ordered representations can indeed claim to be mapping forms of *local* knowledge or 'theory'' (2008, p.12 original emphasis). In this way the narrative approach is well situated to study 'storied' identities, and to represent localised forms of knowledge. Older people's accounts of community-building practices in the village are best understood as stories that 'operate within 'interpretive communities' of speakers and hearers that are political as well as cultural actors. They build collective identities that can lead, albeit slowly and discontinuously, to cultural shifts and political change' (*ibid.* p.55).

By applying narrative methods, I look at ICT experiences from the perspective of older people's life stories. This allows an exploration of how people "re-present" experience, reconstructing it, as well as expressing it', and allows the narratives to 'display transformation or change' (Squire 2008, p.42). Addressing a general experience, in this particular case, older people's engagement with ICTs in the context of their community, the experience-centred approach helps produce a 'thematic biography', where interviewees follow a theme to tell 'the story of a long-term aspect of their life' (Squire 2008, p.42). The experience-centred approach is used in an attempt to explore specific aspects of the life of a particular group (Bentz & Shapiro 1998), in this case how older people in a remote rural village engage with ICTs in the context of community-building.

Importantly, I do not assume that experiences can be straightforwardly 'narratable'. Morgan (2008) maintains that there will always be a gap between the experience and the reconstruction of it, and that omissions are inevitable in their recounting. I appreciate that the role of ICTs in defining and maintaining community cannot be the same for all people in my study, and that their experiences may not be generalised in the tradition of positivism (Ashworth 2003). With this in mind, my aim is to identify multiple 'realities', rather than a singular 'reality'. Given that the study was focussed on the everyday

interactions between people and groups, it was essential for me to employ an analytical approach that acknowledges socially constructed interpretations of reality (Berger & Luckmann 1966), which is well aligned with symbolic interactionism.

3.6.3. Symbolic interactionist perspective

In the symbolic interactionism tradition, one of the central concerns is how people create meanings of the realities of their everyday life, and the key area of interest is the interpretive processes in which social actors engage as part of social action (Blumer 1986; Serpe & Stryker 2011). For symbolic interactionists, people construct their social world through their interpretations of it, and through actions based on those interpretations. From their viewpoint, individuals and groups interacting in a social system form concepts or representations of each other's actions, and these concepts become imbedded in the roles that are played out in social interactions (Charon 1989; Carter & Fuller 2015). Such a framework fits with the purpose of my study better than other analytical approaches that I considered, specifically, Actor Network Theory (ANT), which emphasises the significance of technologies in social networks.

ANT, which is both a theory and a method underpinning Science and Technology Studies (STS), posits that actors, both human and non-human, are related through a series of networks, and it is impossible to separate the social and the material, as they constitute and shape each other. According to Ask, ANT is about 'how ideas, people, technology and meaning are moved (translated) through networks' (2016, p.54). In addition to human and non-human elements, such immaterial notions as knowledge, ideas and emotions are also viewed as actors in networks, although they are often overlooked and believed to be part of human actors (Jons 2006). For some ANT scholars, communities are 'stabilisation' of actor-network assemblies (Holifield 2009), and non-human actors, e.g. a physical entity or knowledge, can provide stability to the community network.

While offering a useful alternative to the technological determinism view of technology as an external factor that determines societal changes, Actor Network Theory is primarily concerned with co-production of the technical and the social, whereas symbolic interactionism focusses on the interactions of everyday life. Also, ANT puts an emphasis on effects, rather than intentions, with an affinity for the 'unintended consequences' (Ask, 2016, p. 53), unlike symbolic interactionism, where community-building is considered as

an active human endeavour. Symbolic interactionists focus on day-to-day life (Goffman 1972), and how people interact within social and physical environments. Social interaction is central for Charon (1989), who posits that any action is social, and the common understanding in symbolic interactionism is that people create and shape their physical and social environments by actively engaging with them.

Furthermore, symbolic interactionists emphasise the role of symbols and images in the formation and maintenance of collective identities, and their relation to the processes of everyday interaction within groups, communities and environments (Allen-Collinson 2009). This perspective offers fruitful avenues for exploring community-building in my study, where I draw on Cohen's understanding of community as a construct that encompasses 'a commonality of forms (ways of behaving) whose content (meanings) may vary considerably among its members' (1985, p.20). Such an approach helped constitute a subset of narrative data in the analysis by focussing on themes that were relevant to the symbolic concept of community. In analysing interviews, I was looking both at the content of the talk and the language used by interviewees, without over-emphasising the latter aspect since English is not my native tongue.

On the content level I identified narratives that contributed to the understanding that people interact with each other based on the meaning they ascribe to particular objects, places, and situations. An example of such an approach can be found in Section 6.3.7, which discusses how interviewees perceived and constructed meaning of the village church – some people, e.g. churchwardens, continued to view it as the community hub, for others it was a symbolic landmark, and community-minded people perceived it as a shared responsibility. The analysis of the narratives relating to the church was informed by the understanding that community-building is an active human endeavour, where meanings translate into actions, thus shaping collective identity of the village.

I believe that the symbolic interactionist approach to narrative data analysis in this thesis provided a pathway for exploring interactions between individuals, groups, the environment and their symbolic meanings, and contributed to the insight into how collective identities are constructed and how community is defined and maintained.

3.7. Summary

This chapter discussed the design and methodological aspects of the project. It also considered the research site and its features, the use of narrative and ethnographic methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observations and other ethnographic methods for collecting data and related ethical considerations. I presented the debates surrounding the use of ethnographic methods, and demonstrated how I applied them in my fieldwork and considered their limitations. I also discussed how narrative methods were deployed in the study and the challenges encountered in the course of fieldwork. The chapter concluded by discussing the symbolic interactionist perspective underpinning the study.

The purpose of this research was to provide an in-depth understanding of the role of ICTs in community-building and whether engagement with ICTs in later life might shape the construction of collective identities. Such in-depth exploration of the diversity and nuanced nature of people's engagement with ICTs was made possible by the flexible research design and the use of narrative and ethnographic methods. I aimed to explore people's particular circumstances and the use of ICTs from a micro-perspective. The use of qualitative methods offered unique opportunities to explore and experience the local practices and dynamics of the village life 'from within' and to account for the diversity of people's attitudes to and experiences of ICTs.

In a largely unexplored domain, like the use of digital technologies by older people in rural communities, in-depth studies are essential, and production of knowledge cannot rely exclusively on large-scale statistical surveys. By employing narrative and ethnographic methods in this project I was able to explore the phenomenon within its real-life context and collect rich data through everyday interaction with people in the village. This would be impossible to achieve in a quantitative study, which would imply collecting data on pre-defined categories or variables, rather than observing the practices and exploring the experiences of real people, looking outward from the particular community to wider issues.

CHAPTER 4. FIELDWORK AND MANAGEMENT OF FIELDWORK DATA

4.1. Introduction to the chapter

In this chapter I discuss my ethnographic fieldwork and its challenges and reflect on the role of reflexivity and the ethical issues encountered in the course of this project. My primary concern is to discuss the experience of exploring, and how my position of a ‘perfect outsider’ might have influenced my findings. I start by relating how I established my presence in the community, and then proceed to discussing the issues related to participant observation and the positioning of the researcher. In the subsequent sections I turn to the ethical considerations and reflect on the ethical issues of fieldwork. The chapter concludes by outlining the procedures of management and organisation of fieldwork data.

4.2. Fieldwork

4.2.1. Immersion, gatekeepers, chain referral

As discussed in Section 3.4, building rapport with the community is a very important aspect of fieldwork, and to do that it was essential to understand the network ties and social dynamics in the village. It was of the utmost importance for me to enter the community with due respect to the local protocol, the social hierarchy and the cultural and social status quo. To do that I combined time-honoured methods, such as using community gatekeepers for chain referral, with my own methods. Using community gatekeepers, such as a religious leader, political leader, a service provider (e.g. education or health) to help with participant recruitment is a common strategy in qualitative research (Hennink et al. 2010; Shaghghi et al. 2011). For my own project I approached people active in the community to make introductions and help me connect with people from various community groups.

For example, I asked the village vicar to make introductions to his congregation, which brought me into contact with the people who go to church on a regular basis, e.g. churchwardens. Of the people the vicar introduced me to, I was able to interview three, although some interviews were easier to arrange than others. One potential interviewee,

91 year old Phillip, felt indisposed to talk when I first approached him (discussed in more detail in Section 3.5). It was only after I got to know and interviewed a friend of his, who then made introductions, that Phillip agreed to give me an interview. Interviewing the churchwardens provided very interesting insights about the role of the church in the community and how ICTs help keep the church afloat, which is discussed in more detail in Section 6.3.7.

Another of my ‘first-in-chain’ contacts was 80 year old Gordon who used to be a JP (Justice of the Peace) and a local councillor. Among his many other community involvements he was the treasurer of the local History Group and introduced me to a member of the group who subsequently gave me an interview for my research. This woman, Elizabeth (74), is actively involved in community activities and runs a project, which aims to record memoirs of the residents, and also looks after the local heritage centre. In turn, she introduced me to two other members of the History Group who both agreed to be interviewed. The three women represent the ‘research-active’ part of the community, and through them I learnt about the on-going project of digitising community archives. I discuss the digitisation project in detail in Section 6.3.5.

Recognising the limitations of the chain referral sampling, e.g. wrong anchoring, community bias etc. (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981; Whitehead 2005), I aimed to diversify my ‘first-in-chain’ contacts and the scope of the interviewees. For example, I joined the local Film Club with a view to meeting people whose interests differed from local history research and church activities. My ‘first-in-chain’ contact there was a woman who runs the Film Club together with her husband. The couple did not seem to participate in other community activities, and joining the Film Club was the only opportunity for me to make the initial contact. In turn, they introduced me to a woman who was in charge of the local amateur Dramatic Club and a number of other local initiatives. When I first approached her, she was way too busy to give me an interview, because they were rehearsing their latest theatrical performance, but agreed to do it at a later date. The interview took place later, and through her I was able make contact with yet another ‘sub-group’ within the community, and explore how people with a stronger focus on entertainment engage with digital technologies in their community activities. I discuss the Dramatic Club and its activities in more detail in Section 6.3.8.

It has to be noted here that not all ‘first-in-chain’ contacts evolved into a chain. For example, when designing my research, I relied on my immediate neighbours to be my ‘key community experts’ (Whitehead 2005) and ‘first-in-chain’ contacts with the working class subgroup³⁵ in the village. However, it transpired that their knowledge of the community was rather patchy and sometimes biased, and they were not very useful in terms of networking, being quite isolated and unsociable themselves. I was able to tap into the working class subgroup through other villagers; however, this showed that at times it is impossible to follow the original research design. Improvisation proved essential in my project, and also has been one of the most enjoyable aspects of my fieldwork. I can echo Daniel Nettle’s³⁶ sentiment that ‘there’s nothing quite like the messy improvisation of a primary empirical project for changing the way you think about the world’ (Nettle 2015, p.6).

One of the improvised methods in my project was using a dog for chain referral. A then four-year old Jug³⁷ named Spud was one of my most useful ‘networking tools’, and he often served as the ‘first-in-chain’ contact. Taking Spud for long walks in the area proved to be a productive way of immersing myself into the study community and introducing myself to local people. This was how I got to know a very unsociable resident, who the villagers referred to as ‘the recluse’, and who never joined any community activities. Also, walking Spud proved to be a good way to conduct initial ethnographic tours and physical mapping of the study setting as discussed by Whitehead (2005). Stopping every few yards to let Spud ‘do his business’ offered me an opportunity to pay attention to details I would have missed otherwise and I got to appreciate the surroundings.

Another way of establishing presence in the community for me was going for walks and jogging in the area. Being seen engaging in healthy activities, apart from obvious health benefits, earned me some ‘brownie points’ in the village, along with baking a quiche as a thank you for an interview, or helping a local woodcraftsman carry a heavy piece of driftwood from the beach. Throughout my fieldwork I learned that such seemingly small things go a long way in a community where everyone knows everyone else, and can help earn credibility, a warmer welcome and also gain rapport with the residents.

³⁵ The issues related to ascribing people to a particular class are discussed in Section 3.5.

³⁶ Daniel Nettle studied people’s social relationships and social behaviour in different neighbourhoods of one English conurbation, Tyneside.

³⁷ A cross between a Pug and a Jack Russell terrier.

These methods - using gatekeepers and chain referral (along with ethnographic tours, physical mapping and network mapping discussed in Section 3.4.1) - are typical for the initial stage of any ethnographic study (Robson 2002), and facilitate immersion of the researcher in the setting, which, in turn, enables participant observation.

4.2.2. Participant observation and positioning of the researcher

It is commonly acknowledged that immersion of the researcher in the setting facilitates participant observation and enables empirical insights into social practices that are normally hidden from sight (Whitehead 2005; Reeves et al. 2008; Simson 2011; Feagin 2013). The advantage of participant observation is that it can help explore the subtleties of social phenomena and link things, which, on the surface, have little connection with each other. In my project, participant observation helped me to develop a holistic understanding of the community, and to collect a wide variety of materials, e.g. field notes, audio and visual media over a period of time. Taking part in local events, such as film viewings, Community Council meetings and charity events helped me get a unique insight into the local life rarely witnessed by outsiders. Partaking in community activities, such as the traditional St David's Day Supper or watching a Six Nations rugby match in the Sailing Club café, also offered a deeper insight into village life, including the role of new technologies in community life. This is discussed in more detail in Section 5.2.3.

Seeing people in such an informal and relaxed setting developed my understanding of the interpersonal dynamics and network ties. Personal encounters and informal conversations with the residents helped me identify questions for subsequent interviews as discussed in Section 3.6.1 and assisted me in establishing rapport with the interviewees. Having said that, I need to emphasise that I never subscribed to the idea that by immersion into the community, I would be able to produce non-subjective ethnographic accounts, or to generate impartial knowledge. Atkinson and Hammersley (1995) point out that in ethnographic studies the researchers construct the social world through their interpretation of it, and with this in mind, in my research I was not endeavouring to generate 'objective truth'.

Drawing on the modern understanding of ethnographic enterprise, I appreciate that in a way, I was part of the social group I was studying, and my personal background, values and perceptions, influenced the knowledge I produced. Despite some similarities between

me and some of the people in my project (I am from a middle class background and have a university degree), in many respects my position as someone born and bred in Russia, with no prior experience of the lifestyle of a coastal rural community in Britain, made me very different from those who I interviewed during the research project, and people in the village in general. Developing contacts and building rapport within a close-knit community may pose challenges for researchers if they do not share the same ethnic, socio-economic or personal background. In his discussion of ethnographic enterprise Jackson (1983) posits that the researcher is on the edge of the community which he or she is studying, in the position of a 'marginal' member.

Throughout my fieldwork I experienced the effects of my 'marginal' position, and can echo Atkinson and Hammersley (1995) that it is often uncomfortable and stressful for the researcher. My position as an outsider in the community was made particularly clear when I was denied access to the Annual General Meeting of one of the local groups. Despite being a public gathering which everyone was free to join, and the overall friendly attitude towards me, people in the meeting felt that I did not belong and their local issues were none of my business. To their credit, some of them approached me later, and apologised for being unwelcoming. However, the incident demonstrated how the position of 'marginality' could influence research endeavours, and that negotiating relationships with people in the village could be a very delicate and sensitive process which had to be treated with utmost care and consideration.

The relationship with participants is contingent on an understanding of the researcher's position, and reflexivity – 'the relationship a researcher shares with the world he or she is investigating' (Reeves et al. 2008, p.513) is an important element of ethnographic work. Representing the researcher's own personality and experiences, reflexivity influences the study, and the researcher cannot be value-free or objective. The personality of the researcher is therefore built in the research process, and some commentators, Smith among them, believe that 'the intervention is immaterial, so long as it is clearly acknowledged' (1988, p.26). Evans (1988), in turn, emphasises the need to make explicit the position of the researcher in relation to those studied. My fieldwork testifies to the importance of reflecting on my dual position as an observer and a participant as well as the relationships that I negotiated with the people in the village. Reflexivity offered a way to manage my own emotional involvement in the research setting, particularly during interviews and 'active' participant observation, such as taking part in community events.

In the subsequent discussion of the interplay of my position as the researcher and the research process, I draw on Atkinson and Hammersley's (1995) concept of reflexivity, which implies continuous reflection on my cultural heritage, preconceptions, beliefs and attitudes, and the effect of my presence and my actions in the course of fieldwork. This concept aligns with Neal and Walters' (2006) study of belonging and identity in the English countryside, where they discuss the notion of the researcher as a stranger and the 'bleed' of researchers' autobiographies into the data collection process. Their approach proved useful in reflecting on my position in the community, and the effect my own personality might have on the knowledge generated in this research project. I recognise that the identity of the researcher is merged in the research process and the produced knowledge, and therefore needs to be 'built into analysis' (Smith 1988, p.26).

Historically, ethnographic studies have been conducted either by researchers from developed countries³⁸ in less developed countries, or by researchers doing ethnography on 'your own doorstep' (James 2003). 'Euroamerican' ethnography, which uses 'the power and knowledge of the dominant culture to study marginalized others' (Mendieta 2001) (cited in Tedlock 2009, p.107) has been subject to much critique. Some commentators - most notably Talal Asad (1979) - see the reluctance on the part of some professional anthropologists to consider the power structure within the discipline, and Judith Okely suggests that the mainstream anthropological discourse relies mainly 'on the Western eye / gaze upon "others"' (1996, p.4), and argues that that it is 'essential to study the West, both in ways that have not been covered by other disciplines, and by non-Western anthropologists' (*ibid.*).

Ethnography on 'your own doorstep', also known as 'indigenous' or 'insider' anthropology, has seen significant growth in recent years, although the concept of 'native' or 'insider' anthropologists has brought about much debate of the difficulties in asserting what constitutes an 'insider' in the fieldwork context (Cerroni-Long 1995). For example, Stephanie Jones in her account of ethnographic fieldwork in a Welsh mining village writes:

I am Welsh, and from a working-class background, but am from a different geographical area of Wales and have a vastly different life experience from most people in Blaengwyn [...] The fact that I am a Welsh woman certainly made it

³⁸ Regions that used to be called the 'first world', and are now referred to as 'developed economies' (UN 2018).

easier for me to be accepted into the village [...] I was somehow similar to the villagers themselves [...] And my research, I believe, falls into the category of 'native' or 'insider' anthropology [...] Throughout the research process, however, [...] on many occasions I was definitely an 'outsider.' (2003, pp.27–29)

These and other reflexive accounts of ethnographic fieldwork suggest that both 'insider' and 'outsider' approaches are not unproblematic and have their limitations.

The 'insider - outsider' dichotomy has been discussed for decades now, since Kenneth Pike (1967) introduced his etic-emic theory conceptualising an 'insider's view' by native members of the culture (emic) and 'outsider's view' through the eyes of an external observer (etic). Emphasising one perspective over the other did not successfully resolve the tension, and some commentators came to see emic and etic approaches as co-existing on a continuum (see Zhu & Bargiela-Chiappini 2013), acknowledging that the latter lends itself to 'illuminated novel, nuanced, more valid findings of the culture being studied' and 'invites the potential for cross-cultural analysis' (Darling 2016, p.3). The emic approach is argued to have a tendency to 'merely internalise conceptions and assumptions of study subjects' (*ibid.*) and incorporate local biases and assumptions, whereas the etic approach requires 'outsider' researchers to have greater 'flexibility' to accommodate insider perspectives.

It is acknowledged that in ethnographic studies, researchers 'still generally rely on at least some displacement from home grounds to elsewhere to distinguish and differentiate the object of their enquires' (Katz 1994, p.68). The researcher should be 'a stranger, different from those s/he studies' (Sergott 2003, p.182). According to Atkinson and Hammersley, the ethnographer occupies a marginal position, of being a 'simultaneous insider-outsider' (1995, p.112), and Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue that researchers should be aware of their 'insider-outsider' status. In terms of ethnographic research, an 'insider' is seen as someone who is a native of the geographic area, culture, or someone who is acutely aware of social norms, whereas an 'outsider' is seen as someone who does not possess any of these characteristics.

Considering the above, I qualified for the category of an 'outsider' researcher, practicing 'reverse ethnography'. Reverse ethnography, pioneered in the 1940s by Jean Rouch, represents a shift from 'colonial' anthropology, which mostly studied 'primitive' societies from the point of view of cultured White researchers, and later labelled 'a child of

Western imperialism' (Gough 1968, p.403). Reverse ethnography is turning the traditional formula - where a Western researcher explores the life of distant tribes – on its head, and is based on observations of Western society by researchers from less developed countries. An example of such an approach is Ntarangwi's *Reversed Gaze: An African Ethnography of American Anthropology* (2010), where the author critiques the incapacity of many Western anthropologists to engage in true self-reflexivity and examine their own societies.

Interestingly, in challenging the power structure of 'Euroamerican' anthropology, advocates of reverse ethnography often take a somewhat satirical stance. The best known examples are the works of Miner (1956) and Thompson (1972) describing the Nacirema (*American* spelled backwards), a 'little-known tribe living in North America' and their curious practices like mouth-rite ritual (brushing teeth) or Elibomotua Cult (*Automobile* spelled backwards). More recently, this perspective seems to appeal to documentary filmmakers (Smith 2011). A 'reverse ethnography' project was undertaken by Channel 4 in 2006, with the view of immersing people from a South Pacific tribe into British society and for them to report on their experiences:

While we're often baffled and amused by the customs of communities on the other side of the globe, this series will show that some of our rituals - the gym, queuing, getting drunk on a Friday night, golf, showing a lack of respect to our elders - look pretty peculiar to outsiders too. (Anderson 2006, p.1)

This perspective aligns with Eduardo Mendieta's view of reverse anthropology, where the dominant culture is treated as 'exotic and unfamiliar' (2001, p.543) (cited in Tedlock 2009, p.107). Viewing myself as a reverse ethnographer, I veer from Wagner's understanding of it as 'literalising the metaphors of modern industrial civilisation from the standpoint of tribal society' (1981, p.30). Coming from Russia, a nation which is an upper middle income 'transitional economy' (UN 2018, p.144) rather than a 'third' world developing country, as a researcher I benefit from this 'analytical displacement' without being caught in the 'primitive versus modern society' dichotomy. Challenging the mainstream anthropological discourse, reverse ethnography invites us to reflect on the dominant 'Euroamerican' centrism in social sciences and the subjectivity of produced knowledge. Adapting such an approach can be a way of addressing the ethnocentric bias which Bennet defined as 'assuming that the world-view of one's own culture is central to all reality' (1993, p.30).

Agar believes that 'ethnographies can differ because of the different cultural backgrounds of ethnographers, sometimes in ways that bring to light implicit Western assumptions buried within anthropology' (1986, p.14). The reverse ethnography approach, based on observations of Western society by researchers from non-Western countries, like myself, can provide useful insights and create perspective outside the generally accepted discourses. Throughout my study I was able to be different, located outside the social and cultural patterns I was exploring, and it helped me preserve what Atkinson and Hammersley termed the 'analytical distance', where the 'analytical work of the researcher gets done' (1995, p.115). Reflecting on my fieldwork which focussed on the daily life of a British rural community, I can echo Anderson's sentiments, who believes that the reverse ethnography approach, although challenging, can be 'both highly illuminating and thought-provoking' (2006, p.1).

In retrospect, I think that in the course of this study my 'outsider' position enhanced my acuity as a researcher. For me, the 'insider-outsider' dichotomy is interesting to think about in the context of another common concern in ethnographic literature - the problem of 'over-rapport' of researchers with those they are studying. For instance, Jackson (1983) argues that over-identification with research participants reduces the acuity of the researcher, and Smith (1988) maintains that the researcher should ideally occupy a position of marginality in the setting, avoiding over-identification or familiarity with people studied. In the view of some writers, over-identification with research participants is far more likely to happen than becoming more detached from the people being studied (Heffernan et al. 2010; Burns et al. 2012). In my fieldwork I experienced both the effects of my 'outsider' position and the issues of 'over-rapport' with some of the research participants.

Given that the public spaces where I could conduct interviews in the village were limited and at times non-existent, many interviews took place in the interviewees' homes, and my determination to avoid what Jackson (1983) termed the problem of 'over-rapport' created some rather uneasy social situations. To illustrate, I was concerned about locating myself too closely with the villagers. Some of them were very friendly and invited me to their houses for tea or a glass of wine, and it has always been a difficult dilemma between wanting to join and feel accepted and the need to maintain the 'analytical distance' (Atkinson & Hammersley 1995, p.115). In many instances I was invited to stay for lunch or dinner after interviews, and in one case the interviewee spent hours cooking a roast

meal specifically for me. Maintaining the ‘analytical distance’ and avoiding ‘over-rapport’ without being bad-mannered in these circumstances was not easy.

It is worth mentioning here that for some more curious villagers being interviewed was an excuse to get to know me better. I fully appreciated that as an outsider I attracted natural attention at the beginning of my fieldwork, and the villagers wanted to learn more about me. To this end, I prepared a portfolio about my background, my project and how I became interested in the subject. The portfolio included photographs of Russia, places where I used to live, webpages of the projects I had been involved in, information about the University of East London and the School of Social Sciences. I found this portfolio to be very helpful and I used it together with the project leaflet (Appendix 7) and consent form for the study (Appendix 8). The portfolio can be found in Appendix 12.

In many instances, sharing things about myself triggered some very interesting insights and encouraged people to share their stories in return. For example, telling about my mother’s experiences with computer technology always drew laughter and giggles and prompted some funny stories about computers and the Internet from interviewees. It needs to be mentioned here that throughout my fieldwork, I realised that sharing information about myself was highly contextual, changing between different settings and participants. Katz maintains that both the researcher and those being studied ‘present, represent, and invent themselves across boundaries of different subjectivities and identities, forged of class, nationality, gender, ethnicity’ (Katz 1992, p.496), and my fieldwork experience supports this.

Another dimension in my relationship with research participants was the use of language, given that the fieldwork was carried out in English. My identity as someone who had learnt English as a second language played a significant part in defining the relationships. As mentioned earlier, I was able to be different, located outside the social and cultural patterns I was studying. In a way, I was outside the culture and inside the language. Fully appreciating the fact that I am not a native English speaker, I was prepared for some language-related misunderstandings and awkward situations. To my relief, however, the only language-related incident was during an interview where a research participant was telling me about a local fête (pronounced [*feit*]) and I had to ask for clarification, having mistaken ‘fête’ for ‘fate’ (also pronounced [*feit*]).

Other than that, in some ways the position as someone who had English as a second language was quite useful. It implied that I had a degree of unfamiliarity with customs, practices and traditions that researchers native to the British Isles would have been expected to know, and would not perhaps have been able to ask about. For instance, in an interview I was able to ask about details of the way the PTA used to be managed, and it produced some interesting insights into what community-building around the local school used to be in the past (the school was closed permanently many years ago). On another occasion my Russian origin brought me in contact with a man whose daughter had been seconded to Moscow, and discussing his visit to Russia offered some insights into his use of the Internet for the online booking of tickets and accommodation.

On yet another occasion I was approached by a very unsociable village resident, who the villagers themselves referred to as 'the recluse' (mentioned above), and who never joined any of the community activities. Being greeted in Russian on a coastal path in the Welsh countryside was unexpected, to say the least. How this man came to find out about me being Russian, I never knew, and it seemed inappropriate for me to ask. It transpired in our chat that he spent a good part of his career developing telecommunications solutions in Russia and spoke fluent Russian. On this, and some other occasions my somewhat unconventional position as a Russian researcher in rural Britain offered unexpected benefits for my research project.

This supports Katz's point above, that the position of the researcher in the field is 'forged of class, nationality, gender, ethnicity and orientation' and 'across boundaries of different subjectivities and identities' (1994, p.496). With this in mind, in my day-to-day social interactions I was constantly reflecting on my personality and background and the effect of my presence and behaviour in the field, how I came across and how the villagers felt about a younger female stranger with a Russian accent. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) highlight the importance of 'personal front' in the context of fieldwork and relationships that develop, and Miller and Glassner (2011) go on to suggest that if the researcher does not belong to same social group, the difference can lead to misunderstanding and even mistrust towards the researcher.

As discussed above, I share few attributes with the research participants in terms of my age, ethnicity or cultural background. Interestingly, my age made me able to relate to participants whose children or even grandchildren belonged to the same generation. One

of the interviewees told me that I reminded her of their son who found himself in somewhat similar circumstances, when he was doing a PhD in geology in a remote island in Scotland. The interviewee's son's experiences as an English researcher finding his way in a remote Scottish community increased our ability to relate to each other. Other common ground on which I was able to relate to my interviewees was my parents and their experiences with ICTs and community-building. These, and many other examples from my fieldwork testify to the importance of reflecting on the researcher's position and illustrate its interrelation with the ability to collect data and negotiate relationships in the course of an empirical ethnographic study.

4.2.3. Fieldwork and ethical considerations

Fully appreciating that it was not possible to envisage all situations and ethical dilemmas of fieldwork before I commenced the project, I tried to address some issues on the ethics application form submitted to UEL's Ethics Committee. Obtaining approval for research involving older people is not unproblematic, which resonates with the concerns of older people's charities about the generally condescending attitude towards older people and the stigmatisation of old age, including older people's ability to make choices and judgments (Age UK 2012; Alzheimer's Association 2016).

In the process of applying for ethics approval for my research (Appendix 6) I had to address a number of issues, particularly around informed consent. The Social Research Association defines informed consent as a 'procedure for ensuring that research participants understand what is being done to them, the limits of their participation and awareness of any potential risks they incur' (Social Research Association 2003, p.28). The particular importance of this for my study was to ensure the right of competent adults to make a free choice regarding their participation with respect for individual autonomy and dignity (Simson 2011). I also recognise that in ethnographic fieldwork, which requires continued engagement, it is impossible to know in advance how the research process will unfold. For example, it was difficult to predict who would participate in the study, or where observations would take place.

These, and many other issues were acknowledged in the ethics application form, which underwent a very rigorous evaluation by UEL's Ethics Committee. Among the issues raised by the Committee was the request to screen participants for conditions such as

dementia and assess their mental capacity to consent. I had to challenge this request, arguing that it insinuates that older people are less able to make choices and judgements, based solely on their biological age, and, effectively, contradicts the principles of the Mental Capacity Act 2005, which states that a person is presumed to have capacity ‘unless all practical steps to help him (or her) to make a decision have been taken without success’ (Mental Capacity Act 2005, p.1), and the World Health Organisation’s guidelines stating that although memory, thinking, orientation can be affected by dementia, ‘consciousness is not affected’ (World Health Organisation 2016).

Furthermore, I did not see any practical way that could be possibly utilised in my fieldwork to screen participants for conditions such as dementia. Health professionals agree that dementia, particularly in the early stages, can be difficult to distinguish from mild cognitive disorders and changes seen in normal ageing (Garand et al. 2009; Martin et al. 2015; Koch & Iliffe 2010). To make the diagnosis it is necessary to bring together all the information from the history, symptoms, tests and brain scans, which are administered by trained professionals such as a mental health nurse and an occupational therapist and I should note that I am not a trained medical officer.

In my fieldwork the risk to recruit a person with dementia which had progressed to the severe stages, preventing him or her to give consent, was mitigated by recruiting only those people who lived independently in the community and participated in community activities without any care support. Also, severe dementia often results in loss of social contacts (Snowden et al. 2001; Olin et al. 2002). Given that participants were recruited on a network basis, it reduced the chance of interviewing people who had lost social contacts. Furthermore, it is unusual for a person significantly affected by dementia to live outside residential care or without a trusted confidant, which can give an indication of the condition (Blankman et al. 2012). Also, given the small size of the community and my contacts within its members, identifying people with severe cognitive disabilities and avoiding recruiting them in the research did not present a challenge.

Also, to accommodate the Committee’s request, I had to forgo some of the questions in my interview topic guide, which they felt might be intrusive and raise emotional or distressing issues for participants. Examples of such questions included: ‘How do you feel about yourself at the age you are now?’ or ‘How do you feel about your life now that you are retired?’ Tailoring the topic guide to the alleged mental frailty of older people

prevented me from asking questions that could have provided additional insight for the project. For, example, to accommodate the Committee's request, I could not ask questions 'What do you think about having a purpose in life?', 'What do you do with your time now?', 'What has been the best and the worst part about living in your community?', which, I feel, could have illuminated important aspects of community involvement, and, possibly, engagement with ICTs.

In retrospect, nothing in my encounters with the older people in the community evidenced any mental frailty. On the contrary, the more I learned about the people and their lives, the more I was impressed by the way they dealt with the difficulties and challenges of living in an isolated rural area. My research was not into areas of high sensitivity, and the risk of participants getting distressed seemed very low at the time of seeking an ethical approval, and my subsequent fieldwork testified to that. Nevertheless, I obtained the contact numbers of national services providing free confidential counselling and emotional support if people needed advice relating to elder care. Furthermore, I had contact details of the support available in the area to signpost the participants, such as the Adult Protection Team, Social Care Out of Hours, Community Care Services for disabled and elderly (*sic*), and the National Domestic Violence Helpline. In addition, I had emergency contact details for medical support and the details for the nearest first aider, in case an interviewee needed immediate medical attention. Also, I familiarised myself with the defibrillator that was recently made available in the village under the Public Access Defibrillator Scheme.

In my encounters with the villagers, I was always mindful of my role as a researcher. Creswell emphasises the issues of respect and reciprocity in fieldwork (Creswell 2007), and Atkinson and Hammersley (1995) argue that issues of gaining access, reciprocity with the participants and being ethical in all aspects of the research are of paramount importance. All data generated during the fieldwork were anonymised, unless explicit consent was given in the consent form which had a 'yes / no' option for anonymisation, together with the statement that data can be withdrawn at any moment (Appendix 8). Participants were informed about the nature of the research in advance, and before interviews I explained to the interviewees what kind of questions they would be asked.

During interviews I remained aware of the interviewee's demeanour and, to prevent participants from getting tired, I regularly checked with them if they wanted a break. I

avoided questions that might be intrusive and might cause an emotional response. Wherever possible, I had follow-up conversations with interviewees to find out how they were feeling generally and how they felt about the interview more specifically, and sent thank you cards and thank you emails to those who used it. At the end of interviews I always let interviewees know how important their contribution was and how much I appreciated their time. As I was winding up my fieldwork, I made sure to leave my contact details with all research participants and people I got to know in the village.

Withdrawing from immersive research is not straightforward (Atkinson & Hammersley 1995), and this is particularly true for ethnographic fieldwork which involves building relationships in the community. Over time, I had come to see some of the research participants as friends, and needed to negotiate my own emotional involvement after leaving the community. I have elected to do this by maintaining contact with some of the villagers: sending Christmas and Easter cards, exchanging text messages with rugby enthusiasts when Wales play, following the village news on the community website and logging onto the webcam overlooking the waterfront. In turn, I receive seasons greetings and messages on the sad occasions when someone in the village passes away. Although I am aware that this is inevitable when conducting research with older people, I still find it difficult to cope with. I continue to reflect on the ethical issues encountered during fieldwork in more detail in the subsequent chapters of my thesis.

4.3. Management of fieldwork data

4.3.1. Data management in qualitative studies

It is my firm belief that it is essential to discuss the practical details and procedures of managing and analysing qualitative data to ensure that the process of research is as open as possible. Back in the 1980s, Turner expressed his concern that the process of research and the process of data gathering and analysis are ‘subjected to mystifications which conceal their true nature from other researchers, from the subjects of research, or from those seeking to understand the research findings when they are reported’ (Turner 1981, p.245). Turner’s misgivings seem to be valid these days, since most of the qualitative studies relating to the use of ICTs in later life have paid little attention to how qualitative data are managed and analysed, and even fewer publications in the area provided details about the practical aspects of qualitative material organisation. The more detailed

accounts include Plowman et al.'s ethnographic study of technologies and services for older people, where they write:

When ethnographers return to the office, they bring with them images, audio recordings, video recordings, and hundreds of pages of field and analytic notes to both review and log for later analysis. [...] transcribed voice recordings and field notes are then entered into qualitative data analysis software to be coded into themed categories that allow a horizontal view across the data set to be developed. (2009, p.28)

Regrettably, Plowman et al. do not elaborate on the software used or the procedures followed beyond stating that they were 'working through the data' and that post-notes were 'used to capture ideas as they emerge' (2009, p.29). The same cursory approach to discussing the practical aspects of qualitative data management and analysis can be found in other, otherwise very meticulous studies in the area. For instance, in a study of information technology, networks and community voices, Fernback limits her discussion of qualitative data analysis to the following passage:

Each transcript was read several times in order to form a systematic analysis. First, overall themes in the transcripts were identified and coded according to thematic relevance. Next, the themes are compared against the conceptual arguments supporting the study. (2005, p.488)

In a similar vein, Wallace et al. in their study which involved interviews and participant observations write: 'Interviews were transcribed and analysed using the Framework method of qualitative analysis' (2017, p.428), and do not provide any further details about the process. Similarly devoid of particulars is the recent work by Lane et al., who limit the description of the analysis procedures to two sentences:

Interview transcripts were then analysed thematically with a focus on the motivations for acquiring and using specific devices for a range of purposes within the home. The theme of life stage transitions emerged as being strongly linked to changes in IT use. (2018, p.360)

Fully appreciating that research practices differ, and not every academic would, in Turner's words, choose to 'lay his procedures open to public scrutiny' to 'suddenly discover that, like the emperor, he has no clothes' (1981, p.245), I believe it is important to provide details of the data handling in my project. Without suggesting that the procedures described below are the only or best that I could have used, they were tested and found to work in my study. There is a plethora of textbooks detailing qualitative data

management procedures; however, when it comes to academic publications related to old age and digital technologies, they tend to skip the mundane details of data organisation and analysis. It is my hope that the account below provokes further discussion of the best practices in qualitative data management and reporting in the studies relating to the use of ICTs in later life.

4.3.2. Practical aspects of data management

Like any study involving the immersion of the researcher in the setting over an extended period of time and in-depth interviewing, my research produced a significant amount of qualitative data, including, but not limited to, audio recordings, photographs, transcriptions and fieldnotes. Some of the data are in digital form, including audio recordings in .wav and .mp3 formats, photographs in .jpg format and, at a later stage of the research, transcription of interviews in .doc format. Managing and organising such a substantial body of digital data implies careful consideration as to how one can securely store, back-up, transmit and dispose of the data. I do not back up my research data such as interviews and photos on third party commercial cloud storage facilities (Google Drive, SkyDrive, DropBox etc.), as they are not necessarily secure or permanent. If such third party facilities are located outside the European Economic Area (EEA) or territories deemed to have sufficient standards of data protection, they are not covered by the UK law and using them for un-anonymised data storage could constitute a breach of the Data Protection Act (1998).

The un-processed un-anonymised data are stored on my personal computer, for which only I have access to, and are not copied onto third party servers, including UEL servers. Instead, I use the Apple AirPort Time Capsule³⁹, a backup device located in a secure cabinet at my living premises, in a building with a sprinkler fire system, an intruder alarm and 24-hour CCTV service. I believe the data are sufficiently protected from theft and physical loss. For the preservation of digital content on my personal computer, data are automatically backed-up on the Time Capsule every hour over the previous 24 hours, with daily backups for the past month, and weekly backups for all previous months (see Appendix 13 for Time Capsule settings). Additionally, the integrity of the data is secured

³⁹ <https://www.apple.com/shop/product/ME177LL/A/airport-time-capsule-2tb>

with the up-to-date anti-virus protection software *Sophos*⁴⁰. All electronic data will undergo secure disposal in ten years' time in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) which states that personal data shall not be kept for longer than it is necessary for the purpose or those purposes for which it was collected.

4.3.3. File organisation and materials in hard form

Throughout my research project I endeavoured to follow a clear file-naming system, which is an essential part of data management. The elements included in the system were interviewees ID numbers, the date and duration of audio recordings and transcriptions thereof. The latter were produced using a template (see Appendix 14) with due regard to the layout and spacing that is easy to read. Also, I adopted a lexicon of symbols as suggested by Fritz (2008) (see Appendix 15), specifically, (.) a dot enclosed in parentheses for a short silence; ((laugh)) double parenthesis for transcriber's notes, () empty parenthesis for talk which was not audible; : colons for an elongated syllable, the more colons, the more the syllable or the sound is stretched. In addition to the symbols, I used ellipses in square brackets [...] to show omissions within quotations rather than ellipsis points without brackets for ease of reading. Also, I used { } curly brackets to indicate anonymisation. At a later stage of the project, when I was writing up the research, I developed a chapter-naming system, which included the name of the chapter, the version number, and the date last edited. The supervisory team provided their feedback in the form of comments to the draft chapters using the reviewing function in MS Word.

In addition to digital recordings and files, my research produced considerable data in hard form, including my fieldwork diaries and notes scribbled on napkins and other odd bits of paper, newspaper clippings, village newsletters, leaflets and printouts, e.g. minutes of the council meetings etc. Other 'hard' materials include keepsakes from my fieldwork, such as a key rack made by my neighbour from driftwood as a gift to me. Among mementos that I keep as a reminder of my time in the village are a limited-issue mug featuring the village mascot given to me by an interviewee and a black pirate eyepatch that I wore during the Pirate Day. Other 'hard' data include consent forms, filled in by hand by interviewees and containing their actual names and dates of birth. I keep them separate in a locked drawer in my desk which only I have access to. The consent forms

⁴⁰ <https://www.sophos.com/en-us/index.aspx>

will undergo secure disposal in ten years' time in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) together with the digital records.

The interviews recorded in the course of fieldwork were transcribed word for word using the open-source browser-based software *oTranscribe Classic*⁴¹. The software is designed in such a way that the data, including the audio file and the transcript itself never leave the computer and is not stored on a remote server or 'in the cloud', which guarantees secure handling of data. Also, I chose not to use a transcription service and instead transcribed the interviews myself. Although this proved very time-consuming, it helped to immerse myself in the data. Josselson argues that doing your own transcription puts the researcher 'back in the interview moment, when I can pause and reflect on what I am hearing in a way that I couldn't do with the participant in front of me' (Josselson 2013, p.145). On average, it took seven to nine hours to transcribe one hour of recorded interview. The interviews, including follow-ups, were organised in the qualitative data analysis software *Atlas.ti* to facilitate a thematic analysis of participants' experience with ICTs in the context of community-building, exploring recurring themes, commonalities and differences in the narratives.

4.3.4. Organisation of data and thematic analysis

Thematic analysis as a method is used to cover broad aspects of the data, including analysis of interviews. Riessman (1993) argues that thematic analysis as a methodological approach is useful for finding recurring themes across narratives and texts, and the themed data can be subsequently investigated in more depth with other narrative methods. The approach suggested by Riessman (1993) involves the coding of data into categories deemed important by the researcher. Constructing of the coding frame implies paraphrasing the text into summary sentences, which are further reduced into key themes. To organise my fieldwork data I utilised thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which implies a number of stages, namely: *familiarisation with the data*, *generation of initial codes*, *searching for themes*, *reviewing of themes*, *defining and naming themes*, and *production of a report*.

Organisation and thematic analysis of unstructured qualitative data in my thesis was

⁴¹ <http://otranscribe.com/classic/>

facilitated by two different specialist software packages; *Atlas.ti*⁴² and *R*⁴³. Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was used in qualitative research for decades; however, there seems to be a fair amount of skepticism towards the adoption of this technology. Paulus and Lester (2015) point out that narrative and discourse analysts, in particular, have been slow to embrace such tools, under the assumption that technology can take control of the analysis. Some commentators, including Seale (2000) speculate that computer-assisted methods may be superfluous when working with small data sets common to discourse analysis. MacMillan further alludes that technology can lift the discourse out of context and is ‘more time consuming than useful’ (2005, p.15).

Recognising the challenges of working with CAQDAS, such as the steep learning curve and technical glitches, I can echo Gilbert et al.’s sentiment that most concerns ‘tend to be raised by individuals with limited QDAS (*sic*) expertise, or individuals who have failed to keep current on the capabilities of QDAS’ (2014, p.233). Contradictory claims around the use of technology for discourse analysis studies range from MacMillan’s (2005) conclusions that CAQDAS are not suitable for discourse studies to Paulus and Lester’s (2015) assertions that the computer-based tools enable the analyst to solve a range of methodological challenges. In my research CAQDAS proved useful in data management and analysis, including organising primary documents, creating and reviewing codes, searching for themes and visualising research findings. I used *Atlas.ti* to consolidate documents and visualise the relations between them, and to code and annotate findings in primary data.

Given the diversity of the materials used and data generated in my study, *Atlas.ti*’s ability to organise large volumes of primary documents was invaluable. The software allowed me to keep track of notes, annotations, codes and organise and analyse both fieldwork data (audio recording of interviews, transcriptions of the interviews in text format, video recordings, digital images) and literature (articles and reports, information retrieved from the Internet). The documents were organised in ‘hermeneutic units’ and contained documents in various formats, such as .pdf, .doc, .jpeg, .wav and .mpeg. The software does not allow adding web resources as a web archive or as page source (HTML text), and to be able to add web resources to the hermeneutic unit, I converted them to .pdf files.

⁴² <https://atlasti.com>

⁴³ <https://www.r-project.org>

Overall, I found that *Atlas.ti* was a useful tool in data management and thematic analysis, which helped organise data by types or codes and have easy access to particular types of data, e.g. photographs. The software also allowed ‘scoping’ of information and facilitated *generation of initial codes* by analysis of word frequency count. By looking at word counts in separate files I was able to see how themes were distributed in various types of documents, e.g. policy reports and interviews with real people. Further organisation of data was achieved using text mining functions in *R*, to create a subset of meaningful frequent terms (see Appendix 16 for the *R* scripts) and visualise the data by creating wordclouds (see Appendix 17 for examples). I find wordclouds more visually engaging and impactful and they are definitely the tool of choice when making presentations and disseminating research to non-academic audiences.

Analysis of word frequencies in *R* facilitated the third stage of thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), *searching for themes*. I identified the following preliminary themes to use in the next stage of thematic analysis: community feeling, community structures, locality and local landmarks, age and age-related changes, status, technology, volunteering and common good. Having identified the preliminary themes, I segmented the data into manageable chunks, or ‘quotations’. Konopasek (2000) emphasises the importance of the segmentation of data, and argues that by creating quotations we also create ‘new analytical objects’ or ‘elementary units of analysis’, thus enabling closer study of data. Creating quotations and adding comments to them in *Atlas.ti* helped me reflect on the data and link the data with the literature.

Having created a corpus of quotations, I started adding coding, creating thematic groups of data by linking quotations together. These groups were given specific names, or ‘codes’, e.g. ‘Volunteering’ or ‘Community structures’ which, in turn, were organised and linked to each other. In some instances the same piece of text or image had multiple codes, which helped me to explore data in multiple contexts. Very usefully, *Atlas.ti* enabled me to add coding to images and link them to thematic groups. This initial organisation and coding of the data and the identification of initial themes informed the next stage of analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), *reviewing the themes*, which involves reflection on the part of the researcher and is an important analytical stage of data analysis.

Atlas.ti facilitates the reflection process via the Quotation Manager, Code Manager, Code Forest and Memos features. Using these features, I was able to arrange and re-arrange codes into new groups and hierarchies. Code Manager allows renaming and semantically connecting codes, which brings added flexibility to analysis and is very useful as data evolve and their volume increase with time. The additional feature of colour-coding helped me to navigate the data and facilitated the process of accessing data. The important feature of the software is that it allowed me to add codes to quotations at a later stage of analysis, once the initial stage of *familiarisation with data* was completed, which made the process truly iterative.

Having said this, it needs to be noted that the process of coding could have easily turned into a purely mechanical exercise, unless I had simultaneously reflected on the data. In *Atlas.ti* such functions as Quotation Manager, Code Manager, Code Forest and Memos facilitate ‘read-and-reflect’ process in analysing data and prevent from coding without thinking. In particular, Memos function enables simultaneous reflection without postponing it for a later date. As analytical tools, memos are distinct from comments, and can be viewed as embryos of future research outputs. The ability to link memos to codes and quotations from literature and field data make them truly grounded into data and embedded into a broader context.

This is where *Atlas.ti* can help make the analysis process visible ‘in ways that it would not have been possible otherwise’ (Paulus & Lester 2015, p.409). Konopasek (2000) argues that the importance and analytical use of memos is growing together with the progress of analysis. Writing down the reflections on the data is the one of the stages of interpretation of data, a pathway to what is termed ‘production of knowledge’. Memos therefore can be viewed as the space where knowledge is gradually born, and Paulus and Lester (2015) emphasise the ability of *Atlas.ti* to provide greater transparency around methods involved in production of knowledge. In the course of my study memos were the space to reflect on the data collected during the project.

Also, *Atlas.ti* allows incorporating memos in network views, which helped me visualise the relations between the produced text and the literature. Establishing relations between pieces of data is an inherent element of qualitative data analysis, and Friese (2014) argues that *Atlas.ti* facilitates creating a system of links, which allows finding meaning and enhancing understanding of the data. Usefully, in *Atlas.ti* network views can be edited,

which made possible iterative exploration of connections in the literature and data, thus enhancing the research process. Appendix 18 shows how the various relations between codes (including individual codes, groups of codes and associated quotations) can be presented using the Network View function. The Network View shows the relations graphically, giving a holistic representation of semantic links between the concepts used in thematic analysis.

In retrospect, I believe that specialist software packages *Atlas.ti* and *R* provided valuable insights in analysis of the qualitative data in this study, allowing what Konopasek (2000) termed ‘thematically or semantically organised reading’. I found *Atlas.ti* to be particularly useful in my research as it enabled organising, managing and analysing unstructured fieldwork data. The software served as a platform where various elements of the research project could be connected, easily accessed and made visible on the screen. The holistic representation and iterative analysis of the finding, which were made possible by the software, made it a functional and helpful tool in the qualitative data analysis.

4.4. Summary

In this chapter I discussed my ethnographic fieldwork and its challenges. My intention was not only to provide a cut and dried account of it, but also to relate the trials and tribulations of a Russian researcher in a secluded seaside Welsh village, and to share the joys and frustrations of an ethnographic study. With this in mind I paid particular attention to the role of reflexivity and how my position of a ‘perfect outsider’ might have influenced the findings. Also, I discussed how I established my presence in the community using conventional methods, e.g. chain referral, and my own methods, and how I diversified my ‘first-in-chain’ contacts and the scope of the interviewees.

Through the extended immersion in the community I was able to get a unique insight into the local life, explore the subtleties of social relations and develop my understanding of the interpersonal dynamics and network ties. Having said this, I did not endeavour to generate ‘objective truth’ in my research; my cultural heritage, preconceptions, beliefs and attitudes were merged in the research process and the produced knowledge. However, I would suggest that my position of a ‘perfect outsider’ practicing ‘reverse ethnography’ enhanced my acuity as a researcher. I was able to be different, located outside the social and cultural patterns I was exploring, and it helped me preserve the analytical distance.

The extended immersion and participant observation enabled me to collect a wide variety of materials, e.g. field notes, audio and visual materials. Managing and organising such a substantial body of data required careful consideration as to securely store, back-up, transmit and dispose of the data. Organisation and thematic analysis of unstructured qualitative data in my thesis was facilitated by different specialist software packages: *oTranscribe Classic* (transcription of recorded interviews) *Atlas.ti* (consolidation of documents, coding and annotation of findings) and *R* (organisation of data using text mining functions for the initial stages of thematic analysis). The software packages proved to be functional and helpful tools in data analysis in my research, and I would suggest that they have the potential to provide a greater transparency between the data and the research output in qualitative studies.

CHAPTER 5. DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN A RETIREMENT VILLAGE

5.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter discusses the use of digital technologies in the context of a retirement village and how it relates to older people's personal experiences with ICTs, including material elements and physical artefacts such as computers, mobile phones etc. and immaterial elements – cyberspace, knowledge, ideas and emotions associated with ICTs. Section 5.2. 'The village's digital landscape' sets the context for the ensuing discussion in Section 5.2.3, 'New dimension of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0', which draws on the technology domestication concept discussed by Silverstone et al. (1992). The use of electronic communications by older people in the context of community-building is discussed in Section 5.3. I conclude the chapter by exploring the role of people's individual experiences in shaping their attitudes to ICTs and their everyday use in Section 5.4.

5.2. The village's digital landscape

5.2.1. Web 1.0

The village's digital landscape, although not particularly diverse or fast-evolving, includes both Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. Put simply, Web 1.0 ('read-only') is an information portal where users passively receive information without being given an opportunity to post comments or feedback, whereas Web 2.0 ('read-and-write') facilitates interaction between web users and sites, and allows users to interact with each other, encouraging participation and information sharing (examples include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.). In the village, Web 1.0 is represented by the community website, set up and administered by the local IT expert, and a handful of webpages of local businesses and organisations⁴⁴, including the Sailing Club, the History Group and local B&B's. The businesses that have their own webpages include a provider of fishing and diving trips, a jeweller, a watercolour artist, the pub, and three B&B's which offer self-catered accommodation in the village.

⁴⁴ The names of local businesses, community groups and their publications were slightly changed in order to make them unsearchable to ensure anonymity.

The businesses' websites present very simple and basic webpages, none of which use interactive tools such as online booking or feedback. Instead, most of them have either landline numbers or email addresses with which the customers can contact the businesses. One exception is the jeweller's website that offers online shopping and payment, although I never tried to do either, and cannot vouch for its functionality. The watercolour artist, whose website suggests to contact her on the landline only, also advises to pay for the paintings by sending a cheque in the post. In a similar vein, the fishing trip provider encourages customers to use phone for communications rather than his website, as 'he is frequently at sea'⁴⁵. Easily the most prominent example of Web 1.0 in the village is the community website.

The history of the website development is very interesting, considering that it was created by the local IT expert as his own private project: 'I registered domain names for the village a long time ago and started creating an embryonic website [...] I funded the website myself, because I think it's a good thing to do' (Trevor, 66). Answering my question about the financial side of the community website, Trevor explained:

I fund it myself, I pay for the hosting, I pay for a few domain names and stuff like that (.) [...]'⁴⁶ And what I plan to do is to [...] persuade, encourage the businesses who are listed to provide a small amount each towards the hosting costs. It's not enormous, we'll see how it goes. (Trevor, 66)

The 'natural' website development was somewhat interfered with in 2005, shortly after the village Community Forum was formed in 2004, with the purpose to 'enable the community to become more organised and able to bring about changes of benefit to the village'⁴⁷. The initiative was facilitated by the Local Action Network for Enterprise and Development, which promotes 'community-based regeneration' in the area and 'community-led local development, utilising innovative techniques' (PLANED n.d.). One of the priorities identified by the Community Forum was to use ICTs to create an online resource for the community, with a particular focus on digitisation of the History Group archive. It is interesting to note that from its inception, the village website was intended to enhance the existing, geographically embedded practices, rather than creating new community structures.

⁴⁵ Providing the reference for the quote would compromise anonymity.

⁴⁶ The lexicon of symbols, e.g. (.), [...] is discussed in Section 4.3.3 and presented in Appendix 15.

⁴⁷ Providing the reference for the quote would compromise anonymity.

The community website lists all the groups and activities which are available to join in the village, including the Community Council, the Community Forum, the Village Hall, the Dramatic Club, the Playground Association, the WI, the Sailing Club, the Gardening Club, the History Group, the church, and, also, now dormant groups such as the Indoor Bowls Club, the Table Tennis, the Youth Club, the Weight Loss Group, the Environment Group, the Nature Group etc. – seventeen in total. The listing does not seem to be updated regularly, for example, the Film Club, which has been screening films since 2015 is not included, as well as the Outdoor Activities Group created in 2017. Equally, some of the groups that are listed, have been dormant for years, and their webpages are either void of content, like the Table Tennis page, or abandoned, like the Environment Group page.

The website includes a calendar where regular and one-off events are shown, examples include such regular events as the fortnightly Film Club meetings, monthly police surgeries, bi-monthly Community Council meetings, and events such as Children in Need Quiz Night, Easter Bingo, Foodlovers Mongolian Feast etc. The Village Hall has its own calendar, however, the most recent entry at the time of writing dates back to December 2016, despite the fact that the Hall is regularly used. The Hall Committee has been thinking about making the Hall calendar interactive, with the option of making bookings online, however, it has not been implemented yet. In the meantime, for an event to show in the Hall calendar, one needs to download the booking form from the website, fill it in and contact the booking officer, whose details are provided on the Hall webpage. Charmingly, one of the options to return the form is to come over to the booking officer's residence for a cup of tea.

5.2.2. Web 2.0

The conventional Web 2.0 ('read-and-write') applications such as Facebook are present in the community's digital landscape. At the time of writing a search using the village's name on Facebook produced 46 results, many of them were pages advertising accommodation in holiday rental homes and the campsite, designated to attract holidaymakers. Most of these pages have a very limited number of likes and followers, usually between twenty and 100. One exception was a Facebook page advertising a self-catering holiday let with approximately 4,000 likes and 3,800 followers. However, having trawled the older posts, I found out that the reason behind the bigger numbers was an offer to like and share the page in exchange for a free four night stay at the property.

Other Facebook pages relating to the village were set up to promote local businesses, such as the pub, boat tours and boat services. At the time of writing the pub's page had a significant number of followers (approximately 2,000) and was actively re-posting messages from other local businesses, both from the village and further afield. There are a few pages for the local community groups, such as the Playground Association and the Outdoor Activities Group, created in 2012 and 2017, respectively. The latter was created by one of the local businesses and its activities align with its focus on water sports. The group advertises itself as a new association set up to promote the local community so the villagers can engage in healthy and fun outdoor activities⁴⁸.

The posts and comments on Facebook suggest that the Outdoor Activities Group targets people from further afield, particularly parents with young children, who are interested in water sports. Events organised by the group, such as the {Water Sports}⁴⁹ Festival, Awards Evening, and {School Activity} Day were primarily attended by visitors rather than the locals, and did not necessarily contribute to community-building in the village itself. The focus of the group on active water sports and outdoor fun makes it inappropriate for the older residents, who tend to gravitate to the less physically demanding activities. Although the efforts of the group to attract visitors to the village are generally appreciated by the locals, they are seen as 'seasonal' or 'touristy' and not truly embedded into the communal practices or the community ethos.

Other Facebook pages related to the village, such as the Playground Association, the Sailing Club, and its café, have a more prominent community focus. The Playground Association was set up in 2012 with the aim to raise funds to 'create a playground for people of all ages in the village'⁵⁰, and is now a registered charity working towards creating a dedicated space which can be shared by children, young people and older adults. Although the Facebook page was set up by a younger village resident, the driving force behind the initiative is a group of older residents, who set their sights firmly on creating another community asset that can be used by everyone in the village. Interestingly, the Playground Association members can be characterised as 'newcomers', and their initiative has not been supported by longer-standing residents, and has caused

⁴⁸ The original wording was changed to make quotes from online sources unsearchable.

⁴⁹ Curly brackets { } represent a pseudonym or concealing identity, as discussed in Section 4.3.3.

⁵⁰ Providing the reference for the quote would compromise anonymity.

some tension in the community, which is discussed in more detail in Section 7.3. Given the low online engagement of the villagers, these sentiments did not find their way onto the Playground Association Facebook page, which despite having approximately 150 followers at the time of writing, had very few comments.

5.2.3. New dimensions of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0

In the context of the retirement village, the Web 1.0 digital media, ('read-only' which is viewed as static and not interactive) such as community webpages, acquired a very interesting dimension, facilitating face-to-face interaction and creating new community practices. Equally curiously, Web 2.0 media ('read-and-write' which was originally meant to encourage users to interact with each other), such as community Facebook pages, were re-imagined by the older people as something static and not interactive, a one-way broadcasting portal which only serves the purpose of publishing content. Such use of Web 2.0 media by older people in my project stands in stark contrast to how younger people use the interactive media (see Appendices 3 and 4 detailing online activities by age groups). Also, it is a very interesting example of 'incorporation' of technologies in the context of the domestication theory which is discussed in Section 2.6.

In their discussion of domestication, Silverstone et al. argue that technology may 'become functional in ways somewhat removed from the intentions of designers or marketers' (1992, p.24). My observations render validity to this argument, particularly when it comes to use of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 by the older residents of the village. Throughout my fieldwork I was continually awed and fascinated by how people in my project used Web 1.0 (which is not meant to be interactive) to interact face-to-face, and, vice versa, employed Web 2.0 (which is meant to encourage interaction) as a one-way broadcasting media. Possibly the best example of such a reversal presented itself over Christmas, when the village vicar used his smartphone to play carols from an online streaming service. (It is also interesting to note that the carol singing took place in the Sailing Club café rather than in the church, suggesting the diminishing role of the church as the community hub in the village, as further discussed in Section 6.3.7).

Curiously, such a Web 1.0 application as online streaming, which is meant to be consumed individually and does not encourage interaction, was used by the vicar to bring the community together in a Christmas Carol sing-along. Such use of online streaming

services illustrates how older people in the village re-imagine and re-purpose digital technologies, thus creating new communal practices, in this case communal carol singing facilitated by the use of ICTs. Importantly, neither online music streaming nor broadband wi-fi in the Sailing Club café were originally meant to be tools of community-building, rather, they were designed for individual consumption. It was the people's perceptions of the technologies and their affordances in the context of local social interactions that made them instrumental in this emerging community practice.

Another interesting example of how static Web 1.0 facilitated interactive community practices and face-to-face communication in the village were technology training sessions run by Trevor (66), the go-to IT expert in the village. The sessions were highly informal 'over-a-cup-of-coffee' meetings organised in the Sailing Club café for community activists wishing to update or add content to their webpages, where everyone was welcome. Given that older villagers who created and added content to their respective group webpages admitted to having rather limited web design skills, for them, the solution was to collaborate and engage face-to-face, thus producing new communal practices. Production of the content for their webpages, which are viewed as static and not interactive, provided the villagers with opportunities for face-to-face communication and creation of new communal practices.

The Women's Institute page on the community website, which is another example of non-interactive Web 1.0, offers an interesting insight into how older people in the village re-imagined and re-purposed digital technologies. The 2018 programme of the WI includes a call for entries for the favourite holiday photo competition. However, instead of uploading digital images onto an online platform - which would have been an obvious choice nowadays - the call invites people to bring their photos to a WI meeting. It would be easy to assume that the people who are targeted by the call, are IT-illiterate and therefore unable to submit digital images. However, most of the WI members are quite competent ICT users, who use the Internet on a regular basis to do online shopping and other daily tasks.

Nevertheless, it never occurred to the person who drafted the call to provide an email address, Facebook page or invite people to upload photos for the competition onto the WI webpage. It suggests an explicit understanding shared by the members of the group, that the obvious way to do it was face-to-face, without any technological contraptions. The

WI webpage was re-imagined by the group members as a means to boost off-line interactions rather than turning the competition into an online community practice. This suggests the importance of personal contacts in the context of community-building and offers validity to Coelho and Duarte's argument that for older people to embrace the communication potential of ICTs, 'the line between online interactions and offline interactions should be very thin' (2016, p.202).

The general perception of Web 1.0 ('read-only') as an information portal, where one passively receives information for individual use, is interesting to think about in the context of another community practice popular with older people in the village, the Quiz Night. In his interview, Gordon (80), the village quiz master, explained that one of the main reasons for him to go online was to search for information for quiz nights organised in the Sailing Club café. Rather than downloading standard quiz questions from the dedicated websites, Gordon would go online to prepare questions that were specific to the area or the village. Some of these geographically embedded questions were the name of the ship that went aground in the bay, or the name of a now extinct pub in the area. This example illustrates how the affordances of Web 1.0 were re-purposed and re-imagined by the older people in my project.

The above examples - singing Christmas carols to music streamed on a smartphone, running sessions to update community webpages over a cup of coffee, using a webpage to invite people to bring photos to a meeting, going online to devise quiz questions specific to the village – offer insight into how older people in the community understand the usefulness of technologies in the context of their local social interactions. They also lend validity to Silverstone et al.'s argument that technologies can only be understood 'as they emerge in the practices of institutions and individuals' (1992, p.26). Importantly, re-imagining of Web 1.0 by the older people in the village happens alongside by their re-purposing of Web 2.0. It seems fair to say that the use of social media, such as Facebook, is always linked to some pragmatic purpose, most commonly, advertising local events and fundraising for local causes.

As discussed in Section 5.2.2, there are a number of Facebook pages related to the community, e.g. the Playground Association, the Sailing Club, and its café. Some of the older people in the village also have personal Facebook pages (see Appendix 19), however, it appears that most of them veered from Facebook's primary mission of

‘staying connected with friends and family’ (Facebook 2017) to more constructive purposes, such as fundraising. I would suggest that Facebook was re-imagined by people in my project as a one-way broadcast medium rather than an interactive tool. For example, describing the promotion of the Pirate Day, Martha (68), the driving force behind the initiative, did not see any difference between giving ads in papers, taking fliers to schools or setting up a Facebook page - although she acknowledged that the high attendance was due to Facebook: ‘I think it was probably mainly Facebook.’

The use of Web 2.0 by people in this project tie in Ferreira et al.’s (2016) ethnographic study of how older people create and share digital videos. Ferreira et al. suggest that appropriation of digital content (which the participants created in the study) was highly social, and only shared with people they cared for, rather than the ‘whole Internet’. In Ferreira et al.’s study, older people preferred to share their videos via email to a select group of people – family or friends – either as an attachment or a link to a file sharing platform, rather than through social networking sites such as Facebook. Ferreira et al. argue that it is through appropriation in a ‘controlled and meaningful way’ (2016, p.565) that the digital content acquired significance. My own study supports Ferreira et al. in challenging the perception that older people lack skills and interest to master the full potential of ICTs (as discussed further in Section 5.3 and Section 5.4).

Similar to research participants in Ferreira et al.’s (2016) study, older people in my project seemed to be very cautious about letting ICTs - particularly social networking sites - into their private life, and generally did not use them for developing new relationships. The villagers who have Facebook pages share, by their admission, very little, if any, personal information there. For example, Martha (68) gave no personal information, such as work and education, places she has lived, contact info, family and relationships, life events etc. on her Facebook page. Instead, the page features charity events in the area and further afield. Such use of Facebook is quite common for the older people in the village, for example, Jacob (75), whose page is equally devoid of any personal information, only uses Facebook to re-post petitions for various causes, e.g. to introduce ‘Helen’s Law’⁵¹.

⁵¹ ‘Helen’s Law’ refers to a proposal that the law should be changed to prohibit the release on parole of offenders who were convicted of murder and have failed to reveal the location of the body of their victim. The campaign for ‘Helen’s Law’ is led by Marie McCourt whose daughter, Helen, was murdered in 1988. <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7890>

Unlike the Facebook pages of younger villagers, whose use of the social media appears quite standard – uploading photos and videos and keeping up with friends and family – older people seem to use Facebook very sparingly (see Appendix 19) and, generally, it serves a specific function. The use of Facebook is mostly linked to some pragmatic purpose, typically it is promotion of local events and fundraising for local causes. It seems fair to say that it is the local context that defines how older people engage or do not engage with social media, and geographically embedded community practices provide sufficient motivation for people in my project to use digital technologies, particularly, Web 2.0 applications. It needs to be emphasised here that people showed little reservation in using social media in a community-building context.

For example, when the Playground Association started the project, their Facebook page had regular updates on its progress, e.g. the steps they were taking to set up the charity, getting the planning permission etc. The frequency of posts increased significantly when the Association was organising specific fundraising events, such as Table Top Sales or Quiz Nights. They used Facebook to ask for donations and contributions, e.g. baking cupcakes or distributing fliers. People's personal Facebook pages showed a corresponding increase in activity as they circulated the advertisements and funding appeals through their personal networks. It appears that older people in my study generally use Facebook as a means to contribute to a collective effort, and it is highly contextualised, usually around local causes. For example, Emma (65), a lifelong village resident and now retired barmaid, who, compared to other villagers, has quite a lot of Facebook friends (more than 500), only posts news related to the village or the area.

One of her posts invited the locals to watch a rugby match together in the Sailing Club premises. Emma's attempt to create a new collective ritual in the village suggests that ICTs were used by the participants in my project as a means of bringing together the members of the existing geographically embedded community, rather than creating a virtual one. It also supports the idea that social and technological contexts cannot be viewed separately, and social practices and local context must be taken into account (Fernback 2005). Emma's post evoked many layers of local knowledge and symbolism, unbeknownst to outsiders, and was highly contextualised. It is important to note that instead of creating a standard Facebook event using the available functionality, Emma fashioned her own advertisement to insert into the post.

The advertisement crafted by Emma was totally unremarkable for anyone outside the village, and packed with meaning for those ‘in the know’. For example, the choice of the premises suggested that the ad targeted the villagers who would not go to the pub - the obvious place to watch a sports event – because of the friction between the villagers and the pub management (discussed in Section 6.3.2). It also mentioned that Joe was hosting the event, without specifying which Joe, suggesting that Emma’s targeted audience were the locals rather than people from further afield. The ad included the Welsh Rugby Union logo – a nod to the regional Welsh identity - and the Sailing Club burgee featuring the village mascot, which had an important symbolic meaning for villagers (discussed in Section 6.3.4).

It is fascinating that such a seemingly unremarkable post can in actual fact be a snapshot of the on-going feud between the villagers and the pub management, simultaneously tapping into the local identity and symbolism, both on the regional and the community level. It is also an example of how technologies are domesticated (as discussed by Silverstone et al. (1992)) and re-imagined in the context of community-building by older people in my project. The rugby match was broadcast on a Freeview channel, and was easily accessible to anyone with a television in the comfort of their own home. The fact that Emma chose to create an ad, post it on Facebook and invite villagers to join her suggests that her online communal experiences were not a substitute for face-to-face interaction, and the meaning that she ascribed to Facebook was deeply contextual.

Equally contextual and imbued with localised knowledge was a Facebook post crafted by Bridget (66), another village resident with a rather high number of Facebook friends (approx. 150 at the time of writing). Her post advertised ‘Wacky Races’, a fundraising event on a bank holiday weekend at the village waterfront. During the event, people enjoyed pantomime racing on home-made self-propelled go-karts down the slipway and into the sea. In the same vein as Emma, Bridget chose to craft her own ad rather than to use the Facebook functionality, and completed it with her own drawings, evoking the village’s seafaring heritage. Instead of the traditional Wacky Race characters driving ‘land’ vehicles, the ad features people racing ‘nautical’ crafts such as wheeled dinghies, wheeled surfboards and even wheeled fish.

Similar to Martha (see p. 92), Bridget chose to use Facebook as a one-way broadcasting medium rather than an interactive tool. It appears that that she never intended her post to

be a means to generate feedback in the form of likes, or engage with the Facebook community. The post served the purpose of conveying highly contextualised information related to the local people and event, which stands in contrast to the typical Facebook uses, such as uploading selfies (136,000 uploaded every 60 seconds worldwide), writing status updates (293,000 every 60 seconds) and other means of showcasing yourself online (Zephoria 2018). Also, despite seemingly targeting audiences from further afield, Bridget's post clearly tapped into the local knowledge. For example, the post invited people to contact her for entry forms, without specifying the address, suggesting that those who wanted to participate would know how to find her. In addition, despite being posted on Facebook, the ad had no mentioning about liking or sharing it, and suggested no Twitter hashtags or other digital interactive tools.

Another villager who uses Web 2.0 for one-way broadcasting rather than engagement with others is Neil (65), the local woodcraftsman and handyman. He seems to only use his Facebook page to promote his artwork, exhibitions in the Village Hall and other community events, and by his own admission never posts selfies, personal photos or status updates. Remarkably, he never thought to post a YouTube music video with him in a starring role on his Facebook page. The video is of a song by one of Neil's friends, a popular Welsh country rock singer, and was filmed on the village waterfront and in the bay. The video features Neil as a sailor looking for his long-lost love, and was released on YouTube a few years earlier, however, it was never posted or promoted on his Facebook page⁵². I had the privilege to be invited into the Neil's house for a cup of tea and was shown the video on his laptop. Such use of online media reminded me of the times when people invited their friends over for a slide show of projected photos on the wall, and serves as an interesting example of appropriation of technologies.

Also, such a lack of interest in posting and sharing the video ties in to Ferreira et al.'s discussion of how older people in his study adopted the strategy of avoiding sharing digital content that concerned their personal life (Ferreira et al. 2016). With few exceptions, people in my project do not use Facebook regularly and choose not to share any personal details or photos on social media (for a summary of how often and for what purposes people in this study use Facebook see Appendix 19). This suggests that they do

⁵² The video is of a song by a local Welsh Country Rock singer and involved filming in the village and the bay of a person looking for a long-lost love. The video was filmed by one of Neil's friends and released in 2016. Providing the link to YouTube would compromise anonymity.

not ascribe much meaning to their online presence, nor are they interested in investing their time and effort in creating online communities. Furthermore, online interactions within the community appear to be seen as a supplement to existing off-line relationships, and not a tool to replace them or create new ones. Data from the interviews suggest that the most useful digital tool in the context of community-building was email.

5.3. Use of email for community-building

The ‘utilitarian’ value of ICTs for people in my project also manifested itself in the use of email. Most interviewees found email to be a useful tool, which facilitated their activities, and its usefulness was understood in the context of the local social interactions. Interestingly, it was not unusual for married people in the village to share an email address with their spouses, and in one instance a villager used his deceased wife’s email for many years without bothering to set up his own. This attitude reminds me of the times when a household had a single phone, and people could listen to conversations by picking up a receiver in another room. The ‘communal’ attitude to emails by older people in my project suggest that they were not overly personalised, and served a pragmatic task of exchanging information.

For example, answering my question what she uses her computer for, Beth (76), an enthusiastic amateur dramatist, admitted that: ‘Mostly for emailing people. It is a short cut to getting the message around.’ Diane (71) found email equally useful in her role as the local council clerk: ‘I think sometimes it is easier, if I am getting in touch with the county councillor, you know, on a problem we’ve got and I’d just drop him a line, [...] and then he will send an email back to me.’ Beth’s and Diane’s comments were echoed by Elizabeth (74), a local heritage enthusiast, who spoke favourably of the affordance of emails in the History Group activities:

I have definitely found that to be helpful. I’ve contacted the Air Cadets Association and the Aviation Group on the military side of things. [...] I think we’ve done that ((using email)) ever since we started in 2005. And I would imagine, ((others use email)) ‘cause I get information from other groups as well about their activities, forthcoming activities. (Elizabeth, 74)

Similarly, Ruth (76), an avid member of the WI, emphasised that it is ‘a huge help, being able to send out messages by email’, and praised its ‘instrumental’ value: ‘it certainly makes reading of minutes and all this sort of thing so much easier.’ In a similar vein,

Roger (77), a member of the community council, acknowledged the growing importance of email communications in the village: 'We are using now email service quite a lot for communication between various members and between groups progressively.' These comments suggest that email became a reasonably well domesticated technology in the village, and the interviewees admitted that people who do not use email 'miss out on quite a lot of the information' (Ruth, 76). Email seems to appeal to older people in my project because of the controlled and meaningful way they can use it to communicate and exchange information, without sharing it with 'the whole Internet' through social networking sites such as Facebook.

Furthermore, email seems to appeal to older people because of the similarity with writing letters by hand. Answering the question about use of email, Diane explained: 'I am quite comfortable using email [...] and I try and write my emails like a letter, I don't use any shorthand (.) words, you know, [...] and I think sometimes it is easier.' Diane's comments resonate with Lindley et al.'s findings that older people felt that 'they were writing a letter when sending an email' (2009, p.1698). In another interview, when discussing communications within the local council, Roger did not see much difference between sending an email and delivering a letter in person:

Our chairman, though he does have an email address, never looks at it. So, if you email the chairman, and it is widely known - he makes a point of it - if you email the chairman, nothing will happen ((laugh)) because he openly says he never looks at it. [...] So he gets paper copies of everything, and if you wanna communicate with the chairman - if I wanted - as I did yesterday - I have to take a note to his house ((laugh)). I don't see that as a problem particularly and it's not gonna make any difference to me. (Roger, 77)

The above comments suggest that the meaning ascribed to electronic messages by older people in the village was quite similar to traditional handwritten letters. For people who were quite competent in using ICTs, email seems to be a fair compromise between the convenience of online technologies and maintaining online privacy, the importance of which was highlighted by Ferreira et al.'s (2016) ethnographic study of how older people share the digital content that they created themselves. The intention to keep online communications 'for internal use only' within the community, without sharing far and wide was evident from Elizabeth's description of how the local History Group uses email:

The History Group asks people to give their email address to our treasurer, who then puts it all in his network, in his community, in his group, and sends out emails to them, you know, as group. (Elizabeth, 74)

It is important to note that whilst favouring email as the main means of communications within the community, older people in this study admitted that email was insufficient to engage with the world outside the village. For example, discussing the role of ICTs in setting up and running the Youth Club, Martha admitted that the more traditional approaches of recruiting members that worked for older people in the village, such as email, were inadequate to attract younger audiences and people from outside the village: teenagers, young children and their parents:

I used to send them a lot of emails ((laugh)), that was the main method of trying to get them involved. Trying to talk to them when they came and dropped off their children. (Martha, 68)

Martha added that she ‘used to be quite dispirited really’ by the lack of success in using email. Setting up a Facebook page to promote the Youth Club and its activities provided a platform to address a younger, IT-savvy audience, most importantly, the parents. Martha admitted that the tactics of engaging people through email did not work as intended outside the community: ‘The parents are much more into Facebook than email, aren't they? I think it's very old-hat to communicate through the email now ((laugh)).’ Discussing the role of ICTs in the Sailing Club activities, Mike (68), a keen sailor and the club activist, acknowledged that email proved lacking in terms of communicating with members who live outside the community:

We do it through emails. We always have a spring and autumn newsletter that goes out by email. We try and advertise a lot of the things that are going on in the Sailing Club, although they ((people living further afield)) don't seem to be (.) that information, so they don't know what things are going on at the moment in the Sailing Club. That's a fault, that's a fault. I mean, social things. [...] We are trying to improve that by having a Facebook page. (Mike, 68)

It is important to note, however, that the notion of using Facebook for coordinating their activities and communicating with the general public outside the village did not sit comfortably with some community activists. Answering my question if Facebook or other social media are used by the local History Group to disseminate their findings, the group chair Elizabeth found the idea laughable: ‘I certainly don't use a Facebook page ((laugh)).’ Other people were prepared to open up and use social media to promote their community

groups. For example, Martha admitted that Facebook can be a much more efficient tool when reaching out to parents and teenagers who were members of The Youth Club. Despite his personal dislike of Facebook: 'I keep well away from Facebook, I am afraid', Mike also acknowledged its use in communicating with geographically scattered members of the Sailing Club.

Overall, the pattern of using email as a convenience or a shortcut, was strong and consistent across community groups in the village, although it was viewed as useful if aligned with the communication infrastructure and networks that already exist. It is evident that most interviewees found email to be a practical tool, which facilitated their activities within the village. Whilst speaking favourably of the affordances of email in the local context, some interviewees also acknowledged that email was no longer sufficient if they wanted to engage with people further afield. Some of them were prepared to employ social media, specifically, Facebook, to promote themselves and reach out to younger or more geographically scattered audiences.

5.4. Lifelong experiences and perceptions of technologies

It is beyond the remit of this thesis to provide a detailed analysis of how technologies become part of people's lives; rather, it is social interactions in the community and the role of ICTs in facilitating them that is my specific focus. However, I feel that without addressing people's lifelong experiences with technologies and looking into how they might affect the socialisation patterns, my analysis of how ICTs might shape the sense of belonging and community feeling will be incomplete. It is important in my research to consider the interplay between people's personal experiences, locally embedded practices, as well as material and immaterial elements such as physical artefacts, technologies, knowledge, ideas and emotions. The technologies that I included in the discussion below are not necessarily related to community-building, however, they play an important role in how people perceive themselves, which is linked to their sense of belonging and community feeling.

In the previous section I discussed the purely 'communication' elements of ICTs, such as email and Facebook. Considering that in my thesis I draw on the participants' perceptions of what ICTs are for them, rather than using one of the many definitions developed across various disciplines (discussed in Section 1.2.4), it is essential to focus on the systems and

services that were relevant to the everyday lives of the people in my project. The participant-generated definition of technology was discussed by Hill et al. (2015) and aligns with the approach in Tetley et al.'s (2015) study of how older people used existing, new and emerging technologies to enhance their social engagement in the Opt-in project. Apart from the 'usual suspects', such as tablets and smartphones, technologies in Tetley et al.'s study included systems and services which are less commonly associated with ICTs, notably, iRobot vacuum cleaner.

Similar to people in my project, the Opt-in participants had a wide range of attitudes to and experiences of technology. Discussing the use of technologies in their daily lives, interviewees referred to 'electrical / labour-saving equipment such as televisions, radios, audio equipment, washing machines, ovens, microwaves and vacuum cleaners, and devices for personal security' (Tetley et al. 2015, p.44). In my study ICTs were frequently associated with computers and the Internet and the associated affordances, such as electronic communications. However, television, satellite navigation systems, video recorders, printers and other devices such as digital hearing aids were also regarded as technology. This section provides an overview of people's experiences with technologies other than the Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 discussed in Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 above.

In their discussion of the domestication of technology (see Section 2.6), Silverstone et al. argue that the physical disposition of objects in the spatial environment of the home represents the dynamics of 'objectification' of technologies (1992, pp.22–24). In other words, the symbolic meaning of artefacts can be gleaned through what Silverstone et al. referred to as 'the geography of the home' (1992, p.23). Drawing on their argument that the arrangement of artefacts reveals their symbolic meaning, it appears that the role of ICTs in older people's lives is rather peripheral: in the homes where I was invited for interviews or social visits, computers and other digital gadgets were nowhere to be seen (television being the exception). Throughout my research I was able to observe this lack of regard for technology in many settings and circumstances, both in people's homes and in public places.

Instead of occupying 'a place of pride', as the televisions in Leal's (1990) study, computers and laptops in the homes that I visited were banished to under the stairs (Harry Potter style), the tops of wardrobes, or relegated to disused bedrooms (the information is based on people's answers of how and where they use computers). One of the more

amusing examples of the 'utilitarian' value of ICTs was using a tablet as a tea mat during an interview. The interviewee, 80 year old Gordon, who was quite adept with technology, did not seem in the least concerned about staining the gadget with tea rings, which offers an interesting insight into objectification of technologies.

This disregard for technology can also be ascertained in public spaces, for example in the village heritage centre. The laptop, which the History Group purchased with the refurbishment grant, was meant to be used for research and cataloguing, and to ensure public access to the online archive. As discussed in Section 6.3.5, the group did not seem to place much emphasis on the digitisation of their collections, and the computer was relegated to the bottom-most draw in the furthest away cabinet. When I asked the centre warden if I could use the laptop in the premises to view DVDs related to the local history, it took our combined effort to open the long-jammed drawer and to extricate the laptop from under assorted detritus. It also transpired that there was nowhere to put the laptop such that the cable could reach a plug, which indicated that technology was not embedded in the spatial geography of the centre.

This lukewarm attitude to modern technology can also be traced back to interviewees' accounts of their use of mobile phones and aligns with my observations that the residents very rarely used them for communications and instead would use a landline. The general unwillingness to use mobile phones was evident from the notices in the village newsletter and on the community noticeboard, which almost never provided any contact information other than landline numbers. One reason for such an attitude to mobile technologies is that the village has a rather poor mobile network coverage, which meant that the mobile phone signal in the village was unreliable or non-existent, with blank spots for reception, and the signal is notoriously poor indoors. Elizabeth seemed rather annoyed: 'How can you use a mobile phone that doesn't work?', 'There's no reception here' and went on to explain:

((I am)) certainly not satisfied with the quality of the mobile signal, no. In this house it's non-existent. You can't be satisfied with that, can you? If I did want to use it - sometimes - when the electricity is off or something like that, you do need to use the mobile phone. I have to go down in the garden or out to the front of the Village Hall. I can text a message here, but I've got to go out to send it, so (.) That's not convenient, is it? (Elizabeth, 74)

The purely technical issues, however, were not the only reason behind the unwillingness to use mobile phones. The lack of interest in this particular technology can be traced in most interviews and it suggests a lack of motivation. For example, Bridget who was otherwise quite comfortable with ICTs and did most of her shopping online, seemed rather unimpressed with mobile phones:

I don't like mobile phones, yeah (.) No, can't be bothered, you know (.) Too much. I mean, you see everyone walking around with their phone. It's too much to see here ((in the area)), too much to look at instead of looking at a phone ((laugh)) (Bridget, 66)

Julia seemed equally unenamoured with her mobile:

Well, I've seen other people using them, [...] and I thought 'I can't be bothered with them' (.) Then I just thought 'Well, one might be useful', so I got one. But it's only a very simple one. It's sufficient for my needs. (Julia, 75)

Similar sentiments were shared by Beth, who despite being quite IT-literate, viewed mobile phones only as a tool to use in case of emergencies:

All I wanted a mobile phone for was to get me out of trouble, really, if a car broke down, I could phone somebody to come and help, and I've never developed (.) I've got a mobile phone, my children complain it's never on. I get messages on it that are, sort of, from last month or the month before even ((laugh)). I haven't got a smartphone [...] the phone I use is a very simple basic phone, it's got a contacts list on it, so I can just press a button and get to a person I want, and it's basically just for an emergency. (Beth, 76)

Like many other interviewees, Beth found it difficult to remember when she used her mobile last time, and had to rummage around the house when I asked her if I could see the brand name. Such attitudes are similar to those reported in Tetley et al.'s study, where 'many participants had a mobile phone, although in some cases they were seldom used' (2015, p.49).

In contrast with younger people's tendency to have their digital gadgets, such as mobile phones, on them all the time, older people in my project never seemed to have them to hand (digital hearing aid being an exception). This disregard for mobile phones contrasts the possessiveness that younger generations exhibit over their gadgets and associated accounts, which was found to be evidence of 'relational intimacy' (Walsh et al. 2011; Zarra 2013; Hyman 2014). Hyman posits that for many younger people their identities

are tied to their phones, the social media and online communications, and Walsh et al. (2011) argue that identifying a mobile phone as part of self manifests itself in keeping the phone nearby, feeling distressed without it, and prioritising the use of the mobile to other activities. Phillip's view on how younger people use ICTs is very interesting in this respect:

Well, young people, I think they've lost the will to live. I mean, what do they do all day? Just sitting, having a meal, picking their phones up and press the buttons and trying to read emails. I know it's different, but they don't go out. I mean, what happened to going out, going for walks and playing out, going to parks? What happened? What happened to playing 'snap'? (Phillip, 91)

Phillip's comments about mobile phones were echoed by Jacob (75), who seemed annoyed that younger people 'can't be pried away from them.' In contrast, evidence from my research suggests that older people did not generally identify themselves with ICTs and showed no 'relational intimacy' with their mobile phones. Interestingly, it was not unusual for interviewees in my project to share mobile phones with their spouses, which suggests they were not viewed as personalised objects, and people were not emotionally attached to them. Similarly, computers, laptops and tablets were often shared, which suggests that people viewed them as any other household object, e.g. a washing machine or a microwave oven. Some interviewees were rather unimpressed with computers, Mary, for example, referred to them as 'these bloody square things' and explained:

I don't want a computer. I had one because everybody told me, 'Oh, you can do this, you can do that', and I thought, 'Hmm', and {Mary's husband's name} bought me one. Great. I mean, {Mary's niece's name} sorted it out for me to get into Google. And I got onto Google, and I learned how to get into my emails, and then I thought 'Pfff'. (Mary, 71)

Mary's attitude to computers contrasts with the fondness with which she spoke of her video recorder:

I'd be lost without it. You know, we had to pay twice the amount of money to buy that one. The ones that originally were – you cannot get them anymore. They stopped making them. Now, we've got all these tapes, and we need it. Now we've got a spare. We loved that one, we repaired it, and we put away a new one until we needed it, because you cannot get one. We paid one hundred-seventy odd for the first one, the last one cost almost four hundred. All because they cannot get them. They've got all these bloody DVDs and you cannot tape on them like you can on the tapes. (Mary, 71)

Mary's comments about a video recorder indicate that the significance she attached to it lay far beyond its functionality. They are interesting to think about in the context of the 'social status' attached to technologies. Coming from a working class background and having re-married in her forties to an older wealthy man, Mary moved to the village, providing her with what she thought would be a 'fresh start', a route for re-imagining her social self. Technical artefacts such as VCR, television and later laptop computer became part of this process of self-creation. For example, a video recorder was the first 'status' object that she and her husband bought after moving into the community. It seems fair to say that for Mary, possession of technologies that she could not afford before, informed, to an extent, her sense of self. Mary's account of her first encounter with computers is very interesting in this context:

It was in an office. I think the first one I saw – it was the last factory I worked at. It was a personnel office, 'cause one place I worked at, I made tea for the office staff. There was one in the accountants (.). In a lot of ways, it's good for businesses. In a lot of ways, but it's no good for me. I mean, if I had been in an office, and changed over - but if I've never worked in an office (.). I mean, coming from a power press, computer is not good. (Mary, 71)

These comments suggest that that from very early on the meaning Mary ascribed to computers was linked to her social class. For her, ICTs were something that 'other' people use, making the division between her and middle class people even more pronounced. These early experiences could have affected the way how Mary engaged – or did not engage – with computers later in life. It was not the particular technologies, but the meaning associated with them that defined her attitude. Describing her experience with computers, Mary clearly distinguished 'us' - people who don't use computers: 'They ((computers)) are no good to us', 'It ((using computers)) doesn't work for us', from people who use them: 'Everybody who's got a computer, they kept saying, 'You should do this', 'You want to get one', 'You can look at that'.'

Mary's perception of social class differences seems to have translated into the use of ICTs: 'To each their own. I am not interested in them, but I think, for people in business, it's good for them.' Mary's comments resonate with Tetley et al.'s argument that 'exposure to specific technologies can be selective, and the manner of their use and ideas about their appropriateness are influenced by many factors not related to the technologies themselves. These very personal positions can have an important impact on long-term engagement, or not, with potentially useful technologies' (2015, p.45). Mary's

experiences are also aligned with Maldifassi and Canessa's (2009) findings that the main factor influencing perception and use of ICTs is social class as discussed in Section 2.7.

It is important to note that interviewees in my project did not report any particular difficulties in learning how to use new technologies, which could have alienated them. Even Mary, who was by far the least enthusiastic user of ICTs among the interviewees: 'I wouldn't care if I didn't have it ((computer)). As I say, it's not for me, I'm not interested. I can't be bothered about it', did not seem to have problems in mastering her laptop and was computer-literate enough to show one of her younger neighbours how to use one: 'He used to come and ask me, and I showed how to turn it on, how to get into Google.' Mary was equally undeterred by SatNav: 'It's quite simple. I mean, if you use it a lot, it's easy', or digital photo camera:

Oh yeah, I do use one ((digital photo camera)). But I don't use half the stuff on it. I just want to take pictures. You know, there's loads you can do with them, but I only want it to take pictures. [...], if you've got a digital camera, you can take it ((picture)), have a look at it, and if it's not right, you can delete it and take it again. And I can do that. (Mary, 71)

Elizabeth seemed equally undeterred by computers, having experienced IT developments in educational settings from very early stages:

The system was very simple [...] you had to go through several procedures to enable yourself to do what you wanted to do [...] All the software had to be loaded onto the computer [...] It was a BBC⁵³ system, so we used tape recorders ((laugh)) to put the information in and record it as well. If you wanted to write a letter, there was quite a complicated procedure to do that. But it wasn't impossible, once you've learnt. (Elizabeth, 74)

My interviewees were not deterred or confounded by technologies *per se*, it was the motivation and individual factors that defined if people used or did not use ICTs in their daily lives. This concurs with Tetley et al.'s study, where older people's personal positions were found to have 'an important impact on long-term engagement, or not, with potentially useful technologies' (2015, p.45). In addition, practical considerations played a part in older people's adoption of technologies. For example, in an interview I was told

⁵³ The BBC Micro was developed by Acorn Computers for the BBC who were embarking on an education programme for the UK called the 'BBC Computer Literacy Project'. The BBC made it their mission to have at least one of these machines available in every school in the UK.
<http://www.computinghistory.org.uk/det/182/acorn-bbc-micro-model-b/>

about an older woman in the village who was handling online banking and accounting for her grown-up daughter and her husband, an agricultural contractor:

Their elderly mother has got a computer and she does all the accounting and (.) online, I don't think with any great enjoyment or confidence. She is not very confident with it, but she does it for the company. (Jacob, 75)

This anecdote illustrates the general perception of computers as potentially useful, albeit uninspiring contraptions. Importantly, despite the fact that Mary's experiences with ICTs were very different from those of middle class people in my project (discussed below), her perception of the 'instrumental' value of computers seemed to be quite similar. For example, Mary consistently used the word 'tool' when referring to ICTs: 'If you are used to them, it's a good tool, I suppose', and acknowledged their potential use: 'On a computer (.) you can do all your shopping, you can buy all your clothes, you can get your car washed.' The instrumental, rather than 'sentimental' value of ICTs was a recurring theme across many interviews, which concurs with my observations throughout the fieldwork.

To illustrate, Bridget, who was rather blasé about computers, admitted their usefulness in such mundane tasks as online shopping: 'Saves you time (.) all the effort of doing all the shopping, you know. You just sitting down doing it at your leisure.' Elizabeth's comments also suggest that she regarded computer as a useful tool for local history research: 'We wanted to do a certain amount of writing and it was the best way of doing it.' A pragmatic attitude to computers and their functionality in relation to their social uses – or lack thereof – can be traced in Gordon's account of his experiences with ICTs:

My first computer was at work, and it was a RadioShack (.) The information was stored on the cassette tapes. And we used it for accountancy (.) nothing else. No quest for knowledge or anything like that. It was the way of bringing in invoices and keeping the books, and keeping the stock records. And it stayed like that for quite a few years, actually, until early 1990s. We decided to have a look at a little bit more of what computers can offer. But it was still for business purposes rather than leisure, for writing letters to clients, credit applications – all to do with business and very little else, there was no leisure. (Gordon, 80)

Gordon's attitude to computers appears very similar to Mike's, whose interest in computers lay mainly in the functionality they provided. His comments about early computers and their role are very interesting: 'You just used them', 'They were (.) they were sort of peripheral, really', 'We had a few IBM machines which were really for word

processing', and suggest that he viewed them as useful, although not very inspiring tools, a mere extension of functionality to the tools that were available before, e.g. typewriters:

And then the PC came on (.) Wordstar⁵⁴ and stuff (.) and the ability to do word processing. So, people wouldn't have to re-type everything and do proper corrections and, sort of, the department became (.) the secretarial side became unnecessary, and it was found that individual researchers could do it just as well (Mike, 68)

It is interesting to note that neither Mike, who had a career in education, nor Gordon, who had a successful manufacturing business, regarded early computers as something to be excited about. Equally, they did not seem to perceive them as 'status' possessions. I would suggest that both men associated computers with mundane and prosaic tasks, such as word processing or book keeping. While Mary, who had manual jobs working on a conveyor belt and a power press, seemed to regard computers as symbols of status. Gordon and Mike, who were born to middle class families and identified themselves as such: 'My Dad (.) went to university, and (.) then he worked in a big company, he was a chemist (.) So, very sort of middle class' (Mike, 68), regarded computers as any other new technological device. For instance, Mike had no reservations about embracing new technologies as they emerged, and was very proactive in using them in his work:

When computers came out, of course, I got quite involved in them (.) I was involved in mini computers long before personal computers were around. And then gradually, as I was involved in research, then the computers became an important feature in the analysis of the data and stuff (.) I used to provide first-line IT support in the department I worked in (.) and then I tried to use it to sort out (.) timetabling at the school. (Mike, 68)

Mike's comments indicate that even with the very early versions of ICTs, such as mainframes that he programmed with punch cards, he viewed them as a means to an end, and did not see them as a symbol of class, unlike Mary who was very aware of her social class and status in the community. This offers an interesting perspective to Silverstone et al.'s argument that a technology is appropriated 'at the point at which it is sold, at the point at which it leaves the world of the commodity and the generalized system of equivalence and exchange, and is taken possession of by an individual or household and *owned*' (1992, p.21). What I found in my study is that appropriation cannot be confined to the act of taking possession of a material object. It is important to account for the

⁵⁴ WordStar is a word processor application that had a dominant market share during the early- to mid-1980s. <http://www.computernostalgia.net/articles/wordstar.htm>

knowledge of and the meanings ascribed to ICTs both as material artefacts and their affordances, before and after the physical act of appropriation, and how people came to accept ICTs into their lives.

Mary's account of how she and her husband came to use SatNav is interesting in this respect:

((We got SatNav)) about four (.) five years ago. No, it might longer than that, to be honest. It was when {grandson's name} was at the university [...] We used to go to Aberystwyth for a long weekend, and we used to take him out to spend money and all that [...] That's what we bought it for. (Mary, 71)

Despite the initial difficulties: 'Well, it takes a while for stuff to sink in, so we have to keep reading and reading', Mary was quite pleased with the new technology: 'Once it's turned on, we press wherever we wanna go, and it takes us there [...] It's useful, but, as I say, we can't drive far now, so we don't go so far. It is what we wanted', and compared it favourably to the laptop: 'That's easier than computer.' Mary's comments suggest that it is the motivation and the context that define how older people engage or do not engage with ICTs. Even before the physical act of appropriation of SatNav, Mary had a clear idea of the benefits that this new technology could provide, such as long weekends with their grandson, and was prepared to climb a steep learning curve:

When we get it out again, if we want to go somewhere, we have to read the instructions again. Because it's nothing to do with the equipment, it's you forget how to use the things. (Mary, 71)

The positive attitude to this particular ICT has been reinforced with repeated use: 'Once we've sorted it out, we used it quite often to get to different places', and Mary eventually came to enjoy the new technology: 'Cause it's like a new toy. You play and play and play', which completed its domestication.

Mary's attitude to SatNav is quite different from Beth's, whose SatNav was a Christmas present from her children and who used it rather reluctantly. Unlike Mary, Beth did not appear to have a clearly articulated vision and expectation of how she was going to use it, and it translated into its dismissal: 'I don't normally use it', 'It annoys me intensely', 'I will only use it to get me out of a problem.' Despite being otherwise rather IT-literate, Beth preferred old-fashioned road atlases: 'We still use maps, we still stop and consult

the map ((laugh)), which is quite nice, quite intimate, if you are both poring over a map trying to find where the hell are we ((laugh)).’ This suggests the enduring meaning of human interactions for her: ‘I suppose our generation relies more on people than on machines, and I think the modern generation probably relies more on machines than people’ (Beth, 76).

It is interesting to note that Beth, who appeared more IT-savvy than Mary, had never accepted SatNav and never fully embraced its benefits. It seems that SatNav never became a ‘domesticated’ technology for Beth, although she acknowledges its potential benefits: ‘I do appreciate the fact that SatNavs are enormously useful for all sorts of applications.’ This suggests that it is the meanings that older people in my project ascribed to ICTs – in addition to their functionality - that defined their acceptance and incorporation into daily lives. Data from interviews suggest that adoption of technologies is an intricate process, and the purely ‘utilitarian’ value of ICTs is not necessarily a predictor of their continued use. Symbolic meanings ascribed to them are equally important, which concurs with the Sorensen’s (2006) approach, which emphasises the symbolic aspect in technology appropriation alongside its practical and cognitive aspects.

The symbolic interactionist approach allows exploring how adoption and use of computers, SatNav systems, mobile phones and other ICTs is connected to people’s personal experiences, and domestication theory provides a useful perspective for analysing older people’s use of ICTs in their daily lives. Interviewees’ accounts of how they use technologies support the idea that social and technological contexts cannot be viewed separately, and social practices and local context must be taken into account (Fernback 2005). Also, they tie in a broader discussion of objective utility and how objects are defined by the possibilities and impossibilities they offer, ‘which are only revealed in the world of social uses (including, in the case of a technical object, the use of function for which it was designed)’ (Bourdieu 1984, p.100). The unexpected ways in which the older people in my study use Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 are interesting examples of how technologies are re-imagined in the context of community-building.

This offers validity to the argument that technology may ‘become functional in ways somewhat removed from the intentions of designers or marketers’ (Silverstone et al. 1992, p.24). Re-imagining of interactive Web 2.0 as a one-way broadcasting medium to support highly contextual localised causes - rather than keeping in constant touch - is of particular

interest. Equally fascinating is that Web 1.0 applications, originally meant for individual consumption, became tools of producing new communal practices and created opportunities for face-to-face interactions in the village. It appears that geographically embedded community practices provide sufficient motivation for people in my project to use digital technologies, both Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. Also, data from interviews suggest that older peoples' past experiences with technologies have an impact on present-day engagement with them, and cultural and social background play a role in how their usefulness is perceived.

5.5. Summary

This chapter explored the use of digital technologies in the village and how the use is shaped by people's personal experiences with ICTs, drawing on the symbolic interactionist perspective and domestication theory. The village's digital landscape, although not particularly diverse, includes both Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. The former is represented by the community website and local traders' webpages, and the latter comprises Facebook pages, both personal and those of local initiatives and businesses. In the village, Web 1.0, such as community webpages, acquired a very interesting dimension, facilitating face-to-face interaction and creating new community practices. Equally curiously, Web 2.0, such as Facebook, was re-imagined by the older people as something static, as a one-way broadcasting portal which serves the purpose of publishing content rather than an interactive tool.

The use of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 offered an interesting insight into how older people in the village understood the usefulness of technologies in the context of their social interactions. It was the local context that defined how people engaged with ICTs, and geographically embedded community practices provided sufficient motivation to use them. The utilitarian value of ICTs for people in my project also manifested itself in the use of email. Most interviewees found email to be a useful tool, which facilitated their activities, and its usefulness was understood in the context of the local social interactions. Furthermore, email seemed to appeal to people in my study because of the controlled way they could use it to communicate and exchange information, without sharing it with 'the whole Internet' through social networking sites such as Facebook.

The chapter explored the interplay between personal experiences, locally embedded practices, as well as material and immaterial elements - physical artefacts, knowledge, ideas and emotions. Overall, people were not emotionally attached to ICTs, and viewed them as any other household object. The role of ICTs was rather peripheral, and people generally did not view computers, laptops or mobile phones as personalised objects. Their interest in ICTs lay mainly in the functionality they provided, and their instrumental, rather than sentimental value was a recurring theme across interviews. However, the purely utilitarian value of ICTs was not necessarily a predictor of their continued use. People's past experiences with technologies had an impact on present-day engagement with them, and their cultural and social background played a role in how usefulness of ICTs was perceived.

The next chapter looks into community structures and practices in the village and the role of ICTs in facilitating them.

CHAPTER 6. COMMUNITY STRUCTURES, LOCAL IDENTITY AND ICTs

6.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter discusses the association between the locality, community engagement and ICTs. I begin by exploring how particular landmarks are linked with the community feeling and the construction of collective identity in the village. In the subsequent sections I discuss the long-standing and more recent community structures and practices, such as the Sailing Club, the History Group, the pub, the Village Hall etc. and consider the utility of ICTs for enhancing community participation in the study village. I draw on the symbolic interactionist perspective of community and collective identity where the process of community-building is considered as an active human endeavour. The chapter highlights the significance of locality as part of creating meanings about the community, and the role of community structures and practices in the co-construction of shared identity, with a specific focus on those facilitated by ICTs.

6.2. Locality, community feeling and shared identity

Exploring the use of ICTs in the context of community-building and co-construction of collective identities involves a close study of day-to-day interactions between individuals, groups, and the environment. The interactions of everyday life, and the role of symbols and images, are the key area of interest in symbolic interactionism. In the interactionism tradition, particular attention is given to how meanings are constructed in social situations, and to the interpretative processes in which social actors engage as part of social action (Blumer 1986; Charon 1989; Serpe & Stryker 2011). With this in mind, in my research project I paid particular attention to the places and events where people were ‘enmeshed and constantly interacting with both their physical and cultural/social environments’ (Allen-Collinson 2009, p.7), and where localised communal practices were most visible.

Observations during my fieldwork and data from interviews suggest a strong association between locality and socialisation patterns, and they are in line with some studies of rural sociology, in particular, Neal and Walters’ (2008b) study of rural belonging, where sociality has been linked to rural environment and spaces. Attachment to a place was

essential for many older people in my project, and they tended to speak about their social life as spatially defined. Local landscapes and landmarks were a recurring theme in every interview, and they seemed to have an enduring value and meaning to the interviewees. People placed a significant value on their geographical location, and for them it was more than a mere backdrop for social interactions.

Answering the question about what draws people from other parts of the country to this particular village, Elizabeth (74) spoke of the aesthetic appeal of the place and suggested that for people of a particular disposition the area is perfect to retire to, 'if you wanted isolated natural beauty with plenty of time to enjoy in solitude.' This suggests that for Elizabeth there was a strong association between the 'physical' aspects of location, socialisation patterns and the experience of community living in later life. Landscapes and landmarks have long been seen to be important elements of community feeling, and physical spaces have been argued to have an important part in the interplay of age and place in construction of social identity (Peace et al. 2005b; Peace et al. 2006; Chapman & Peace 2008; Dowds 2016).

In my research, association with particular landmarks worked as community glue, bringing together people from different backgrounds, newcomers and old-timers alike. One example of a strong connection between a landmark and development of collective identity is the village waterfront, easily the most popular place with locals and visitors alike. Having a long tradition of seafaring, the village has been known as a place for water sports, regattas and dinghy races, which attracted people from all over the UK to move into the community to enjoy fishing, surfing and sailing. The waterfront seems to be the place where community-making practices are most visible, be it Bonfire Night or the blessing of the boats, beach cleans or sponsored walks. It is also the place where the subtle yet discernible evolution of the village identity manifests itself in the decline of some community practices and the emergence of others.

Living by and from the sea has always been part of the village identity. For some interviewees, sailing or fishing was one of the aspects of the village identity they could relate to. For Ben (81), losing the ability to go out to sea severed the few ties that he had with the community and influenced his decision to move out of the village and settle further inland. Sailing appeared to be deeply ingrained in Ben's personality, to the extent that he refused to sell his boat to a local resident, because he could not bear to think of it

being sailed by someone else. Interesting parallels can be drawn between Ben's age and declining health, that affected his 'seaworthiness', and the village's waning reputation as a sailing haven. Nevertheless, the village waterfront remains very important in shaping the identity of the community.

The seafaring heritage of the village manifested itself through many sea-themed community events, both recurring, such as the Pirate Day and sailing regattas, and one-off events, most notably the 500th Anniversary of the landing of Henry Tudor. The important symbolic meaning of the waterfront can be traced in cyberspace too: together with the church, the imagery of the beach and surrounding buildings and landmarks can be found on most local websites and other media related to the village. For example, the first photo one sees upon entering the gallery on the community website is the name of the village made of pebbles washed by waves on the beach, suggesting its importance for the localised identity. The gallery features other village landmarks, such as the Village Hall, the pub and the seawall, along with sea life and wildlife specimens occurring in the area.

Historical photographs of the waterfront, cliff cottages and shipwrecks are used on the website of the History Group, despite their overall focus on the military heritage of the area (as discussed in Section 6.3.5). The importance of the 'nautical' aspect of the village is also evident from the photos on the Facebook page of the local woodcraftsman, Neil (65). The page, which he occasionally uses to advertise local events and art exhibitions features mythical and naturally occurring sea creatures, ranging from mermaids, pirates and sea monsters to frogs, lobsters, seahorses and fish. It needs to be noted that Sean's woodwork, including hand-crafted benches and signposts have long graced the waterfront, the villagers' drives and their gardens. Furthermore, it seems fair to say that nautical-themed artwork produced by the local artists has much symbolic meaning for the villagers and contributes to the village identity.

The art of another resident artist, Bridget (66), adorns the interior walls of the Sailing Club and the pub, whose owners commissioned hand-quilted and hand-painted fish to be made by the artist. Her paintings also have a place of pride in some of the houses that I visited. The waterfront and its elements are recurring images on Bridget's Facebook page, where the artist advertises her art available to buy and/or commission. The local landmarks and symbolism can be traced throughout her posts over the years. Many posts

feature the seafront, the pontoon, the seawall, the pub, the puffins, and other local symbols. As discussed above, nautical themes are also strong in Neil's art and his Facebook page. To the locals, the artist is inexorably connected to the village waterfront, where he lives, crafts and displays his art, and some of his works have become village landmarks in their own right.

One of the posts on Neil's Facebook page, advertising his exhibition in the Village Hall, is of particular interest. The rather haphazard black-and-white drawing features: a fish with a fishing rod, an anchor with a chain, a sand-spade, a bottle with a message inside, a crab, a seagull, a dinghy, two sun-bathers and a melting ice-cream cone, all suggesting the symbolic importance of the seafront in the exhibition. The name of the exhibition itself includes a reference to the seawall, which bears much symbolic meaning for the villagers. The association between landmarks and the construction of collective identities has been noted elsewhere, for example, Cohen posited that communities are 'important repositories of symbols, whether in the form of totems, football teams or war memorials' (1985, p.19).

In addition to its enduring symbolic importance, the village landmarks are also the places where community sociality converges with the community responsibility. The upkeep of the local communal areas, such as the waterfront or the church, brings the villagers together in a rare display of solidarity. For example, in 2017, several community groups joined ranks to raise money to repair the church roof. The WI was serving cream teas in the Hall, the Gardening Club was selling plants in the village walled garden, and the Sailing Club was displaying a beautifully restored WWII RAF rescue launch on the waterfront. The upkeep of the local landmarks leaves its trace in cyberspace and triggers the use of ICTs in the village: the most recent (at the time of writing) entry on the village website news section invites people to join a communal beach clean-up organised by the Community Council.

Importantly, the way the clean-up efforts in the village were promoted – notices on the website, ads in the local newsletter, notices on the Village Hall noticeboard – suggests that they targeted the local people. It also provides a stark contrast to how other beach clean-up activities are promoted in the area. For example, Coast Care⁵⁵, a charity working

⁵⁵ <https://www.keepwalestidy.cymru/coast-care>

across Wales, takes a different approach, targeting a wider audience through a number of online tools, such as the website, the Facebook page with more than 2,000 followers (at the time of writing) and a Twitter account. Unlike the Wales-wide initiative that relies on sharing the information across social media to attract people, the clean-ups in the village rely on the existing networks in the community, such as the WI, the History Group or the Sailing Club to mobilise volunteers. This suggests the importance of particular landmarks in bringing people together, maintaining the localised shared identity and the sense of belonging to the local community.

The next section discusses the community structures and their use of ICTs, and how they are related to local landmarks and the construction of shared identity in the village.

6.3. Community structures and the construction of localised identity

6.3.1. The Sailing Club

As discussed in Chapter Three, the village has various community groups, ranging from long-standing ones such as the Women's Institute (founded in 1920s) and new ones, such as the Film Club (founded in 2015), and village residents are usually involved in more than one community group (see Appendix 5). One of the longer-standing community groups, the Sailing Club, is strongly associated with one of the most prominent landmarks in the village, the waterfront. It was noted earlier in Section 6.2 that living by and from the sea has always been part of the village identity. Reflecting on the role of the Sailing Club in the community Mike (68), a lifelong sailing enthusiast, explained that 'A lot of people have moved here, or are here, to sail and to use the facilities here. It's been part of the community since about 1960 or so, something like that.' Another sailing veteran, Roger (77), reminisced about the evolution of the club, which originally started as

a group of ((local)) people who wanted to sail together. And then they wanted to compete, race against each other. Then it grew into (.) people with bigger boats, (.) cruisers racing against each other. And over the period of time - and then windsurfing came along as well. (Roger, 77)

The Sailing Club is an interesting example of how the structure and *modus operandi* of a community group changed over time to reflect the ageing of its members. As the villagers who used to own fishing boats and sail leisure yachts, grew older and more frail, regattas

and races became fewer, the village's reputation as a haven for sailors, surfers and other seafaring enthusiasts has waned, and the boats are dry-docked in the boatyard or parked on trailers in front of houses. As time has gone by and the 'founding' members of the club have got older, '(The club)) had a big dip towards the end of the 90s, and it got almost sold off because there was a lack of youth. But we managed to bring it back from that, and it's now prospering' (Roger, 77). To address the dwindling membership, the club changed its recruitment strategy. Previously a self-contained group of local sailing enthusiasts, the club employed a different approach:

One of the main ways we get the members ((now)) is the moorings. [...] We can't make people join the Sailing Club if they have a mooring, but we can encourage it. And they want to, often. They do like to be able to come off the water and use the facilities and have a meal and a drink there. So, that's one major source of membership. (Mike, 68)

This recruitment strategy makes the club very different from other sailing clubs in the area, as Mike explained:

I think, about only about a quarter of the members are local, and then about two thirds of the members are absent. They live in Hereford, Oxford, Cardiff, London and even Cambridge. So, the majority of our members are out of county, and that means they are holiday-makers, 'holiday' members, really. (Mike, 68)

It needs to be noted here that the changes in the membership structure were perceived as a 'sort of a limitation to our club, we don't have a large group of members very close by', which led to 'certain problems (.) The large number of the members are holiday members, so it is very difficult to get them represented and to know what they really want' (Mike, 68).

Furthermore, the changed structure of the club membership called for a new approach to communications with the now geographically scattered members. The new methods included email and Facebook, although Mike admitted that there was still plenty room for improvement: 'We do it through emails. [...] We are trying to improve that by having a Facebook' (discussed in Section 5.3). Despite being very critical about Facebook: 'I dislike a lot of it, I've seen a lot of damage done by it', Mike however admitted its instrumental value in promoting the club and its activities:

It *is* a way of advertising [...] and we do need to address that a bit more actually (.) what things are on in the Club and the restaurant. We do regular racing and everybody, all members should know about that because they have a little handbook. We have a regatta coming up soon and [...] there will be an email coming round to everybody to remind them about that. In the past we've sent emails out regularly about events in the Sailing Club (.) social events. (Mike, 68)

Embracing online media was of crucial importance for the Sailing Club as it started targeting young people: 'We advertised to schools for junior sailing to try and encourage youngsters to learn to sail, and they'd come along and become members. And the families have followed suit' (Mike, 68). He admitted that the traditional media, such as the local newsletter, annual handbook and notices, 'On the lavatory doors, we have, 'why don't you become a member' ((laugh))', proved insufficient in the changed circumstances. To keep the club afloat, its older members were willing to succumb to the incoming tide of digital technologies and embrace new ways of doing things. Not only did the membership structure change, but also the management style. Roger (77) explained that the club 'used to be run by a committee, all of whom would have been resident members', whereas these days members of the committee come from further afield.

Such an arrangement did not sit comfortably with everyone. For example, Martha (68), who was involved in the Sailing Club activities on the administrative side, identified another important issue with the geographically scattered committee: 'It's totally impossible to run a concern as big ((as the Sailing Club)) with as many different aspects to it by a committee meeting once every two months.' In her opinion, the Sailing Club is

quite a big thing to run. It needs a lot of organising, a lot of managing [...] and, yet, the Committee meets once every two months, and there are no subcommittees, so everything has to be decided at these meetings that take place once every two months. But you can't run a big organisation like that. (Martha, 68).

To address the issue, much of the communications relating to the club management was moved online, and Roger admitted that ICTs helped greatly: 'I could do that because of email contact, and people could communicate with me all the time. I couldn't have done that without that technology.'

It is interesting to note, that despite not doing much sailing these days, the older members of the club found other ways of staying engaged and re-asserting their connection with the village's seafaring identity:

We manage all the moorings out here [...] We manage the sailing events that happen. At the sailing events we have children's sailing (.) junior sailing. We have racing twice a week [...] We are involved in the pontoon [...] We, if you like, manage the waterfront, and, hopefully, make it a place that people like to come to for water sport. (Roger, 77)

Importantly, the older members of the club also took it upon themselves to raise money to ensure the survival of the group: 'Financially we are sound, and we can afford to buy rescue boats and other things [...] And we raise all that money ourselves' (Roger, 77).

The Sailing Club and its activities were generally viewed favourably by the villagers, and its symbolic importance was a recurring theme in interviews. For example, discussing the role of the club in the village, Mike posited that 'it does have quite a big role in the community', and Martha was very complimentary about the assistance the club offered the Youth Club in securing a grant to buy a sailing boat to 'provide an extra facility for the young people.' Such cooperation between community groups is interesting to think about in the context of symbolic importance of sailing and related facilities and activities. The Sailing Club and the Youth Group championed deferent causes, however, they united their efforts around seafaring, which is an important element of the village identity.

6.3.2. The village pub

Another part of the community fabric in the village which is strongly associated with the waterfront, is the local pub. Community hubs such as schools, post offices and pubs are acknowledged to be important for socialising in rural areas (Mount & Cabras 2016), and Bingham (2014) argues that people are increasingly relying on pubs to provide community cohesion. In their study of how pubs are perceived and experienced in the context of economic and social transitions and demographic changes in British rural communities, Markham and Bosworth highlight the significance of village pubs as social places, parts of the rural economy and as 'familiar images within their communities' (2016, p.267). They argue that going for a drink in a village pub is 'wrapped up in deeper social and cultural meaning' and creates a form of 'local embeddedness', where connections to the place are strengthened by virtue of interrelated social influences (*ibid.*).

Sadly, the village pub, which can trace its history back to 1820s, came under significant economic pressure, and in the 2000s changed owners who turned their attention to tourists

for survival – which follows the general trend in the UK (Bingham 2014) - thus reducing their focus on the needs of local residents. The intermittent business pattern of the pub after the change of ownership - it would only open in summer months, Christmas and Easter, when there were enough tourists - meant that the opportunities for social interactions for the local people in the pub were limited, which caused much tension in the village. It is common knowledge that small rural communities rely on their pubs to provide for the social side of village life. Ben (81) sounded bitter and frustrated when he discussed how the villagers found themselves without a pub to go to, when the owners decided to keep the pub open only during the tourist season:

There is no pub [...] So if you want to go have a drink, you have to go to {nearby town} or {nearby town} [...] For some unknown reason, they both ((the pub owners)) decided to shut, and we've had nothing. Since New Year's, the 2nd of January, there is nowhere to go. (Ben, 81)

Despite its very diminished role as a community hub, the pub continues to be an important symbolic landmark, and it is a recurring image on the websites and media related to the village. Furthermore, the pub's own page on Facebook features the village's landmarks, most importantly, the seafront. In addition to food, the photographs show the pontoon, the seawall and sea-themed sculptures crafted by the local woodcraftsman, Neil (65), adorning the beach. Given that the pub relies on visitors and holidaymakers to survive, it is unsurprising that the activities and events of the local groups are not present on the pub's Facebook page. Instead, the photos feature younger people, usually with children, enjoying a meal or participating in themed family events such as Halloween and Mother's Day parties, fancy dress parties and educational fundraising fêtes.

A point to note is that one of the fancy dress parties was 'come-dressed-as-your-favourite-London-underground-station', which inferred that it targeted people from further afield and contrasts the general focus of village events on local symbols. Other activities promoted by the pub on their Facebook page include beer festivals and live music evenings with bands from as far away as Swansea, which also contrasts the usual practice in the village to invite people from the area to perform in the Village Hall and later in the Sailing Club café. Browsing the posts from the date when the Facebook page was created, I found no evidence that the pub was involved in community events, and villagers never appeared in the photos. Despite being linked to the landmarks, the pub does not seem to be one of the elements of community feeling, suggesting that locality and the associated

symbolic meaning is only one aspect of belonging to the community, and without links to social and cultural elements it lacks significance.

6.3.3. Sailing Club café

In the situation where the pub could no longer be relied upon to promote community cohesion, the other mainstay of the community, the Sailing Club, stepped in and opened its café on the club's premises for the villagers and visitors alike. The café was refurbished and started serving in 2015, after the village pub focussed on attracting holidaymakers rather than the locals. For two years, before it closed due to a conflict with the building owners, the café, together with the Village Hall, served as the community hub, hosting communal themed meals, such as Food Lovers Feast, Mongolian Evening Curry Night, American Theme Night, organising community events such as {Newt} Day or reviving long-dormant rituals, such as quiz nights and Christmas Carol sing-along. The orientation of the café to the needs of the local residents was obvious from its very first Facebook posts, where the manager thanked the villagers for their support for the opening evening, saying he was overwhelmed by the turnout.

During my fieldwork I had the rare privilege to witness the emergence and evolution of new community practices in the village as they sprouted and burgeoned in the café, established by the Sailing Club. The café's *modus operandi* soon proved its strong emphasis on the community needs, and became an important element of the village social network. Speaking of the role of the café in the community Roger (77), the Sailing Club activist, was glowing with pride: 'I would see it as a gift to the community.' The community had long lost their post office and village shop, and the Sailing Club café served as a focal point, offering opportunities for social interactions, including chance meetings with neighbours and passers-by, and its closure is regretted by many in the village.

It needs to be mentioned, however, that some members of the Sailing Club felt that the café, while being a 'place where people can drink, other than the {village pub name}' (Mike, 68), also created 'divisions' in the community. Martha (68), for example, fretted about 'this huge (.) sort of (.) anti-pub feeling' and admitted that the Sailing Club café 'is where they all ((villagers)) discuss it, how horrible the pub is.' Mike was also aware of the dichotomous role of the café – as a hub that brought people together, but also created

what he half-jokingly referred to as a ‘schism in the village.’ Despite the dissention, the café was an important part of the local social network, and offered unique opportunities to witness the emergence and evolution of community-building practices in the village.

6.3.4. The village mascot

Importantly, the Sailing Club café had an online presence from day one, when it opened its doors in an effort to fill the ‘pub-shaped’ void in the village social life. During its short life-time, the café also contributed to development of the ‘online media’ image of the village, most significantly in promotion of the village mascot as part of the village identity. Shortly after its inception the café sponsored a competition ‘to see who can create the best {Newt}’ and advertised it on their Facebook page. {Newt}⁵⁶ has long been associated with the village – there was even a locally brewed craft beer named after it - although the origins are unclear. Mueller and Schade (2012) argue that place symbols, such as logos, mascots and songs contribute to the development of group identity, and are essential aspects of the feeling of belonging to a place. The café’s attempts to bring the villagers together in the competition where they were encouraged to produce an image of the village mascot can be viewed as the ‘conventionalising’ of a symbol that can be ‘big or small, short or tall, thin or fat, or even wearing a hat’⁵⁷.

In this particular context, conventionalising is a process where the connection between the symbol (such as the village mascot) and the meaning (place identity attributes) is established. Villages and towns in the area all seem to have symbols or mascots, often represented by animals. For example, residents of {B} are nicknamed ‘crows’, of {C} ‘sharks’, {D} ‘magpies’ etc. The growing symbolic meaning of the village mascot can be traced in the digital and other media related to the village. For example, the local newsletter (available both in paper copy and online on the community website) advertised {Newt} craft workshops in the Village Hall, as well as weekly {Newt} Youth Group meetings and {Newt} film night and a {Newt} Halloween party. Importantly, despite the demise of the café, its imagery of the village mascot was recycled in the newsletter and other media, which suggests its lasting significance for the village identity.

⁵⁶ The name of the village mascot was changed to {Newt} in this thesis to ensure anonymity.

⁵⁷ Event ad on Facebook, the wording was slightly modified to make it unsearchable.

During my fieldwork I witnessed how this particular symbol grew in significance, as more people learned the meaning, which aligns with Blumer's (1986) idea that symbol is a variable entity that arises out of social interaction. For example, in a local council meeting, which I attended in an observing capacity, one of the items on the agenda was ordering a new village sign to replace the stolen one. It is interesting to note that the local woodcraftsman Neil single-handedly crafted and installed a replacement sign featuring the village mascot, however, the council determined that it should be taken down. Subsequently they filed a request to the County Council to insert the {Newt} image on top of the sign, however, it was ruled that such an image can only be permitted in the case of images that have historic significance, unique to the village, such as coat of arms. Despite the fact that the {Newt} did not qualify as such, the villagers' initiative suggests that the process of the symbol conventionalising was taking place.

I should point out that the sign commissioned by the local community council included other conventional symbols indicating the attractions available in the village, such as the beach, water sports, picnic locations, the café and camp sites. The importance of the issue for the villagers was evidenced by the fact that they were prepared to pay almost £500 (from their approximately £1,500 annual budget) for the sign with the place identity attributes, rather than to have a like-for-like replacement without cost. This example, albeit anecdotal, supports Mueller and Schade's argument that collective identity 'needs to be coded in tangible symbols that can be communicated (e.g. group name, logos, clothing, rituals)' (2012, p.85), otherwise the existence of such identity is uncertain. In a similar vein Stafford (2009) argues that communities are places where memories are sustained and meanings are cultivated.

6.3.5. The History Group

In the village, the process of creating meanings and conventionalising symbols is strongly related to and can be gleaned through the activities of the local History Group. Created in 2006 by the Women's Institute members, the group put a lot of effort into cultivating and preserving the heritage of the village. The group runs the heritage centre, which houses the village archive, where documents are available to the general public to use the resources for their research. The group has their own website which contains the catalogue of items held in the collection, annual programmes, annual reports, a selection of old historic photographs of the area and contact details of the group. Being a 'bottoms

up' community initiative, the History Group does not follow any professional methods of archiving, curation or stewardship, and the group appears to not have any established policies in this respect. Despite the fact that some of the documents in the collection are digitised, the History Group's tacit yet firm policy is not to publish the scanned documents online.

Equally, the Power Point presentations from the talks organised by the History Group never found their way to their website, and the members who I asked for electronic copies, were reluctant to share them via email or otherwise. Throughout my fieldwork I approached the group members to offer my assistance in digitising the documents, e.g. to do the initial scanning and adding documents to the existing database. My advances were politely yet firmly evaded, with reasons offered such as the need to discuss my involvement with the group, the low temperature in the heritage centre where the documents were stored, and more importantly, the need to develop a structured database to add documents to. The latter alluded towards the fact that the group's archiving was somewhat haphazard and inconsistent.

Having said that, it needs to be acknowledged that the issue is quite common for heritage initiatives in the area. For example, in a preface to their online catalogues, West Wales Maritime Heritage Society⁵⁸ admits that their archiving is rather sporadic and warns that their cataloguing 'does not follow Dewey decimal, ISBN or any other standard cataloguing system. This policy has been followed as the collection is a piecemeal collection with only a few parts that could easily follow a standard classification method. Almost all of the collection predates the introduction of the ISBN system' (West Wales Maritime Heritage Society 2010). However, the Society has been growing their online presence, having recently created a Facebook page for the West Wales Maritime Museum⁵⁹ in addition to the Society's Facebook page⁶⁰, which currently has more than 300 followers, and the official website⁶¹.

⁵⁸ <http://www.westwalesmaritimeheritage.org.uk>

⁵⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=west%20wales%20maritime%20museum>

⁶⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/WestWalesMaritimeHeritageSociety/>

⁶¹ <http://www.westwalesmaritimeheritage.org.uk>

Other heritage groups in Wales, such as The Carew Cheriton Control Tower Group⁶², have an equally strong online presence, including websites, Facebook pages and news blogs. The intention to grow digitally and ‘go public’ is evident in the recent projects of The Pembroke and Monkton Local History Society⁶³ who launched Digital Town Trail⁶⁴ and Digital Storytelling Project⁶⁵. The Society’s policy is to make their collection of oral histories and photographic archives available to all⁶⁶, which makes an interesting contrast to the village’s History Group’s practice of keeping materials close to their chest. Having produced a DVD with an oral history of the village, the group never made it truly available to the public, as the DVD can only be viewed in the heritage centre, on the heritage centre’s computer and in the presence of one of the group members, on certain days of the week and at certain times.

In the course of my fieldwork I came to appreciate that the reluctance to fully digitally engage with the outside world was related to the personalities of the people involved in the heritage initiative in the village. Unlike other history groups in the area, whose members can be as young as 13 years old⁶⁷, everyone in this particular group was over 70. From my observations and personal contacts with its members, it became apparent that they were determined to keep doing things in their own way, and did not welcome any questioning of their ability to maintain, curate or exercise control that they felt they needed over their collection. For example, my bona fide suggestion that it might be beneficial to contact and get guidance and help from such projects as Scran⁶⁸ or UK Culture Grid⁶⁹ was politely yet firmly dismissed as irrelevant.

This suggests that the History Group, despite their lukewarm efforts to digitise the collection, was determined to keep things local and under their control. Both Scran and UK Culture Grid allow uploading and sharing of heritage materials, help organisations

⁶² <https://www.carewcheritoncontroltower.co.uk>

⁶³ <http://www.pembrokeandmonktonhistory.org.uk>

⁶⁴ <https://www.pembroketowntrail.wales>

⁶⁵ <http://www.pembrokeandmonktonhistory.org.uk/PembrokeOralhistory.html>

⁶⁶ <http://www.pembrokeandmonktonhistory.org.uk/Projects.html>

⁶⁷ <http://www.carewcheritoncontroltower.co.uk/about/>

⁶⁸ <http://www.scran.ac.uk/info/aboutscran.php>

⁶⁹ <http://www.culturegrid.org.uk/about/>

share their collections online and promote best practices in archiving and curating community archives. The reluctance to engage with the projects and get the archive digitised implies that sustainability of the community heritage materials can be easily compromised, given the age of the members of the History Group and curators of the heritage centre, and that no ‘succession planning’ seems to be in place. The fact that the local heritage preservation depends on the efforts of dedicated yet ageing volunteers, who are reluctant to commit to digitisation of the archives, suggests that the initiative is very fragile.

My observations during fieldwork suggest that construction of collective identity in the village is inexorably related to the individual characteristics of people who contribute to the process, consciously or otherwise. In the case of the History Group, the personalities of its members have a significant bearing on the localised heritage and the place identity produced through their efforts (between 2,000 and 2,500 guests visit the centre annually). It has been noted elsewhere that local heritage initiatives depend heavily on the efforts and commitment of a few dedicated individuals (Tait et al. 2013). In my project it became apparent that the personalities of the heritage enthusiasts and community archivists, including their age, education and other social factors, define how the village presents itself to the outside world through the heritage centre and its website. The choice of the imagery for the website home page - the WWII paraphernalia and symbols - speaks more of the personality and research interests of the website manager rather than that of the village.

The chairwoman of the History Group, who is also in charge of the website, has a personal interest in WWII, and her contacts with retired RAF officers define the activities related to collating and maintaining the local heritage. Unsurprisingly, the History Group’s exhibitions, talks and research have a very strong emphasis on the military history of the area, with a particular focus on fortifications and WWII artefacts. Farming or seafaring are far less prominent, despite the fact that the village used to be quite a thriving seaport with the vessel tonnage up to 40 tons⁷⁰ and many villagers used to earn their living from the sea. Interestingly, in an informal conversation, a local resident told me that he offered some of his fishing artefacts to the heritage centre, and they were dismissed as irrelevant to their work. (Is it worth mentioning that the village was an important military centre

⁷⁰ Providing the reference would compromise anonymity.

during the war with various defence systems, and required troop housing to be built in the village during WWII).

This provides an interesting perspective on Stafford's (2009) and Tait et al.'s (2013) research into collective memory and how digital technologies can facilitate production and communication of cultural heritage. Tait et al. look into the socio-cultural dimensions of community digital archives and sustainability of the initiatives and argue that ICTs facilitate 'co-production of heritage by a wider range of people' (2013, p.565). My observations throughout the fieldwork suggest that the creation of collective memory can be highly subjective and partial, and relies on the judgment of the people who run a particular local initiative. It is in their sole discretion whether to accept or deny artefacts for the heritage centre, and what is published online, displayed at their exhibitions or discussed during public talks. This is interesting to think about in the context of the relationship between community structures, construction of shared identity in the village and the role of the locality in the process.

Symbolic interactionism suggests the existence of multiple identities within the same community, and the village's heritage is also multi-faceted, fluid, co-constructed and re-imagined. In the course of my fieldwork I came to appreciate that the 'official' village heritage produced by the History Group was not necessarily representative of the community, and some villagers came up with their own accounts which were quite different from the image presented by the History Group to the 'tourist gaze'. For example, the manager of the now closed Sailing Club café put together a history of pubs in the village. There he covered the side of the village life ignored by the History Group, starting his narrative with the statement that the area has 'a reputation for producing booze of various kinds.' In his account, the military heritage of the village, which is very prominent in the 'official' narrative, serves as a mere backdrop for the once flourishing pub trade, and the Royal Navy air bases are humorously described as a source of 'plenty of custom for the {pub name}'⁷¹.

Interestingly, it was the villagers who could be categorised as working class, according to the Savage's seven class model (2013), who knew of this 'side' research about the local pubs history, and I was given a copy, printed on plain A4 paper, by my good neighbour

⁷¹ Providing the reference would compromise anonymity.

Gareth (68) who used to be a plumber. In contrast, people involved in the History Group had university degrees or diplomas, and can be characterised as middle class according to the Savage's (2013) model, which measures class according to the amount and kind of economic, cultural and social 'capitals'. Before retirement, members of the History Group held such positions as headmistress of the now closed primary school or civil service officer, and no member of the group can be categorised as working class. My observations suggest that people representing different strata in the village perceived its history and heritage differently, which concurs with symbolic interactionist understanding of community.

6.3.6. The Women's Institute

Another community group whose activities are strongly associated with local causes and landmarks is the Women's Institute. In addition to the more traditional WI activities, such as the favourite pudding recipe competition, flower and foliage arrangement, cookery demonstration etc., the WI webpage features talks by environmental experts on the problems associated with plastic pollution of the coast. As in other local groups, the nautical aspect of the community and the symbolic meaning of the sea is strong within the WI. For example, the 'official' photo of the group on their webpage shows the women posing on the seafront, suggesting its symbolic importance for them. Other photos, taken at the 90th anniversary celebration of the group, feature other prominent village symbols, such as the Village Hall and the {Newt}.

It needs to be noted that similar to other groups presented on the community website, contact details of the president and secretary of the WI do not include their email addresses or any other digital means of communication. Despite the fact that both women are rather competent ICT users, they chose to provide their landline numbers instead. Sadly, the WI webpage is also testament to the toll that the ageing demographics have taken on the community. Each year the images of the group show fewer and fewer people, and the activities captured by the photos are becoming less physical – the earlier images being of gardening, outings and parties - whereas the later ones feature less strenuous, 'sit-down' activities.

Perusing the WI notices in the village newsletter over the years, it is easy to notice the changing dynamics of the group – the earlier brisk business-like notices gradually being

replaced by pleas to people from further afield to join the previously self-contained group. The more recent notices even offer lifts for people from outlying areas to attend the meetings. Reflecting on the state of affairs in the WI these days, Ruth sounded concerned about the current situation and nostalgic about the past:

The WI has (.) it is losing its membership at the moment. There's a gradual drop-off mostly through people dying, I must say - the old members have gone - through not recruiting younger members (.) We haven't recruited any younger members. [...] The WI used to be very vibrant and do shows at the Village Hall, completely driven by the WI members. But there's not that sort of drive anymore. (Ruth, 76)

Discussing the growing importance of online communications within the group, Ruth explained:

Five years ago, I think we wouldn't have communicated at all via computer, via email. Now, all the minutes and the agenda for our meetings, all go via computer, and I think it covers our membership fairly comprehensively. We have some members who are away for quite a lot of the year, they still get all the information through computer. (Ruth, 76)

Throughout the interview Ruth emphasised the instrumental value of digital technologies in sharing information between the existing members: 'It certainly helped, yes, enormously', 'It helps things function a lot easier.' At the same time, she insisted that certain things, such as recruitment of new members, required more traditional forms of communication: 'It has to be word of mouth, or telephone.' Ruth also made clear that the organisational side of the WI activities, such as coordinating tea rotas or outings needed to be done face-to-face: 'It is done at our WI meetings more than by computer. It is done at the meetings.' Overall, my observations suggest that the pattern of using ICTs as a convenience or a shortcut rather than something that brings people together was strong in the WI and consistent across community groups in the village.

6.3.7. The village church

Research suggests that the church is losing its significance as a community hub, where people gather not only to pray, but also to engage in social activities (Pae & Kaur 2004; Bingham 2014). Data from interviews provide a persuasive fit with Pae and Kaur's discussion of the meaning of the church in the countryside, which they see as becoming increasingly indistinct and unclear. For example, Elizabeth was sceptical about the

importance of the church for most residents. Discussing the role of the church in the village, she admitted that it had greatly diminished in recent years, and used the word ‘surviving’ when referring to its current state of affairs:

The church is still surviving, the Sunday School is not so much - I mean, children don't go to Sunday School, which is what they used to do. At one point there was a choir in the church, that's not there anymore. (Elizabeth, 74)

These sentiments were echoed in Beth’s observations about the role of the church in the village:

Well, I don't know really, because the congregation at the church is usually about five or six ((laugh)) [...] I think the church is an important part of the village as a building, but how much it's regarded in the religious light, I am not absolutely sure. I mean, if it was, then there would be far more people at church on a Sunday. (Beth, 76)

Given the diminishing importance of the church, other community structures became more prominent in the village. In their study of the influence of neighbourhood and community on well-being and identity in later life, Peace et al. emphasise the role of community hubs for their research participants who thought that ‘it was very important to have a community center or some kind of communal space, like a park or a village green where people could meet’ and felt that it was ‘particularly important’ to have public spaces where they could see or talk to their neighbours (2005b, p.305). In the study village, where the church lost its significance as the community hub, the local shop and the post office no longer existed, and the pub focused on attracting holidaymakers rather than locals; people gravitated to alternative places for social activities and social interaction, such as the Village Hall.

6.3.8. The Village Hall

The Village Hall’s history can be traced back to the 1920s, when it occupied the hut previously used as the WWI Military Hospital. The old Village Hall was used until the early 1950s for dances, films, family events, cricket teas, and entertaining the troops during and after WWII. The new Hall was built with the funds collected from the local farmers, villagers, organisations, fetes and other events, and opened in mid 1950s. The Committee, formed to manage the new Hall, continued to raise funds for improvements and additions, for example, £150 was raised to build a porch and install heating

equipment. Over the years the Hall was used for various events, including the Queens' Silver Jubilee in 1977. The fondness for the Village Hall was evident in the interviews with the old-timers, including Elizabeth:

The Women's Institute or the church, and they would organise - and the Village Hall committee - they would organise social events - with a dual purpose to raise money as well as provide social interaction for the villagers [...] there were Whist Drives, Beetle Drives⁷² - ((laugh)) - it's mostly for the children, it is a little game, a sort of children's game [...] There were plenty of those. There were dances - people had dances, concerts – occasionally. (.) There was a clinic, [...] It was at the end of the war [...] a visiting nurse would come. The usual procedure was just to look after new born babies - to weigh them, to give them entitlements, such as orange juice and cod liver oil and that sort of thing. (Elizabeth, 74)

Elizabeth's comments tie into Hamilton's discussion of the 'instrumental value' of local services, such as post offices, shops, schools, pubs and community halls, in offering older people in rural areas opportunities for social interaction (Hamilton 2015; Hamilton 2016). The importance of the Village Hall as the community hub has been growing over the years, whilst other services, such as the post office, the shop and the school got closed down, or became unfit to be the village focal point, such as the local pub under the new management. The Hall's role as the social hub became even more prominent in the 2000s, when it underwent another major renovation. The Hall can now hold up to 120 people, has wheelchair access and facilities, including a stage with a theatrical lighting system, a drop-down projector screen, a high definition projector and a modern sound system.

As discussed in Section 5.2.1, the Village Hall has its own page on the community website, with photographs of the building and the facilities, including the main room for formal occasions and bigger gatherings, the suite for smaller meetings and functions, and the kitchen. The section with information regarding bookings, prices and contact details has interesting similarities with other community pages. For example, similar to the Gardening Club who suggests to 'contact John' without specifying the contact number or address or even the surname of John on their webpage, the Village Hall page is equally scarce of particulars, suggesting to 'contact Bill' or 'contact Tom'⁷³. As mentioned in

⁷² Beetle is a British party game in which one draws a beetle in parts. The game may be played solely with pen, paper and a die or using a commercial game set, some of which contain custom scorepads and dice and others which contain pieces which snap together to make a beetle/bug. It is sometimes called Cooties or Bugs. The game is entirely based on random die rolls, with no skill involved.
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beetle_\(game\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beetle_(game))

⁷³ Names were changed to ensure anonymity.

Section 5.2.1, the only person whose contact details are provided, is the booking officer, who suggests to return the booking form by dropping by at her residence for a cup of tea.

Furthermore, similar to local business websites and Facebook pages of the community groups, the Village Hall webpage features photos of the village waterfront. Interestingly, these photos are given a greater prominence on the webpage than images taken inside the building. The text on the webpage is equally interesting, with recurring references to the seafaring identity of the village. Some of the words used in the rather short description include: 'water's edge', 'seafood', 'boathouse', 'seaside', 'coast', 'coastal', 'seafront', 'windsurfing', 'sailing', 'water sports', suggesting the enduring symbolic importance of seafaring in promoting the village and its facilities to outsiders. Importantly, other images on the Hall webpage feature village residents sat in meetings or going about their business. The choice of photos is interesting to think about in the context of the symbolic interactionist perspective of the community-building as an active human endeavour and Cohen's (1985) ideas of social solidarity and symbolic processes of collective experience and cultural meaning.

What emerged from the data is that the involvement in the events and activities in the Village Hall was perceived as a way to belong to the community and locality. Particularly interesting in this context was the amount of effort some newcomers in the village put into upgrading and maintaining the Hall:

I think the first group I joined was, in fact, the Hall Committee. It was about time the Hall was not making money, was sitting there, was a community asset not being used particularly. And there were thoughts that it would be really nice to upgrade it. So, my husband was the treasurer of the Hall Committee (.) and I joined the Hall Committee. We worked then towards thoughts about upgrading, raising the funds and so on. Extending the Hall, making it more... (Beth, 76)

Beth's comments not only evidence the amount of effort that went into the renovation, but also indicates the role of the Hall in communal practices. Having completed the renovation in record time – it was commenced and completed in the same year, with a generous grant awarded to the village by the Welsh Assembly⁷⁴ - Beth set her sights on

⁷⁴ Community Facilities and Activities Programme is a capital grant scheme operated by the Welsh Government. The Programme is community based and is open to community and voluntary sector organisations, including social enterprises. The focus of the programme is on increasing opportunity and tackling poverty. <https://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/communities/community-facilities-programme/?lang=en>

creating community groups in the Hall, such as the Weight Loss Group, Table Tennis and the Youth Club. The new groups created by the newcomers now share the Hall with the long-standing groups such as the Women's Institute and the Community Council. Interestingly, despite having a venue of their own, the WI chose to hold their fortnightly meetings in the renovated Village Hall. Equally, for several years running, the local vicar chose to hold the traditional St. David's Day Supper and Harvest Supper in the Hall, rather than on the church premises.

The ever-growing importance of the revived communal space in the local social landscape was evident in many interviews. Collective identity and sense of belonging to the community can be produced and sustained through the process of recurring social interactions. In my study the Village Hall was the place which enabled such recurring interactions, despite being unmarked by explicit symbolism, like such landmarks as the waterfront or the church. In a situation where the local church, like many other churches in rural Europe 'belong more to landscape scenery and history than to people's lives' (Pae & Kaur 2004, p.134), the Village Hall became a central place in the communal practices of the village. Recounting what the Hall was used for these days, Bridget sounded rather enthused:

Oh, loads of things. Like, this one man here that does sailing lessons - does all the theory and everything in the {Name} Room, things like that. And then our exhibition, the craft exhibition; there's christenings and parties, weddings (.) I am not sure about (.) I can't remember one. Oh yeah, there must have been one in there. And there was the Youth Club, of course. And there's the Film Club. And there's the Table Tennis and the Bowls, anything like that. [...] And of course polling, we have the polling station in there. [...] There's been flower arranging and different things like that, you know. (Bridget, 66)

Bridget's comments allude towards the idea that the communal spaces can work as community glue, bringing together 'insiders' and 'outsiders' alike. It is evident from the interviews that regardless of their sense of belonging, people spoke of their social life in relation to their local world. Similarly, involvement with the community activities seemed to be framed by the sense of place, creating what Neal and Walters referred to as 'convergence of locality and sociality' (2008b, p.285). Ethnographic methods deployed in this study enabled observation of the processes through which collective identity was co-constructed and maintained. Being a communal space, the Village Hall not only provided a space to gather data, but also was the arena where identities were produced

through social interactions. In the context of my research, focussing on the process of interaction, complemented the insights made possible through interviews with villagers.

Throughout my fieldwork I had the privilege of being present at various community events in the Hall, observing various community practices as they unfolded. These events ranged from meetings of the Community Council to rehearsals and performances of the Dramatic Club, the latter possibly the most visible manifestation of community practice. It seems fair to say that this relatively new form of community engagement replaced other, now extinct community rituals, such as the village fair and carnival, which traced their origins back to the 13th century and came to an end in the 1980s, its passing regretted by many villagers. The Dramatic Club was founded in early 2000s, to ‘provide entertainment for the local community and a vehicle for people wishing to perform on stage’⁷⁵. My observations throughout the fieldwork indicate that theatre-making can bring otherwise disparate members of the community together, and has the potential to reach those who would not be normally expected to engage in performances.

For example, the 2016 theatrical production saw the vicar, who rarely engaged in non-religious activities in the Hall, perform on stage in a sketch depicting the dealings of the local council. Even Mary (71), who steadfastly avoided being part of community life, got drawn into the orbit, when she was asked to teach how to speak like a Brummie for a performance (Mary had a very distinctive Birmingham accent). This suggests that theatre can be perceived as communal work, which has the potential to counter excessive individualism and decline of the rituals of rural living. The village residents joined their efforts to ensure that the Hall was fit for the purpose of performing, which alludes that the theatre, along with the waterfront, was perceived by the locals as their shared responsibility. People spoke with pride about the collective efforts that went into refurbishing the Hall for the needs of the amateur theatre.

Answering my question if the stage equipment was council-funded, Beth explained:

No, it’s been donated. We raised funds through {name of company} in {name of town}. They paid for the new curtains for the Hall, and also new lighting equipment. But a lot of sound equipment, we purchased through proceeds from the production. Or people have donated, [...] quite a bit of stuff. (Beth, 76)

⁷⁵ Wording from the Dramatic Club webpage was slightly changed to make the quote unsearchable and ensure anonymity.

The villagers also contributed their time and effort in creating the props, costumes and posters. Beth, who used to be a ‘reluctant user’ of digital technologies, spoke with pride about how she mastered the use of a computer to design posters, and it was clear that she found the experience inspiring and educational:

And the other thing that I discovered because I was involved with quite a lot of activities, that I really, really, liked the idea of creating posters. So I went into Publisher – quite creatively – and I learnt to do quite a lot with Publisher. (Beth, 76)

The posters together with other visuals, such as logos and images, became part of the local heritage and contributed to the construction of the localised collective identity. Significantly, some visuals get published on the village website, and emailed to various other organisations. However, apart from a page on the village website, the Dramatic Club does not seem to have much online presence, on Facebook or elsewhere. The productions are digitally video recorded, but are never put on DVDs for distribution or uploaded to the website. Interestingly, during rehearsals which involve children, they were asked not to share them on social media. The general impression that I received throughout my fieldwork is that the Dramatic Club, like the History Group, preferred to keep it ‘local’, and did not seek to perform or be known further afield.

Other visible manifestations of community practices in the Village Hall are annual exhibitions organised by the local artists and artisans. This relatively new form of community engagement can be traced on the Facebook pages of resident artists and those who live outside the village, however, the efforts to promote the exhibition online seem to be rather half-hearted. They include a handful of posts on the Facebook pages of the local artists, and some ads put up by visiting artisans on their respective websites. Despite the lukewarm online campaign, the exhibitions are highly anticipated events in the village, which offer a space to come and socialise throughout the day (the meetings and more formal events such as the Community Council meetings are usually scheduled in the evening). The atmosphere at the exhibitions is very relaxed and friendly, and creates opportunities for chance meetings with neighbours outside the structured groups and events.

It has been noted elsewhere that rural communities are not necessarily idyllic places, and the traditional image of a supportive community with plentiful opportunities for social

interaction does not reflect its complex dynamics (Little 1999; Neal & Walters 2008b). Therefore, the Hall seems to contribute to maintaining and validating the shared identity of the villagers by creating rare moments of ‘togetherness’ and connectedness. One example is the St. David’s Day Supper, which is one of the few occasions which brings most of the villagers together in the Hall every year on the 1st of March. For Mary (71) and Ben (81), possibly the most unsociable people in the village, joining St. David’s Day Supper was one of the few moments of feeling included and to experience belonging to the place. Despite having no explicit visual symbolism like the waterfront, the Hall nevertheless has an important symbolic meaning for the villagers.

6.4. Community structures and evolution of the village identity

The importance of the Village Hall seems to have grown in parallel with the waning of ‘physical’ community practices such as water sports, regattas and dinghy races and their replacement with less strenuous pursuits. My observation throughout fieldwork and data from interviews indicate that age influences the ways of being ‘out and about’ in the village, and that the activity patterns are governed by people’s declining health; mobility being one of the most important factors. Reflecting on how she feels about the community spirit in the village, Elizabeth admitted:

It diminishes, because you are not physically able to do what you used to do. [...] So, as you get older those things are not possible to do, so many of them, I would say, because you do things at a slower rate. (Elizabeth, 74)

Furthermore, in the interviews, the effects of ageing on the community involvement and collective identity seem to be intertwined with the general feeling of a dwindling community spirit. For example, for Gareth (68), the lack of youngsters in the village had a strong association with the waning of ‘more physical’ community practices. Describing the now extinct village fair and carnival, Gareth sounded rather sad and nostalgic about the olden days, commenting that for the community to sustain, it needs ‘fresh blood’ to keep going:

We used to have them ((fair and carnival)) (.) the last carnival was in 1988, the village carnival, that was good. That's the last one I remember (.) there's been nothing since. {Name of neighbouring village} has one every year, ‘cause there's youngsters there, see. A lot of children. But here (.) We had stalls in the meadow, and people (.) it was good, it was good. (Gareth, 68)

In days gone by, the fair and carnival were much-anticipated events in the area, contributing to the village's identity and community-building. Some distinctive features included making the renowned {Village name} Fair Pudding, baked in large earthenware bowls using milk collected by villagers from the local farmers, and shared by locals and visitors on Fair Day. Other popular features included crowning the carnival queen who judged floats and walking entries, and sports for young and not-so-young, including wheeling a barrow blind-folded, throwing a weight, tug of war, running in socks and rowing matches. Over time, the activities contributing to the identity of the village, including such symbolic events as fairs, carnivals and regattas have been being gradually replaced with less physical manifestations of the community spirit, and the Village Hall is becoming an ever more important place in community-building.

The waning of 'physical' community practices and their replacement with less strenuous pursuits can be traced on the village website. When the website was created, it listed all the groups and activities available at the time, including Badminton, Table Tennis, Weight Loss Group and the Bowls Club. Now, the respective pages of these groups either say 'This club is no longer running' or have not been updated for years. One of the 'physical' groups that persisted until recently was the Bowls Club. Formed in mid 1990s, the club has been in continuous operation for many years, and had weekly sessions with three games of five ends each. As with many other more 'physical' activities in the village, the Bowls Club has experienced the effects of its ageing demographics. Answering my question about his involvement, Ben replied: 'Yeah, played bowls. Pub bowling. It's a short-mat bowl, not as long as (.) indoor bowls, short-mat they call it. Great, I used to play (.) in the evenings. I can't bend too good now.' When further prompted if the club is still going on, Ben said: 'Oh yeah. They still bowl. But they are slowly dying off now.'

Ben's comments suggest that his own involvement in the social life depended on his physical abilities, and also allude toward the fact that the Bowl Club itself was fading away as its members were getting frail and less mobile. This interview was recorded in the very beginning of my fieldwork, and as the time went by, I witnessed how the sessions became fewer and finally ceased after one of the organisers sustained a fall-related injury. However, as some community groups in the village have become dormant due to the waning of 'physical' pursuits, other community practices have become more prominent. Examples of such practices include cream teas and talks organised by the Women's

Institute and the History Group as well as the Film Club meetings in the Village Hall. Arguably, the growing popularity of the 'sit-down' events can be attributed to the need to accommodate the age and the declining health of the village residents. For example, reflecting on how activities in the village have taken a new turn, Elizabeth explained:

The WI is still there. The social events that they organise are not the same as they used to be, because people don't want to go dancing on a regular basis. [...] But there's still plenty of opportunities for interaction [...] I am thinking particularly of the St. David's Day Supper, and also the Harvest Supper. There are some new things that have developed as well. So, as one thing's gone, something else seems to have come in to take its place. (Elizabeth, 74)

This suggests that models of socialisation in the village are age-related, and there is a strong connection between ageing and community involvement. Activities which contributed to the village identity, including such symbolic events as fairs, carnivals, regattas and dinghy races are being gradually replaced with less physical manifestations of the community spirit. This subtle yet discernible evolution of the village identity manifests itself in the decline of some community practices and the emergence of others. With seafaring in decline, the village's identity has evolved over time from a water sports haven to a peaceful retirement refuge, with 'less physical' elements of the collective identity becoming more prominent. The dying out of some community practices and the emergence of others can be linked to the growing popularity of the Village Hall and now extinct Sailing Club café as places which can accommodate the age and the declining health of its residents. This evolution of the village identity can be traced online, specifically, on the community website and Facebook pages of some community groups, e.g. the Sailing Club.

6.5. Community structures and communication infrastructure

It is important to note that online interactions were viewed by the research participants as a step towards becoming part of off-line community, which is aligned with Fernback's (2007) study of the symbolic meaning of web-based communities. None of the groups listed on the village website suggest creating online communities or promote online interactions of any sort. Instead, all of them encourage people to come along to their meetings, and provide landline numbers to get in touch. Some of the groups, e.g. the Community Council, give their email address, others, e.g. the Community Forum, give no contact details whatsoever - other than the name of the clerk - suggesting that people

would know how to find them. The Gardening Club page is equally devoid of any particulars, and instead suggests to ‘contact John’. These examples are interesting to think about in the context of claims regarding the waning importance of place in community-building and the potential of ICTs to ‘forge relationships, networks and communities of interest in cyberspace’ (Pigg 2001, p.508).

The decline of rural infrastructure has been strongly associated with the loss of the community spirit (Markham & Bosworth 2016), and many interviewees mentioned reducing opportunities for socialising due to declining services and local community hubs, supporting the argument that ‘community changes including lost services such as post offices and shops are barriers to engagement in community activities’ (Wenger & Keating 2008, p.41). However, none of the research participants regarded cyberspace as a substitute for face-to-face interaction, and I found no evidence that the villagers made efforts to create communities online to make up for the loss of community structures. Digital technologies that are intended to ‘build community’, e.g. Facebook, or facilitate remote interaction, e.g. email, were viewed by interviewees as useful only if they were aligned with the communication infrastructure and networks that already existed. Primarily, it was ‘material’ or ‘spatial’ structures of community feeling such as landmarks, buildings and facilities that contributed to the construction of collective identity and community feeling in the village and promoted community engagement.

6.6. Summary

This chapter explored the association between the locality and the community feeling, and how particular landmarks were linked with the construction of shared identity in the village. Local landscapes and landmarks were a recurring theme in every interview, evidencing their enduring meaning to the interviewees. Older people in my study placed a significant value on their geographical location, and for them it was more than a mere backdrop for social interactions. Importantly, the upkeep of the local landmarks, such as the waterfront, served as a reason for older people in the village to use ICTs. Association with landmarks worked as community glue, bringing together people from different backgrounds, newcomers and old-timers alike. This evidences the importance of locality in maintaining shared identity and sense of belonging to local community.

Furthermore, local landmarks were strongly associated with community structures in the village. Both long-standing and more recent community structures contributed to construction of shared identity through the process of recurring social interactions. Community groups and community hubs, such as the Sailing Club, the History Group, the Hall and the café served as focal points in the village, offering opportunities for social participation and enhancing it. Despite being unmarked by explicit symbolism, like the waterfront, the Hall and the café became important parts of the social network, where community practices emerged and developed. In contrast, despite being an important symbolic landmark, the pub was not regarded as an element of community feeling, suggesting that locality and its symbolism are only one aspect of belonging to the community, and without links to social aspects they lack significance.

Place symbols, such as the village mascot, and the associated process of conventionalising are important aspects in constructing and maintaining of the village identity, which can be traced in cyberspace. Together with the waterfront and other landmarks, the imagery of the mascot can be found on most local websites and other media related to the community. In the course of my study I came to appreciate that the ‘official’ image of the village produced by the History Group and presented at the heritage centre and their website was not necessarily representative of the community, as it reflected the personalities of people who were involved in the process. I found that the village’s identity is multi-faceted, fluid, co-constructed, re-imagined and ever evolving, which concurs with the symbolic interactionist understanding of community.

One prominent aspect of the evolution of the multi-stranded village identity manifests itself in the decline of some community practices and the emergence of others. With seafaring in decline, the village changed over time from a water sports haven to a peaceful retirement refuge, with the ‘less physical’ elements of the collective identity becoming more prominent. The waning of some community practices and the development of others can be linked to the growing popularity of the Village Hall and now closed Sailing Club café as places which can accommodate the age and the declining health of its residents. Importantly, these changes can be traced online, specifically, on the community website and Facebook pages of some community groups, e.g. the Sailing Club.

Despite the growing role of ICTs in the community, it is the ‘material’ or ‘spatial’ structures of community feeling such as landmarks, buildings and facilities that contribute

to the construction of collective identity and community feeling in the village and promote community engagement. None of the research participants regarded cyberspace as a substitute for face-to-face interaction, and I found no evidence that the villagers made efforts to create communities online to make up for the loss of community structures. Digital technologies that are intended to ‘build community’, e.g. Facebook, or facilitate remote interaction, e.g. email, were viewed by interviewees as useful only if they were aligned with the communication infrastructure and networks that already existed in the village.

In the next chapter I will discuss how community practices are geographically embedded and developed by the community members and community groups, and how ideas about ICTs contribution to community-building meet the community practices in a particular location.

CHAPTER 7. EMBEDDED PRACTICES, SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND ICTs

7.1. Introduction to the chapter

Cyberspace has been perceived by many as a place where cohesive communities can be created, and ICTs have been argued to have the potential to enhance social participation of older people. Ageing rural demographics have been behind many initiatives to roll out ICTs in the countryside, under the assumption that digital technologies can boost community-building and bring people together. This chapter looks into how ideas about ICTs contribution to community-building meet the actual practices and realities of a retirement village. I explore the ‘hands-on’ aspects of community participation and the role of ICTs in facilitating geographically embedded communal actions, drawing on the symbolic interactionist understanding of community-building as an active human endeavour and that people live in overlapping domains of social interaction and community.

7.2. Cyberspace interactions vs face-to-face interactions

It has been suggested that ICTs have the potential to transform rural communities, and that their relative isolation and dispersion make ICTs even more important than in urban areas (Townsend et al. 2013; Wallace et al. 2017). Cyberspace has been viewed as a ‘new electronic social commons’ (Loader et al. 2000, p.83), and ICTs have been argued to have the potential to offer people ‘mechanisms to re-establish community social structures’ (*ibid.*). Some commentators, Wallace et al. among them, argue that ICTs can be used to ‘bridge social divisions and self-consciously create an online cohesive community presence’ and to re-embed social relationships (2017, p.433). Data from this study do not support the idea that technologies in isolation can create communal bonds or can be a source of community engagement in later life. Instead, the data suggest that for older people, community continues to be defined by the everyday ‘physical’ interactions, which can be mediated by digital technologies.

As discussed in Section 3.3 and Section 5.3, the preferred method of communication in the village is face-to-face contact, landline phone calls and, to a lesser extent, email. Analysis of social media relating to the village suggests that it has a rather limited role in

community-building, which is supported by data from the interviews. For example, answering my question if Facebook or other social media were used by community groups for communications and coordinating their activities, Elizabeth found the idea laughable:

I don't know. I certainly don't use a Facebook page ((laugh)), but I do sometimes - if I am looking for information from another local history group - if I want some information - I will have a look to see if they've got a website, and that usually gives a contact number, or contact address, so we can get in touch directly with the person that you want to speak to or get information from. (Elizabeth, 74)

The importance of establishing and maintaining direct contact and preserving face-to-face communication is evident from Roger's comments about the use of ICTs in the village. Whist acknowledging the utility of digital technologies: 'We use computers all the time for communicating between committees', and their growing role: 'We are now using email service quite a lot for communication between various members and between groups progressively', Roger insisted that face-to-face communication was essential in the context of community-building:

So, I consider - it is not just the ((local community)) council - it's any committees - that I benefit considerably from listening to other people's views. So, when we are in a common room, and that could be the Sailing Club committee or it could be the council or it could be the Parochial Church Council. My views will change as other people speak, because they will think of things that I haven't thought of. If we go onto (.) if we do it on the computer, where we all put down our opinions, you haven't got that inter-reaction (*sic*), you can't (.) I don't see how you can develop that inter-reaction (*sic*). (Roger, 77)

If we think about community-building from the symbolic interactionist perspective, as an active human endeavour – which aligns with its definition by the UN as a 'process whereby community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems' (United Nations n.d.), Roger's comments about how face-to-face communications facilitate solving issues in the village are of particular interest: 'We can sit round the table, and we can actually discuss matters and probably come up with a better, more conducive reaction and conclusion.' Discussing how the council dealt with everyday issues of community life, Roger emphasised the importance of immediate, unmediated interaction:

We listen to everybody's point of view, and quite often we may go to a meeting - I certainly do go to meetings where I have a view, I've formed a view about a particular subject. That may not be the view that I end up with. And we often find that we end up - we don't fall out very often - we don't end up in a situation - we usually have a majority view, a majority and often a unanimous view comes out of a council meeting on a particular subject because we have all adjusted - we may have gone in with five different views, but we've all adjusted our views to where we think we can end up with the best solution. (Roger, 77)

Whilst acknowledging the benefits of online interactions, Roger sounded rather concerned about the increasing role of technologies in the activities of community groups:

We are in danger, as I pointed out earlier, of having email meetings, and I am reluctant to allow that because I personally don't believe that's the right way to go. I've seen mistakes where people are forming an opinion that they wouldn't do around the table. (Roger, 77)

He particularly emphasised the value of face-to-face interaction: 'As far as the communications are concerned, I still believe it needs to be maintained on a local basis.' Roger's comments align with Tetley et al.'s study, where older people expressed concerns about the potential of social media to 'diminish face-to-face contact, to the detriment of real relationship' (2015, p.49).

Furthermore, they provide an interesting perspective to the idea that in the digital age, community as a social construct is increasingly becoming based 'around common interests rather than spatial proximity' (Loader et al. 2000, p.81). In the context of the retirement village, the communal initiatives proved to be related to the place and local symbols, and the efforts around the common good were geographically embedded, which resonates with Tönnies' (1963) notion of a spatial human togetherness. It also concurs with Neal and Walters' argument that 'the imagined community gives rise to a series of material activities and everyday labours to realize more tangible and more concrete structures of community feeling' (2008b, p.282).

7.3. Community Action Plan and community-making practices

In my study, the creation of the structures of community feeling can be traced on the Community Action Plan, which was created in 2003 and updated in 2006 and 2014. The very first version of the Plan was devised by the village residents who took part in

‘visioning workshops’, organised to record the issues and ideas important to the locals⁷⁶. The many suggestions made at the initial visioning workshops included the upgrade of the Village Hall, provision of events and entertaining, IT training, creation of an art centre, a heritage centre, a community café etc. The three versions of the Action Plan, compiled by the villagers in 2003, 2006 and 2014, offer a very interesting insight into how the identity and the image of the community evolved over the years. As discussed in Chapter Six, the village’s identity was closely tied to seafaring and outdoor pursuits such as sailing and boat racing, which was a recurring theme in interviews.

As the residents grew older and less physically active, there was a shift towards viewing the village as a place to retire rather than a place to sail. This shift is best illustrated by Elizabeth’s comment where she explains what draws retirees to the village nowadays: ‘They like to have the peace and quiet that is available in a small village. Big time ((laugh)). And that's why they are here.’ Importantly, this gradual evolution of the village’s identity can also be traced on the Community Action Plan. The seafaring aspect of the village identity was much more prominent in the 2003 Plan, where the priority was given to ‘fresh water at end of pontoon’ and refurbishment of the Sailing Club facilities. The 2006 Plan described the village as a ‘friendly and unpretentious place that is so dear to so many people’ with ‘glorious sunshine, beautiful scenery, and, of course, the sea’⁷⁷.

In 2014, eleven years after the original Action Plan, it was admitted that ageing demographics in the community was a growing problem, and the 2014 Plan described the village as ‘very quiet’⁷⁸. The villagers increasingly identified themselves as a retirement community, and the Action Plan indicated that they aimed to age-proof the village. For example, a major concern was the lack of services for the care and transport of older people. To this end, the 2014 Plan suggested investigating possibilities for retirement accommodation by converting existing buildings, and carrying out a survey to establish the needs of older people in the village in respect of meals on wheels, sheltered housing and transport.

⁷⁶ Between 50 and 60 members of the community took part in two visioning workshops held in 2003 where they carried out a strengths, weakness and opportunity analysis, a skills and resources audit and an exercise in translating ideas into action.

⁷⁷ Providing the reference would compromise anonymity.

⁷⁸ Providing the reference would compromise anonymity.

The evolution of the Community Action Plan is interesting to think about in the context of linkages between collective identities, community-making practices and commitment to the common good. Community initiatives, proposed and implemented under the Action Plan, such as the refurbishment of the Village Hall, restoration of the kiln, repair of the cemetery wall and the churchyard wall etc. always required interaction and shared activities centred around local landmarks. Also, local meanings formed a foundation for purposeful actions for the furtherance of local causes, be it the Dramatic Club or the Community Council. Looking back at the community initiatives that took place over the years, I would suggest that to be successful, they needed to be framed by the sense of place. Initiatives that did not have proper ‘anchorage’ or symbolic meaning in the community, had little chance of becoming a lasting community practice. In contrast, community practices and groups with a stronger association with the locality and its symbols, such as beach cleans, the Sailing Club or the History Group persisted.

Two more recent examples of community initiatives that did not have sufficient anchorage and symbolic meaning in the village, are the Youth Club and the Playground Association. The rationale behind the Youth Group and its successor, the playground project, was to bring ‘fresh blood’ to the village. Discussing the idea of creating the Youth Group, Martha said that at that time she believed that ‘It will be good for the village because it will probably attract people into the village.’ The lack of anchorage for the initiative was evident to the villagers, and even the people who ran the club had their reservations: ‘We knew it wasn't really (.) necessary’ (Martha, 68). Despite being sceptical about the usefulness of the initiative, Martha and two other volunteers took on the challenge and put much effort into the creation of the club: ‘We contacted the schools, and advertised it in the {name of the village’s newsletter}, we took fliers to the schools’, including raising funds for the initiative: ‘We got quite a few little grants, you know, grants to buy a pool table and a grant to buy an air hockey table, the church supported us, gave us a grant’ (Martha, 68).

It needs to be noted that their efforts paid off initially: ‘We used to have up to twenty children coming here. They used to come from {name of a neighbouring village} and {name of a neighbouring village}. And there were (.) a group of young people of around about fourteen-ish, as well as much younger children’ (Martha, 68). The Youth Club was short-lived, partially because parents would bring children to the village so they could enjoy drinks in the pub, while their offspring were looked after by volunteers in the

Village Hall. The people who volunteered felt that helping out with the Youth Club was not a particularly rewarding experience. For example, describing his involvement with the initiative, Mike appeared to be rather annoyed: 'They ((parents)) would use it as child care, whilst they went to the pub on a Friday evening.' His opinion concurs with Martha's, who put it rather humorously:

The parents used to like bringing the children on a Friday evening, 'cause the pub was open. So, they would leave their children and they would go to the pub, which was fair enough, you know, they'd worked hard all week, you know (.). We were, Beth and I and Neil were happy to do it, and they could have a break. But once the pub stopped opening in the winter, that place for them to go wasn't there ((laugh)). (Martha, 68)

As the children who attended the Youth Club grew older, their parents became 'very keen on their children doing [...] something specific, not just having a nice time [...] you know, they do ballet, and they do swimming, and they do horse-riding' (Martha, 68), and Mike suggested that 'I don't think there was quite enough for teenagers to do. They really need, sort of, music, a room to, sort of, chill out, a coffee machine or something like that.' Discussing the reason for the demise of the Youth Group, Martha speculated that it might be the failure to engage people from further afield: 'Perhaps we didn't do enough to engage with the parents ((from other villages)), I don't know', and the declining health of the volunteers: 'Beth and I felt that we couldn't carry on (.) committing every Friday to it.' Another important reason was that the community support for the Youth Club was dwindling away. For example, the current vicar was reluctant to get on board: 'When the next vicar came, I asked whether they would help with the Youth Club, as the previous vicar had done, and they said they couldn't because Friday was their day off' (Martha, 68).

Some interviewees felt that the Youth Club and Playground initiatives were gratuitous to begin with. For example, when discussing them, Gareth, one of the longer-standing residents, was rather dismissive and critical: 'I think it's going to be a waste of money [...] I think that's a lot of rubbish [...].' When prompted to explain why he felt this way, Gareth added:

I think that's a bit silly. There's not enough youngsters. And the only people who'll find (.) going for this thing, are people who've got grandchildren ((who visit)). But I say, by the time (.) if anything goes up, they'll all be grown-up anyway. So, it's just going to be a waste of money. It can go up, I am sure, towards other things. (Gareth, 68)

Gareth's stance on this particular initiative is striking, as he is known to support local causes and contributes his time and efforts to the upkeep of the church and the graveyard. It was very unusual for Gareth, a very good-natured and considerate person, to oppose local initiatives, and the use of such words as 'rubbish', 'waste of money' and 'silly' evidences that he was quite negative about this particular cause. Gareth's views about the playground were echoed by other people in the village in my informal conversations with them. Therefore, a fair assumption would be that the initiative did not have proper 'anchorage' or symbolic meaning in the community, and could not last. The demise of the group was announced on the village website, although the Facebook page still exists. When the Youth Club was discontinued, its organisers called a public meeting, where they set up a steering group to build a playground, using the funds raised for the Club. Discussing the trials and tribulations of trying to get the project off the ground, Martha sounded rather frustrated:

It's a lo::ng time, it's been a lo::ng time. So, first of all, we became a charity, which took a while, 'cause in order to get funding you really need to be a charity, [...] and then we needed to get the agreement of the landowner. We did a questionnaire in {name of the village's newsletter} to get feedback as to whether everybody thought it was a good idea. We got people to do design for us, and then we went to the landowner and put it to him, and he had some input into it, and then we finally [...] had a proper plan drawn up and put that into the planning authority, and we got the planning permission in September, last September. But we are still trying to negotiate the land lease with the landowner, it's very complicated. (Martha, 68)

The initiative received support from the Welsh Government, and the steering group organised a number of fundraising events, which were advertised on Facebook. The interview with Martha took place in 2016, when things were looking up for the initiative; however, in 2018 the landowner changed his mind about leasing out the plot for the playground. The group invited people to share their views as to how to proceed on Facebook, but this received no responses. At the moment the project is in limbo, and the steering group is now in discussions exploring whether they can change their focus and become a grant-giving charity to children living in the area. Despite the lack of success, the initiative is an illustrative example of the commitment to common good by the older people in my project. In addition, it demonstrates the practical dimension and instrumental value of ICTs in communal actions, e.g. using Facebook and email for distributing questionnaires and promoting fundraising events. Also, it shows that ICTs

are used by older people in the village for the furtherance of highly contextual community efforts, such as the playground, which are generally centred around local causes.

The lack of success in launching the playground initiative and in sustaining its predecessor, the Youth Group, invites some further reflection. It is easy to assume that they never embedded in the community because of the ageing demographics of the village. However, they are interesting to think about alongside another community initiative, the Nature Group, that ended shortly after its inception. Established as part of the village Action Plan, which aimed to introduce new community initiatives, the Nature Group had no particular local cause or symbolic landmark for the villagers to rally around. Their webpage describes them as an informal gathering of people from the village and further afield with the purpose of organising walks and talks on a wide variety of topics covering all aspects of natural history. Delicately described as ‘hibernating’ in the Community Forum Committee minutes (2016)⁷⁹, the Nature Group is an example of a stillborn initiative that did not originate from a locally embedded grassroots community effort.

The stillbirth of the group stands in contrast with the success of another community initiative, involving restoration of a historic limekiln in the village. The project is of particular interest in the context of community-building as it brought onboard farmers from outlying farms, who provided most of the stone to rebuild the partially collapsed kiln (it is noteworthy that farmers are otherwise largely uninvolved in community activities). It took several years and much combined and single-minded effort from the villagers, the nearby National Park and corporate sponsors based in the county to complete this very demanding project. Importantly, the same woman was behind the successful limekiln project and the stillborn Nature Group. This suggests that it was not the lack of enthusiasm or experience that drove the Nature Group into oblivion. Rather, it was the particular landmark (such as the limekiln) for the villagers to rally around that made the difference.

One would assume that the Nature Group with its stated purpose of organising walks and talks would appeal to older people in the community. Walking is a popular pastime in the village, and talks of the History Group and the WI are usually well-attended events.

⁷⁹ Providing the reference would compromise anonymity.

However, the Nature Group never took off, and it appears that it is the symbolic anchorage that was missing in the initiative. The failure to launch the group is contrasted by the continued efforts to maintain the village church, despite its diminishing role in the community. Having lost the ability to fulfil the traditional role of the community hub, the church is still perceived as a shared responsibility. Comments from believers and non-believers alike suggest its strong symbolic meaning for the villagers, for example, Gareth explained:

The WI [...] they do a lot, like cooking, baking, selling stuff to pay for the cutting of the cemetery. Community pays for that, see. And the ladies do wonders (.) you know [...] And all the money then would go towards the cemetery, to cut the grass. The church people [...], they take it in turns to help out. Everybody [...] helps out, does something there. Different people cut the grass there, round the stones, I look after the boiler. The only time I charged them if it is a big problem... But touch wood, it's been good. (Gareth, 68)

I would suggest that volunteering around local landmarks and local causes acted as community glue for older people in the village. The linkage between the sense of place and community involvement is best illustrated by the Community Council, one of the ongoing concerns in the community, which deals with the minutiae of everyday life in the village: 'Things like, what's the bus transport like, is it meeting local needs for those who haven't got cars (.) and we'd look at the street lighting or the refuse collecting - is that working properly for people' (Diane, 71). The importance of the routine practices in community-making and their anchorage in the local causes is best captured by Roger's comments. Discussing how the Community Council identified the issues in the village, he explained:

Walking around ((laugh)). That's the best (.) in the pub, in the ((Sailing)) Club, walking the streets and coming across people and they say, 'Oh, I was looking at this and this (.)', 'The road is broken there', or 'Certain grass needs cutting' or whatever. And you just pick up views as you go around. (Roger, 77)

Importantly, the community councillors went further than simply identifying issues and reporting them to the county authorities. When the County Council was unable to provide a solution, as was the case with dog nuisance, the councillors formed teams of watchers to mount patrols in the village. Also, councillors are personally involved in the upkeep of the village, such as beach cleans or patrols to enforce car park regulations and considerate parking. Furthermore, they do not hesitate to get their hands dirty, for example one councillor, a man in his 70s, personally pushed back the stones that had built up close to

the floodgates on the village waterfront, which was mentioned in the minutes. On another occasion, when the hinges of the floodgates corroded, another older councillor took it upon himself to fix the gates and apply WD40 rather than taking the matter up with the service company. The above examples suggest that, similar to other successful local initiatives, the Community Council's efforts are centred around the village's symbolic landmarks and the common good.

7.4. Sense of belonging, common good and volunteering

For the participants in my project, the sense of belonging in the community and the place was linked to a commitment to the common good. This commitment was generally, although not exclusively, associated with volunteering for local causes. Similar to participants in Neal and Walters' (2008b) study, in my project the people's understanding of community manifested itself in routine practices of community-making, which were driven by local causes. Of particular interest was the level of commitment demonstrated by participants in creating and maintaining the structures of community. This commitment is best illustrated in the comment made by Roger: 'We all tend to sit on committees of some sort or another ((laugh)). And often it's the same people.'

The communal spirit, albeit diminished (as discussed in Section 6.4), is still rather strong in the village. For example, I witnessed how older residents provided informal care in the village, usually to recently bereaved people, or to people whose spouses suffered from deterioration of mental health (search parties for a much-loved village resident who tended to go and wander was a common occurrence). Having said that, I need to mention that longer-standing residents and newcomers contributed to the common good in different ways. My observations and data from interviews suggest that the former were less likely to be involved in 'structured' volunteering. Their contribution to the common good tended to be on a one-off basis, for instance, when the farmers from the outlying farms provided the stone to rebuild the partially collapsed kiln (discussed in Section 7.3). The longer-standing residents were prepared to get involved and lend a hand when there was an immediate need, such as servicing the boiler in the church or getting rid of ivy and brambles in the cemetery.

Newcomers, on the other hand, tended to engage in more structured volunteering, usually in groups with established memberships and regular meetings. This observation provides

an interesting perspective to Jerome's anthropological study of older people where she suggests that 'social worth' in Western industrial societies is measured in terms of productivity in paid employment and productivity is a 'major ingredient of status' (1992, p.2). Jerome further argues that 'Through volunteering, active elderly (*sic*) people continue to participate in the community and contribute to the welfare of its members. The benefits of voluntary work overlap with the paid employment' (*ibid.* p.179). In my study, I found no evidence to support Jerome's assertion that 'activities within old-age associations are interpreted as a collective response to status loss' (*ibid.* p.10).

For newcomers, structured regular volunteering appeared to be a way to construct the sense of belonging with the place rather than reaffirming the status. Also, data from my study suggest that volunteering and commitment to the common good could be seen as community-making practices and were referred as such by the interviewees. For example, discussing the shift in the WI activities, Ruth explained: 'We are trying to do more in the community, which is why we are trying to do litter picks. And we are having an open day at the Walled Garden and so on' (Ruth, 76). In a similar vein, Roger made links between community-making and the voluntary efforts by the Sailing Club: 'We manage the waterfront, and, hopefully, make it a place that people like to come to. And one of our duties, I believe, is to make sure everything is cleared, [...] I would see as a gift to the community' (Roger, 77). This supports Fast and Gierveld's argument that 'volunteering, helping others, donating and belonging to social organisations are instrumental in promoting feelings of being connected to the community' (2008, p.72).

Throughout my fieldwork I was amazed and humbled by the villagers' commitment to invest their time and energy into local causes, such as cleaning-up of the waterfront or serving weekly cream teas to collect for the church roof and other communal practices. Both community activists and more introverted people contributed, in their own way, to the creation of the community through everyday discourse and practice. This made me reflect on Cohen's (1985) ideas of social solidarity and symbolic processes of collective experience and cultural meaning, and also made me question the value of online communities with their 'convenient togetherness without real responsibility' (Fernback 2007, p.63). Having said that, I need to acknowledge that the village is a far cry from the idyllic image of a close-knit rural community 'buffered from the social problems of urban areas' (Kalahe 2008, p.iv) and does not always operate through 'the 'warm' glow of human togetherness' (Neal & Walters 2008b, p.281).

Despite the fact that there were close links between the local causes: ‘There’s usually cooperation [...], so, if we have fundraising events, each attends the other’s events to give them support’ (Diane, 71), the small size of the village means that community groups are competing with each other. Martha’s account of how she was thwarted in her attempts to raise money for the Playground initiative during a quiz night, offers an insight into the rivalry that exists between the community initiatives:

I went to the Sailing Club ((café)) [...] and I had all the raffle tickets ((for the playground initiative)) [...] I wasn’t trying to sell raffle (.) what I was trying to do was to give people in the village books of raffle tickets to take with them and sell themselves. So, I went to a few tables and people wanted to buy raffle tickets and take some away, so I sold them [...] and Gordon ((said)), ‘Martha, I am extremely upset about you doing this. This is not on, this is to raise money for the {name} charity’, and Julia was sitting next to him, and she was just absolutely furious. She was basically shouting at me, telling me I shouldn’t be doing this (.) To be faced with these two really, really angry people (.) they didn’t exactly shout but they talked in a very loud and horrible voice to me ((forced laugh)). (Martha, 68)

This evidences that even community-minded people who are committed to the common good and generally get along well, would clash on occasions. Martha’s account of how she tried to raise money supports Neal and Walters’ argument that ‘rural communities contain their own complex dynamics’ and they can be ‘inhibiting, parochial, exclusive and suspicious’ (2008b, p.281). I discuss the rifts observed in the village and how they relate to community-making practices and the sense of belonging in the next section of this chapter.

7.5. Us and them: divisions in the community

As discussed below, there is a certain cleavage in the community, which one of the interviewees described as ‘us and them’ syndrome which happens in the village’ (Beth, 76). The cleavage did not seem to be related to ‘Cymrophobia’ or ‘Anglophobia’, which can be prominent in other parts of Wales (Morris 2010). When asked whether there was an ‘English vs Welsh’ divide in the village, people tend to shrug off the idea: ‘No, no, none at all. Because this area has always been known as ‘Little England beyond Wales’⁸⁰ ((laugh)), so it doesn’t crop up’ (Beth, 76). It is worth mentioning that the divide between

⁸⁰ Little England beyond Wales is a name applied to an area in Wales, which has been English in language and culture for many centuries despite its remoteness from England. Today the Welsh call it Sir Benfro Saesneg. The language boundary with the Welsh-speaking area to the north is known as the Landsker Line. http://www.pembrokeshire.org.uk/The_Welsh_and_Little_England.php

the middle class people and the working class people was somewhat alleviated by the fact that the latter was priced out of the village, particularly people of working age:

Youngsters can't (.) couldn't afford to stay here. They couldn't afford to take over the houses (.) or work (.) They get only to get jobs away. [...] A lot of them have moved away, can't afford to stay here [...] You have to go out to work, you know, there's nothing here. (Gareth, 68)

With the house prices starting from around £200,000, and very little social rented housing⁸¹, even those people who could be categorised as working class according to Savage's seven class model (2013), were rather well-off, and the difference was more in terms of education and social capital, rather than material riches. Interestingly, the divide has a spatial dimension: the village is nested in a valley with most of the houses aligned along a U-shaped road. Historically, houses on one leg of the U are former council houses, many of them occupied by the longer-standing residents, and properties on the other side are spacious detached houses with generous plots of land, owned by affluent newcomers who moved into the village from other parts of the country after retirement. Unsurprisingly, there is some tension between the two sides of the road.

What transpired from observations and interviews, is that the most noticeable dividing line in the village was between the community-minded people and people who tended to be more private. Speaking about tensions in the village, Beth explained:

There's a nucleus, there's a core of people who have strong volunteering ethos, who enjoy being involved [...] I think that people who probably do keep themselves to themselves are in the minority, and I don't think it creates a particular problem – it's tolerated, I mean, it's accepted, if you like, that there are people who just don't want to be involved in the village activities. (Beth,76)

Community-minded people in the village were not necessarily newcomers, who tend to bring 'idealism in terms of community relations and a commitment to making them work' (Wallace et al. 2017, p.432). Of the thirteen interviewees who were involved in volunteering, two people were born and bred in the village, and another locally born participant, a man in his 80s, used to do much volunteering when he was younger and less frail. The 'mainstream' local population, who Neal and Walters referred to as 'rurally included' people, who can make 'a seemingly uncontested claim to rural belonging'

⁸¹ References to NOMIS sources detailing features of the village were purposely omitted to ensure anonymity.

(2008b, p.283) is best exemplified by Diane. Her attachment to the area and the village was rooted in her lifelong familial and community ties:

I was born in the local area [...] now live in the house which was from my father's family. My mother lived in the area as well [...] We ((Diane and her husband)) were in London for a couple of years [...] and when there was an opportunity for my husband to get an employment back in {name of the area}, we moved back. [...] When we came back, we had the opportunity to buy the property we are now in, which was where my grandparents had lived. (Diane, 71)

For Diane, the familiar landscape and the buildings where she and her kin had lived for generations, helped to construct and maintain her position as a respected community member, and supported her ongoing participation in the community life. Her 'social insidersness' and the sense of belonging were derived through her connections and involvement with the local people and the local events. Diane discussed how her social networks grew over time and how she proactively built her social network within the local community:

I am warden of the local church now [...]. So, you know, if there's an event going on, I would tend to know, usually, the people, you know [...]. Particularly funerals, actually, because when there's a funeral, you tend to have quite a large attendance, compared to your normal Sunday attendance. And I try hard to, sort of, you know, understand how the family would be without, whether it's a mother or father, or a grandparent, and you realise how it affects other family members. (Diane, 71)

For Beth, a newcomer in the village, the sense of belonging to the community was not derived from her 'birth right'. She and her husband moved into the area permanently in 2000, and were involved in community activities from as early as 1977. Beth described a different experience of integrating into the village life:

We've been coming down to {name of the area} previously for holidays before we bought the house. And then we spent weekends renovating the house, pulling it down and building it up. So we got to know a lot of people within the village during that period. And, of course, if there was anything in the Hall, the community, we would always join in, so by the time we came to live here in 2000, which was when {name of husband} fully retired, we already knew a lot of people. We already had a house here (.) lots of villagers been in for a chat and so on. The transition was perfectly obvious, perfectly smooth. (Beth, 76)

Diane's and Beth's comments support the argument that 'engagement in volunteer activities can provide wonderful opportunities for retirement in-migrants to develop links

to their new communities or for long-standing residents to give back to communities that have been supportive to them' (Fast & Gierveld 2008, p.63). This argument is also interesting to reflect on in the context of Mary's and Ben's experiences, a couple who moved into the village 25 years ago in search of a restful retirement. Both identified themselves as outsiders who never fitted and felt that they did not belong to the community. In her interview Mary explained:

I mean, don't get me wrong, it's a lovely place to live, really is, in the summer. But in winter we only see {name} and {name}. You know, they come and see us, but otherwise we don't see anybody. Unless you see your mate. And do not come and visit people. (Mary, 71)

In a similar vein, reflecting on how he integrated into the community, Ben admitted: 'Not very well really. We are loners, me and Mary, you know. The villagers wouldn't let you in. They talk to you, but wouldn't let you in, and we've been here twenty, twenty-five years.' Answering my question how he felt about this, Ben tried to put on a brave face: 'I don't give a sod ((laugh)). We've got each other. That's the main thing.' I should point out that the couple did very little to engage with the community and contribute to the local causes, although Ben played bowls with the villagers when he was younger (as discussed in Section 6.4). What emerged from the interviews and observations during my fieldwork is that Mary and Ben did very little to get 'entrenched in the rural way of communal living' (Dowds 2016, p.134).

Other villagers mentioned that the couple came across as rather rude and unsociable, and were known to actively sabotage some of the local initiatives, including renovation of the Village Hall and the painting the yellow lines on the road to prevent unauthorised parking, claiming that it would spoil the natural beauty of the village. Both never contributed to any local causes or events, and when asked if she knew anyone who was involved in local activities, Mary seemed to have a very vague idea as to what was going on in the village:

Well, there's {name of a woman} on that side ((of the road)), then there's one, up the top here, what's her name, {name of a woman}. They do a lot. Lot of people do lots of different things. (Mary, 71)

Equally, the couple had very little interaction with their neighbours:

I have less to do with my neighbour here than I do with anybody else. But only see her when she is up in the garden. [...] I haven't seen her since Christmas. I haven't spoken to her since Christmas. (Mary, 71)

Describing her experiences of living in the community, Mary sounded resentful about the exclusiveness of the longer-standing residents: 'You know, these people, and there's a hell of a lot of people that are related down here. And they used to be more fond of each other.' Importantly, she also felt unwelcome by newcomers from other social groups, who lived on the 'affluent' side of the village, and felt that they monopolised the social life in the village: 'And now it's all down the other side now. It's a shame. Now it's a bit (.) cliquy.' Although the couple's experiences of communal living are on the far side of the range, they tie in with Neal and Walter's argument that the countryside can be 'a highly contested and heterogeneous site containing a range of socio-economic tensions, needs, socio-cultural exclusions and contradictions' (2008b, p.280). Also, they lend weight to Curry's idea that 'lifestyles increasingly separate people who live in the same community' (2012, p.2).

For Mary, being in physical proximity with others did not translate into the sense of belonging to the community. Without sharing collective experiences and associated symbolic meanings, she was never able to truly relate to the village and its social life. In contrast, people with a strong communal ethos, both longer-standing residents and newcomers had a sense of shared identity rooted in spatial and emotional ties with the place and in the shared purpose and experiences, such as renovation of the Village Hall or upkeep of the church. This supports the idea that building and maintaining social infrastructure and relationships in a community takes time and effort (Heatwole Shank & Cutchin 2016). People who were prepared to invest their time and energy into social relationships in their younger years were able to benefit from a feeling of living in a friendly and supportive community in later life.

Beth's, Mary's and Ben's accounts illustrate the different experiences of settling into the social life of the village and supports Loader et al.'s argument that 'geographical location does not naturally lead to social relations and what is of interest are the circumstances which produce such a variety of strong, weak or non-existent social network' (2000, p.84). The comments from insiders like Diane, and outsiders, both 'excluded' like Mary and Ben, and 'included' like Beth, suggest that people's experiences of communal living are shaped through participation in collective actions. Also, they offer validity to Loader

at al.'s argument that 'even the most idyllic country village setting may be perceived quite differently by some of those who are its inhabitants' (2000, p.84).

7.6. The use of ICT for local causes and volunteering

As discussed in Section 7.3, local meanings formed a foundation for purposeful actions for the furtherance of local causes, and commitment to the common good brought together truly local people and newcomers. Furthermore, the use of ICTs was usually prompted by a very specific and pragmatic purpose. For instance, the most recent (as of the time of writing) entry on the news section of the village website invites people to join a communal beach clean-up organised by the community council. Another recent entry on the website invited people to join the History Group to tidy up the cemetery and get rid of shrubs, suckers and weeds. These examples lend weight to Loader et al.'s argument that ICTs are 'subject to social shaping and as such lend themselves to the achievement of a variety of possible outcomes' (2000, p.92) and that ICTs play a facilitating role to an 'enhancement of existing social and political activity and interaction' (*ibid.* p.94).

The participants in my project demonstrated that they needed reasons for continued engagement with ICTs, such as creating posters for the Dramatic Club or sending minutes of the WI meetings or advertising fundraising events on social media. The furtherance of the local causes that have significant symbolic meaning was one of the reasons for older people in the community to engage with ICTs. The Facebook page of Gordon, the village's quiz master, provides an interesting insight of how the use of ICTs is linked to the local causes and anchored in shared activities. After his wife passed away, Gordon was seeking distraction to cope with grief, and found consolation in joining community groups in various capacities, including the History Group's treasurer and the Dramatic Club member. In 2015 Gordon created a Facebook post with the aim to 'see if there is any interest in getting together to talk about thoughts and ideas that might work to the advantage of others and ourselves.'

It is interesting to note that Gordon explicitly targeted the locals, which he described as 'a wonderful community with such great folk and friends', and suggested that 'it is more of a community effort' and that villagers can 'pull together to raise money' which he thought would result 'in a feeling of wellbeing and the making of friends with a common aim and last but not least a basis of a village social life.' It needs to be mentioned that

apart from the occasional re-posting of nation-wide fundraising initiatives, such as Wales Air Ambulance or Pembrokeshire Young Carers (and even more occasionally, wishing people a happy birthday and posting photos of his dog), Gordon's use of Facebook was linked to the local causes and community practices. Most notably, it was raising money and reaching out to local people and encouraging them to come together. In particular, Gordon used his Facebook page to revive a long-dormant community practice, the quiz nights.

As discussed in Section 6.3.3, the Sailing Club café was re-purposed and re-imagined as a communal place in 2015, and was used for events other than structured community group meetings, which gravitated to the Village Hall. Quiz nights became one of the more informal community practices that took root in the café, and Gordon was the driving force behind it. During the two years while the café was open, Gordon organised numerous successful quiz nights, raising money for local causes and bringing together villagers from different community groups and walks of life. As discussed in Section 5.2.3, rather than using standard quiz questions, Gordon prepared questions that were specific to the area or the village, such as the name of the ship that went aground in the bay, or the name of now extinct pubs in the village. The quiz nights are yet another example of a geographically embedded practice that had symbolic links and anchorage in the locality, meaning that it endured in the community.

Importantly, Facebook posts of older people in my project usually invoked local knowledge, and never attempted to create online communities. They seemed quite disappointed by the shallowness of Internet connections. Dissatisfaction with her online experiences was evident from Emma's comments:

Unfortunately, most social media 'friends' aren't true friends. They will send you a 'like' here and there, but in reality they do not take time to read your status if they see it's lengthy. More than half will stop reading right here, or have already scrolled on to the next post on their page. [...] Most people will say, 'If you need anything, don't hesitate to call me, I'll be there to help you' but will they? (Emma, 65)

This suggests that Emma did not believe that social networking sites, such as Facebook, facilitated the forming of social bonds, and her comments offer an interesting perspective to Fernback's study where the author concludes that 'online social relations provide opportunities to explore new avenues of community-building, but few have committed

deeply enough to the endeavour to move beyond that metaphor' (2007, p.63). Also, this ties in with Lambert's (2013) discussion of 'prosthetic' intimacy as opposed to the more natural, 'symbiotic' intimacy, which is produced from interacting with close friends. Importantly, Emma used her Facebook page to communicate with the locals rather than keep in touch with people further afield, for example inviting villagers to watch a rugby match together in the Sailing Club café (discussed in Section 5.2.3). The digital content that she produced can be viewed as a manifestation of community practices, and as a process of production of collective identity.

Data from this study suggest that collective identity and sense of belonging to the community is produced and sustained through the process of recurring social interactions, which most commonly manifest themselves in volunteering, which is structured around local causes. This provides an interesting contrast to the ideas that community as a social construct is becoming imagined rather than place-based. For people in my project, involvement with the community activities seemed to be framed by the sense of place. Meanings ascribed to the place were translated into communal actions, thus shaping collective identity of the village. Local causes and volunteering around local landmarks acted as community glue for people in the village and contributed to the process of engaging with ICTs. However, I found no evidence that ICTs created new community structures.

It seems fair to say that ICTs can, to an extent, help foster a sense of collective identity through local heritage and communal events facilitated by ICTs, such as the community website or Facebook pages of local groups, businesses and people's personal pages. It needs to be mentioned, however, that the community does not seem to have an articulated or coherent image that it presents to the world. Rather, it is a mishmash of various representations by various groups, such as History Group, or the local artists, whose works help shape the community image (both off-line, in the form of Neil's art on the waterfront and online, on the artists' Facebook pages). Symbolic interactionism suggests the existence of multiple identities within the same community, and in my study I found that the village's identity is also multi-faceted, fluid, co-constructed and re-imagined by its residents.

Data collected throughout fieldwork renders validity to Cohen's assertion that the idea of community is symbolic, and has 'eloquent but different meanings for its various users'

(1985, p.19). Digital media produced by the villagers and community groups can be regarded as one of the forms of ‘intangible’ manifestation of community practices, and as a process of production of collective identity. Drawing on Neal and Walters’ (2008b; 2006) discussion of the routine practices and performances of community-making, I explored if ‘intangible’ digital technologies played a role in creating ‘more tangible and more concrete structures of community feeling’ (2008b, p.282). Also, I was interested if ICTs can be used to ‘bridge social divisions and self-consciously create an online cohesive community presence’ (Wallace et al. 2017, p.433), however, I found little evidence to support this.

Participants did not regard cyberspace as a public space, and ICTs were generally viewed as tools that had the potential to enhance the existing, geographically embedded practices, and their usefulness was understood by the interviewees in the context of their local social interactions. Technologies were not regarded as a panacea for local issues, and ICTs alone did not constitute or propel community actions. Data from my fieldwork indicate that the use of ICTs reflected the existing community structures and relations, and there is no evidence to suggest that older people used ICTs to form online communities within the village. Although interviewees articulated clear opinions that technologies could benefit the community engagement, it was clear that they viewed ICTs as tools for collective pragmatic actions rather than a force that shapes community. ICTs were generally regarded as means to enhance their volunteering efforts, and volunteering was centred around local landmarks and local causes.

7.7. Summary

This chapter discussed the potential of ICTs to enhance the existing, geographically embedded practices, and their usefulness in the context of local social interactions drawing on the symbolic interactionist understanding of community-building. I explored how community practices are geographically embedded and developed by community members, and how ideas about ICTs contribution to community-building meet actual practices in a particular location. Data from this study do not support the idea that technologies in isolation can create communal bonds or can be a source of community engagement in later life. Instead, the data suggest that for older people, community continues to be defined by the everyday ‘physical’ interactions, which can be facilitated by digital technologies.

In the context of the retirement village, the communal initiatives proved to be related to the place and local symbols, and the efforts around the common good were geographically embedded. Community initiatives such as the refurbishment of the Village Hall, restoration of the kiln, repair of the cemetery wall etc. always required face-to-face interaction and these shared activities centred around local landmarks. Also, local meanings formed a foundation for purposeful actions for the furtherance of local causes, be it the Dramatic Club or the Community Council. Looking back at the community initiatives that took place over the years, I suggest that to be successful, they needed to be framed by the sense of place.

Initiatives that did not have proper 'anchorage' or symbolic meaning in the community, had little chance of becoming a lasting community practice. In contrast, practices and groups with a stronger association with the locality and its symbols, such as beach cleans, the Sailing Club or the History Group persisted. Volunteering around local landmarks and local causes acted as community glue for older people in the village. Their sense of belonging in the community and the place was linked to a commitment to the common good, although longer-standing residents and newcomers contributed to the common good in different ways; the latter tended to engage in more structured volunteering, and the former tended to contribute on a one-off basis.

The village, however, is a far cry from the idyllic image of a close-knit rural community, and there are certain rifts and tensions therein. The most noticeable dividing line in the village is between the community-minded people and people who tend to be more private. Community-minded people are not necessarily newcomers, and longer-standing residents are not always community activists. For some villagers being in physical proximity with others did not translate into the sense of belonging to the community, and without sharing collective experiences and associated symbolic meanings, they never truly related to the village and its social life. In contrast, people with a strong communal ethos, longer-standing residents and newcomers alike, had a sense of shared identity rooted in spatial and emotional ties with the place and in the shared purpose and experiences.

Local meanings formed a foundation for purposeful actions, and commitment to the common good brought people together. The furtherance of local causes that have significant symbolic meaning was one of the reasons for older people in the community to engage with ICTs, and their involvement with the community activities was framed by

the sense of place. Furthermore, the use of ICTs was usually associated with a very place-specific purpose. However, I found no evidence that ICTs created new community structures. Although interviewees articulated clear opinions that technologies could benefit community engagement, it was clear that they viewed ICTs as tools for collective pragmatic actions rather than a force that shapes community.

CHAPTER 8. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

8.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter discusses the findings of this study in relation to the existing literature and debates around the use of ICTs and community-building in later life. As outlined in Section 1.1, this project was informed by the following research questions: ‘What is the role of ICTs in defining and maintaining community for people in later life?’ and ‘How does engagement with ICTs in later life shape the construction of collective identities?’ I was particularly interested in exploring how ideas about the contribution of ICTs to community-building meet the actual practices in a particular location with a high ratio of older people, and what these practices look like. As is discussed more fully below, there are parallels and divergencies between the findings of this study and the prevalent perceptions and discourses on the utility of ICTs in old age.

8.2. Discussion

Technological advances and their potential to change people’s lives have always been hyped up: steam power, telegraph, cars and telephone are just a few examples of such ‘neophilia’ (Edgerton 2011). Equally, the debates about the role of technologies in defining community are hardly new, as are speculations that technological advances can revolutionise the way people interact with each other. To illustrate, in the 20th century, when the use of automobiles became commonplace, some believed that they had the potential to facilitate the creation of ‘intentional’ – or interest-based communities – in favour of more traditional place-based ones (Zablocki 1971, p.294). Ideas about the community-defining potential of automobiles proved largely unfounded, as did claims that the telephone, the first person-to-person electronic communication technology⁸², would radically change social relations (Fischer 1997). The impact of telephones on community patterns was modest at best and community patterns proved to be ‘remarkably resilient to technological change’ (*ibid.* p.116).

⁸² Another early electronic communication technology, the telegraph, required an intermediary.

More recently, digital technologies have been professed to transform societal interactions and society itself. For decades now, policymakers have heralded the potential of ICTs to revitalise civic participation and forge communities (Office of the e-Envoy 2001; Cabinet Office 2005; BERR 2009; National Audit Service 2011; Cabinet Office 2013). Much of my interest in the topic arose from the conjecture that ICTs can play a transformative role in communities and the way people interact with each other. In my project I set out to explore how people from the older generation, who were not born ‘digital natives’ and were not familiar with ICTs from an early age, use new technologies in their daily lives, and whether ICTs can indeed revolutionise social participation in later life. Originally, my interest in how new technologies are used in old age was underpinned by the ‘empowered user’ discourse, which suggests that ICTs can improve the welfare for the ageing population, provide access to social services, government agencies, enable independent living and, importantly, enhance community participation of older people (Age UK 2015; Heinz 2013; Park 2012; Dahmen & Cozma 2009).

Within this discourse, those less able or willing to adopt ICTs, most notably older people, are branded as ‘digital outcasts’, ‘digital immigrants’, ‘truly disconnected’, ‘grey gap’, ‘can-nots’ etc. as opposed to computer-savvy ‘netizens’, ‘digital natives’; in other words, successful ICT users (Gorard & Selwyn 2008). Whilst reviewing the literature on the relation between old age and technology, I discovered that older people’s use of ICTs is generally viewed from two perspectives, either the ‘enabling potential’ of digital technologies, once the obstacles to use them have been overcome, or their ‘dividing potential’. The works that draw on the ‘enabling’ approach tend to include a problem-solution narrative, where technologies are seen as a fix or remedy to social problems, and studies of the ‘dividing potential’ variety tend to view older people as marginalised and disenfranchised, in other words, on the ‘wrong side’ of the digital divide.

Overall, the review of literature suggests that older people are perceived as a homogeneous group, and many studies draw on facile dichotomous division between older users and non-users – the latter viewed as a marginalised group in need of ‘digital rescue’. Furthermore, in most studies the use of ICTs by older people is explored as an abstract social phenomenon rather than the lived experience, and I found very few works that provide open and reflexive accounts of lived practices of older people in specific local contexts. My study highlights that the dichotomous approach in the literature that pigeonholes older people into users and non-users, ignores the diversity of their attitudes

to and experiences of ICTs. The more time I spent with older people in my fieldwork, the clearer I could see that the stereotypes about their general digital illiteracy are largely unfounded.

As discussed in Chapter Three and Chapter Five, people in my project had different levels of engagement with ICTs throughout their lives, ranging from Trevor (66), who made a living as an IT professional, to Ben (81), who never sent a text or pressed a computer button in his life. Some of my interviewees were people once enthusiastic about computing and ICTs, but who grew disillusioned with information technologies and weary of the pervasive nature of social media. I am thinking particularly of Mike (68), who was at the forefront of the digital revolution in universities, but turned into a self-professed ‘computer luddite’. Also among my participants were people like Emma (65), who used Facebook regularly despite bemoaning the shallowness of online interactions, and people like Elizabeth (74) who steadfastly avoided social media, but was otherwise quite IT-savvy.

Importantly, people who thought of themselves as computer-illiterate, like Mary (71) and Gareth (68), were in reality quite adept with a wide range of technologies, such as car navigation systems, digital cameras, digital televisions, etc. Also, there were people like Beth (76) who was a reluctant, albeit rather competent, computer user, who would only turn to ICTs in time of need. The diversity and nuanced nature of people’s engagement with ICTs suggest that statistical surveys and qualitative studies may not always reflect the actual IT competence of older people, which can only be established through an in-depth exploration of people’s particular circumstances. Having created a diverse sample of people with a varying range of IT expertise in this study, I can safely say that even those who claimed to have no knowledge of computers and digital technologies, were exposed to and adopted ICTs into their daily lives. The findings of this study do not support the widely held perception in the literature that older people are generally apathetic about technology and more likely to have technophobia, rather, their use of ICTs is very contextual and situational.

Another generally unchallenged assumption in the literature is that digital technologies can boost interaction and enhance social relationships in later life. These ideas are popular with policymakers, who view ICTs as a means of re-establishing community social structures, bridging social divisions, promoting independence and delaying

institutionalisation of older people. This resulted in a number of well-intentioned but largely untenable initiatives to encourage older people to use ICTs for social engagement and in community development. As discussed in Chapter Two, ageing rural demographics have been behind many initiatives to roll out ICTs in the countryside, under the assumption that digital engagement could be of particular value in rural areas, which are most affected by demographic ageing, and where social participation for older people can be laden with difficulties.

As my project progressed from desk research to immersing myself in fieldwork, I became increasingly aware of the mismatch between commonly held perceptions and actual experiences of the older people in my project. The more time I spent with them in the course of my fieldwork, the clearer I could see that the ideas about the potential of ICTs to revitalise waning community participation and bridging social divisions are largely unfounded. Without inferring that digital technologies cannot encourage the forming of social bonds in the countryside, in this study I found little evidence that the participants' social engagement was boosted by ICTs. As discussed in detail in Chapter Seven, for older people in my project, community was defined by the everyday 'physical' interactions, which were, to an extent, mediated by digital technologies, most notably email.

As demonstrated in Section 5.3, the pattern of using email as a convenience or a shortcut was strong and consistent across community groups in the village. This concurs with a more general trend in email use among senior Internet users, which was estimated to be 94 per cent, similar to the level of use by employed people and students, at 99 and 100 per cent, respectively (Dutton & Blank 2011). What emerged from the data, was that interviewees in this study found email to have the potential to facilitate community activities, although it was viewed as useful if aligned with the communication infrastructure and networks that already existed in the village. Also, it transpired that the meanings ascribed to electronic messages were quite similar to traditional paper ones, and email seemed to appeal to interviewees because of the similarity with writing letters by hand. Roger (77), for instance, did not see much difference between sending an email to his neighbour and delivering a printed version of the same email in person.

Email appealed to participants in my project because of the controlled and meaningful way they could use it to communicate and exchange information between themselves,

without sharing it with ‘the whole Internet’ through social networking sites such as Facebook. As discussed in Chapter Two, the commonly held perception in the literature is that ICTs, including social media and social networks, would be a panacea for older people in tackling loneliness and isolation and becoming more connected with the community. In my study, with few exceptions, interviewees who had Facebook accounts, did not use them regularly and shared no personal information there. I found no evidence to suggest that older people in the village were interested in investing their time and effort into creating online communities, on Facebook or other online platforms, localised or otherwise. This concurs with Burke et al.’s (2011) study of the relationship between age and use of social networks, which found that for older people establishing new contacts seemed unattractive, which is one of the reasons for not using Facebook.

In my project, when participants used online tools, such as Facebook or the community website, it was usually to supplement the existing off-line initiatives and activities, e.g. the Community Council, the WI, fundraising, beach cleans etc. This is consistent with Harley et al.’s argument that older people tend to favour the existing off-line contacts in the online world, and that ‘much of the activity through Facebook extended local connections by engaging in interactions relating to real world spaces and places’ (2014, p.48). In my study this was best exemplified by Gordon’s (80) use of Facebook to encourage the villagers to join quiz nights or Emma’s (65) post, where she invited people to watch a rugby match together in the Yacht Club café. These examples align closely with Harley et al.’s (2014) conclusion that older people view online tools as means of sustaining existing relations in the local area rather than making new online contacts.

The overarching aim of this thesis was to explore the role of ICTs in defining and maintaining community for people in later life. Data from this research suggest that in the context of the retirement village, cyberspace did not serve as a public space, and ICTs did not create new community structures. There is no evidence to infer that people used new technologies to form online communities within the village or externally. The use of ICTs reflected the existing community structures and relations, rather than created or encouraged new ones. Importantly, digital technologies were appropriated, re-imagined and re-purposed to reflect people’s aspirations and existing relationships and practices. These findings diverge from the common notion that ICTs can enable older people to form meaningful social bonds, connect with the community and thus benefit from participating in communal life. Instead, I found that ICTs were generally used to better

organise the existing relationships rather than pursue new ones. Whilst acknowledging that ICTs can speed communications, people in my project used them to facilitate face-to-face communications within the existing networks.

The other research question underpinning this study was to explore how engagement with ICTs in later life might shape the construction of collective identities. I found that collective identities were anchored in interaction and shared activities within a particular locality. This provides an interesting perspective to Tait et al.'s (2013) and Wallace et al.'s (2017) ideas that place identities can be increasingly centred around online or digital resources. Tait et al. (2013) in particular argue that cultural heritage is linked to construction of place identities, and digital technologies have been increasingly important in this domain. In my study, the village heritage was cultivated, curated and preserved by the members of the History Group, which ran the heritage centre and maintained the village archive. As discussed in Section 6.3.5, the group was reluctant to fully digitally engage with the outside world and was determined to keep things local, most importantly, the village archive which was effectively 'ring-fenced' from outsiders by the heritage centre policies.

Importantly, individual characteristics of the group members, such as age, education and other social factors had a significant bearing on the localised heritage and place identity produced through their efforts. The personalities of the history enthusiasts and archivists defined how the village was presented to the outside world through the heritage centre and the History Group website. I found that the creation of the heritage and place identity could be highly subjective and partial and relied on the judgement of the people who ran the heritage initiative in the village. It became apparent throughout my fieldwork that the 'official' heritage produced by the History Group was not necessarily representative of the community or reflected the place identity. As discussed in Section 6.3.5, other villagers came up with their own alternative vision of the village heritage, which offers an interesting perspective on Tait et al.'s argument that ICTs can facilitate 'co-production of heritage by a wide range of people' (2013, p.565).

Symbolic interactionism suggests the existence of multiple identities within the same community, and in my study the village's identity was also multi-faceted, fluid, co-constructed and re-imagined by its residents. Lhermitte (2000) theorises that activities based on elements from history or geography, help create an identity for the locality.

Being a social construct, localised identities have been explained in cultural terms (by referring to landscapes, or local music bands), or identified with economic activities present in the area (e.g. farming), or associated with local heritage (local history or 'authentic' local products) (for discussion see Haartsen et al. 2002). In this study, it was clear that identities were embedded in discourses and needed to be considered as a process rather than 'natural' or 'objective' characteristics of the area. Collective identity and sense of belonging with the community was produced and sustained through the process of recurring social interactions which most commonly manifested themselves in volunteering, which was structured around local causes.

This provides an interesting contrast to the ideas that community as a social construct is becoming imagined rather than place-based. In this study I found that involvement with the community activities was framed by the sense of place, and local causes and volunteering around local landmarks acted as community glue for people in the village. Meanings ascribed by people to their place were translated into communal actions, thus shaping collective identity of the village. In symbolic interactionist understanding of community, it is its individual members and how they construct meaning, that leads to action, in this particular village, volunteering or community governance. The mundane 'hands-on' aspects of creation of community and geographically embedded communal actions brought people from different backgrounds together, shaping the collective identity of the village. Importantly, local causes and volunteering around local landmarks contributed to the process of engaging with ICTs.

What emerged from this study is that construction and co-production of collective identities was embedded in everyday interactions between individuals, groups, symbols and the environment. Data from interviews suggest a strong association between locality and socialisation patterns, which is in line with some studies in rural sociology, in particular, Neal and Walters' (2008a) work on rural belonging, where sociality was linked to rural environment and spaces. For participants in my study, locality was important in creating meanings about the community, and was linked to how people perceived themselves and to how they co-constructed localised shared identities. Attachment to place was a recurring theme in interviews, and people tended to speak about their social life as spatially defined. Local landmarks, such as the waterfront or the Village Hall had an enduring value and meaning to interviewees and were the places where community-making practices were most visible.

As discussed in Chapter Six, living by and from the sea has always been part of the village identity, and the seafaring heritage of the village manifests itself through sea-related community events, e.g. the blessing of the boats, beach cleans, sponsored beach walks etc. The imagery of the beach, the surrounding buildings, including the Village Hall, can be found on most local websites and other media related to the village. The importance of the 'nautical' aspect of the village was also evident from the imagery on the Facebook pages of the local artists. This supports the perception in the literature that living beside particular landmarks plays a role in maintaining the localised shared identities and the sense of belonging with the local community. Importantly, as the people who used to own boats and participated in seafaring activities grew older and more frail, the village's reputation as a haven for maritime enthusiasts has waned.

The waning of the 'physical' community practices such as water sports, regattas and dinghy races and their replacement with less strenuous 'sit-down' pursuits was traceable in the village website as discussed in Chapter Six, as some 'physical' community groups, such as the Bowls Club and the Table Tennis Group, became dormant and other community practices, such as the Film Club or the History Group became more prominent. This indicates that age influences the ways of being 'out and about' in the village, and that the activity patterns are governed by people's declining health, mobility being one of the most important factors. The dying out of some community practices and emergence of others was linked to the growing popularity of the Village Hall and (now closed) Sailing Club café as places that accommodated the age and the declining health of the residents. The Hall and the café were the places that enabled recurring interactions of older people in the village, that has long lost its shop, post office and other community hubs, thus contributing to co-production of the place identity.

With seafaring in decline, the village's identity has evolved over time from a water sports haven to a peaceful retirement refuge, with 'less physical' elements of the shared localised identity becoming more prominent. Such symbolic events as fairs, carnivals, regattas and dinghy races were gradually replaced with 'less physical' community practices, and this evolution was reflected in cyberspace, as discussed in Chapter Six. Evidence from interviews suggests that, in creating new meanings about community, older people in my project increasingly constructed it as a place where engagement could be facilitated by affordances of technologies. Their vision of community and understanding of technology translated into communal actions, whereupon technologies were getting gradually

entrenched in the existing social network. The participants in my project clearly demonstrated that their community is about the place and its people, and ICTs were increasingly becoming part of the place. However, this study produced very little evidence that engagement with ICTs might shape the construction of collective identities. Rather, it was that the process of the co-construction, most notably, volunteering around local causes, that gave meaning and defined the use of ICTs for them.

Therefore, ideas about the potential of ICTs to revitalise waning social participation and create new communal bonds in later life were not supported by this study. I found that older people generally used new technologies to better organise their existing relationships rather than to pursue new ones. Whilst acknowledging that ICTs could speed up communications, participants used them to facilitate face-to-face communications within the existing localised networks. Without suggesting that digital technologies cannot foster meaningful social relations, I argue that ICTs do not necessarily empower older people or revitalise community engagement in later life. I found little evidence that technologies that were heralded at the turn of century as ‘providing a basis for a resurgence of community life’ (Loader et al. 2000, p.85) were of much significance for people in my project. Equally scarce is any evidence to support claims of cyber visionaries such as Barlow (1996) about how new media can radically change community development.

My research shows that for older people, ICTs are only useful if embedded in the fabric of the community. I found that new technologies were appropriated, re-imagined and re-purposed to reflect people’s aspirations and the existing community structures. The popular ‘empowered user’ discourse appears to have little relevance to the day-to-day lives of older people, and those who chose not to use digital technologies cannot by default be viewed as disempowered or deficient. My study shows that concerns about non-use of ICTs in later life are rather exaggerated, as are claims that ICTs can foster community engagement. I argue that before any more costly initiatives aimed to tackle the assumed digital illiteracy or improve the well-being of older people are rolled out, we need to get a better understanding what ICTs can and cannot do for them and, how and why older people choose to use or not use digital technologies. It is my strong belief that sweeping generalisations about use of ICTs in old age need to make way for empirical and reflexive accounts of real people’s experiences.

8.3. Contribution to knowledge

My study makes a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge about later life and technology, which looks at the use of ICTs by older people from a micro-perspective made possible by ethnographic and narrative methods. It offers an in-depth understanding of the role of ICTs in community-building in later life, which accounts for people's personal experiences and the social context. I believe that my thesis complements and extends the existing academic research on the use of technologies by older people by providing a nuanced view of the varied and often unexpected ways ICTs are used in the community-building context, and by challenging widely held perceptions about the utility of digital technologies.

This nuanced view was made possible by the flexible research design – an ethnographic study with some elements of case study, such as interviewing and documentary analysis. The flexible nature of the research design allowed more freedom in collecting data as my project progressed and evolved, and enabled insights about the role of ICTs in community-building in later life. In a largely unexplored domain, like the use of digital technologies by older people in rural communities, in-depth studies are essential, and production of knowledge cannot rely exclusively on large-scale statistical surveys. In this study, ethnographic and narrative methods offered unique opportunities to explore and experience the local practices and dynamics of the village life 'from within' and enabled an in-depth exploration of how 'people live, experience and make sense of their world' (Robson 2002, p.89).

To capture and interpret the diverse and nuanced facets of individual and community life I spent considerable time observing the practices and exploring the experiences of real people, looking outward from the particular community to wider issues. The small scale of this research is both its strength and its limitation. On the one hand, the use of ethnography and case studies as research methods is not unproblematic, and there are criticisms aimed at whether they can legitimately represent social reality (Hammersley 1992, p.2; Carr & Kemmis 1986) (discussed in Section 3.4). I fully appreciate that my findings may not reflect the experience of people in different contexts. However, on the other hand, I was able to explore the phenomenon within its real-life context and collect rich data through everyday interaction with people in the village. This would have been

impossible in a large-scale study, which normally implies collecting data on pre-defined categories or variables.

I am confident that the insights produced in my small-scale study will contribute to the understanding of the relation between old age and technology. I aimed to look beyond conceptions that tend to pigeonhole older people as ‘digital outcasts’ or hail ICTs as a panacea for age-related issues, and my research will inform future initiatives aimed at encouraging digital participation of older people, and help shift the focus from purely technical aspects, e.g. access to broadband or making interfaces more user-friendly, to considering what technologies can actually do for older people.

Without suggesting that the study village is representative of other rural communities, it shares many characteristics and problems with similar sized settlements in the UK, and even more so in Wales. The proportion of older people in Wales is predicted to grow at a faster rate than the national average (Watt & Roberts 2016). Therefore, it seems fair to assume that more and more rural settlements will be accommodating older people, eventually turning into ‘naturally occurring retirement communities’ (Prosper 2011) similar to the village where I conducted my fieldwork. With this in mind, the methods and findings of my study, without making overt generalisations, may be transferrable to other ageing communities.

For instance, programmes around community-building in rural areas may need to shift focus from creating new initiatives to providing support to existing ones with strong association with local causes. Also, academic endeavours such as Meeteetse (Brunette et al. 2005) discussed in Section 2.8 may need to pay more attention to their sustainability, once researchers withdraw from the research site, leaving behind sophisticated equipment which requires technical expertise to maintain and operate. My research shows that to be sustainable, initiatives aimed at improving social connectivity need to be linked to local causes with strong symbolic meaning for the residents and properly embedded in the community. Otherwise, they may never take off or become dormant due to their limited relevance to older volunteers who are often involved in multiple projects.

Importantly, in my project it became apparent that initiatives which rely on the efforts and dedication of older community activists often have no ‘succession planning’ in place. This is particularly true for local heritage and archiving initiatives, implying that their

sustainability can be easily compromised. Therefore, I believe that it is important to encourage local heritage enthusiasts to get their archives digitised and shared online. This can be achieved in collaboration with such organisations as Scran and UK Culture Grid, which help history groups across the UK to better organise their materials. It may be beneficial to provide local archivists with training on how to upload and manage their collections online and to advise them on best practices in curating community archives. This may contribute to the preservation of local heritage and ensure continuity and sustainability of the initiatives.

Furthermore, findings from my study may prove useful for shaping policies around volunteering and civic engagement. I found that in a small rural community older people tend to rely on hyper-local horizontal ties to get things done, and overlook the possibilities offered by digital technologies, such as social media, for furthering their local causes, e.g. fundraising. Initiatives aimed at helping local initiatives by older residents may need to focus on showcasing how ICTs may help raise funds or get a broader media coverage. With this in mind, it might be useful to roll out regular ‘digital surgeries’ in remote communities, where people can get advice from visiting IT experts on how to solve their immediate IT needs, e.g. create a ‘fundraising package’, including promotion on Facebook, Twitter, specialised fundraising websites, or a put together a poster for a local theatre performance or a slideshow for a local history talk.

Importantly, findings from my study indicate that peer-to-peer learning, particularly linked to community-building efforts, has a beneficial effect on social engagement. Drawing on the local expertise, e.g. IT knowledge of computer-savvy people in the village, has the potential to maintain local social networks and create new communal practices as discussed in Section 5.2.3. Such ‘bonding’ activities need not be limited to IT training, as demonstrated in Section 6.3.8 in the discussion of how theatre-making can bring otherwise disparate older people in the community together. Enhanced social cohesion in rural ageing communities can be achieved by promoting peer-to-peer learning which taps into the available expertise of local people without relying on outside resources.

Also, my study showed that older people understood the usefulness of ICTs in the context of their social interactions, which were generally centred around local landmarks and their upkeep. Therefore, initiatives aimed at increasing social cohesion in communities may

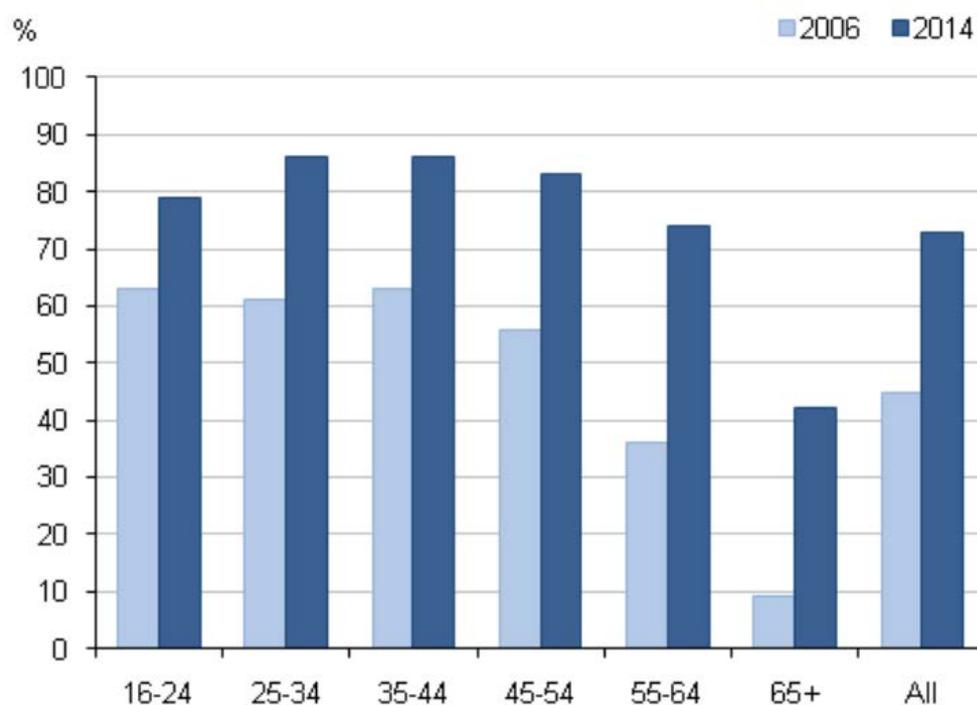
need to ‘work backwards’ – first identifying the landmarks, objects or events with a strong symbolic meaning to the residents and then shaping interventions, including those involving ICTs, around them. Such an approach may provide sufficient motivation for people in communities to join the local causes and engage with ICTs to implement or promote them further afield. Having said this, I am not suggesting that findings from this study are directly applicable to other settings, and therefore more research is needed to establish their transferability.

Thinking ahead, the avenue for future research could involve a comparative study of community-building practices in rural and urban areas, or of several similar sized rural communities, or a collaborative study across many cultures worldwide. It is very important that policies around promoting ICTs as a tool of inclusion in later life, reflect older people’s interests and respond to their needs, rather than politicians’ or academics’ ideas of what they might be. Finally, I believe that digital inclusion initiatives for older people in the UK and worldwide will benefit from seeing ICTs as the means to an end, and not the end in itself.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

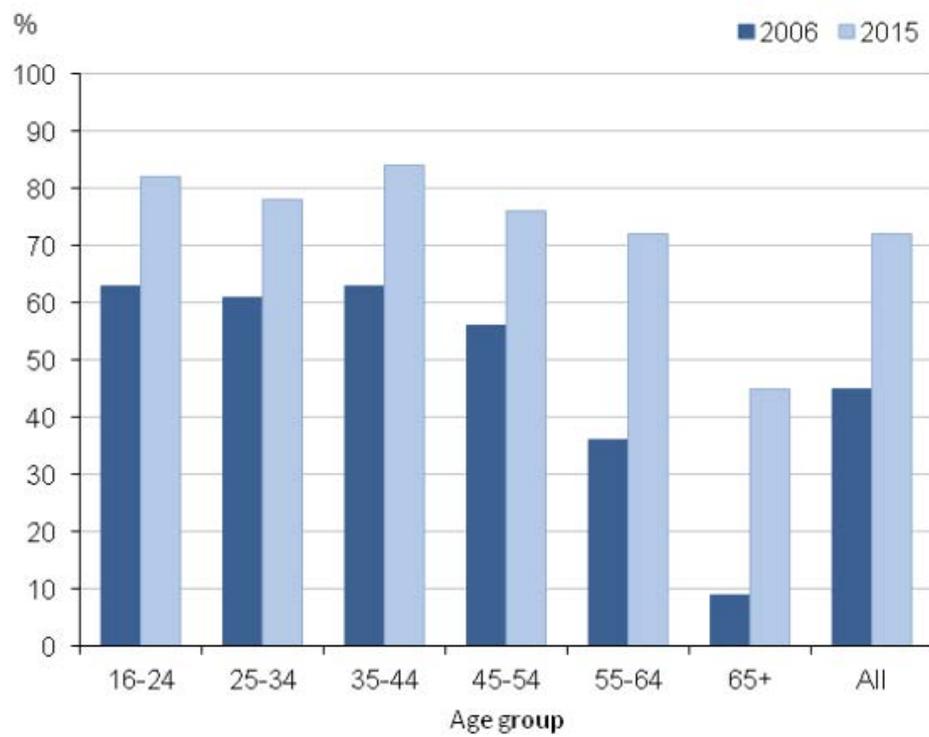
Daily computer use by age group, 2006 and 2014 (Office for National Statistics)



Source: (ONS 2014)

Appendix 2

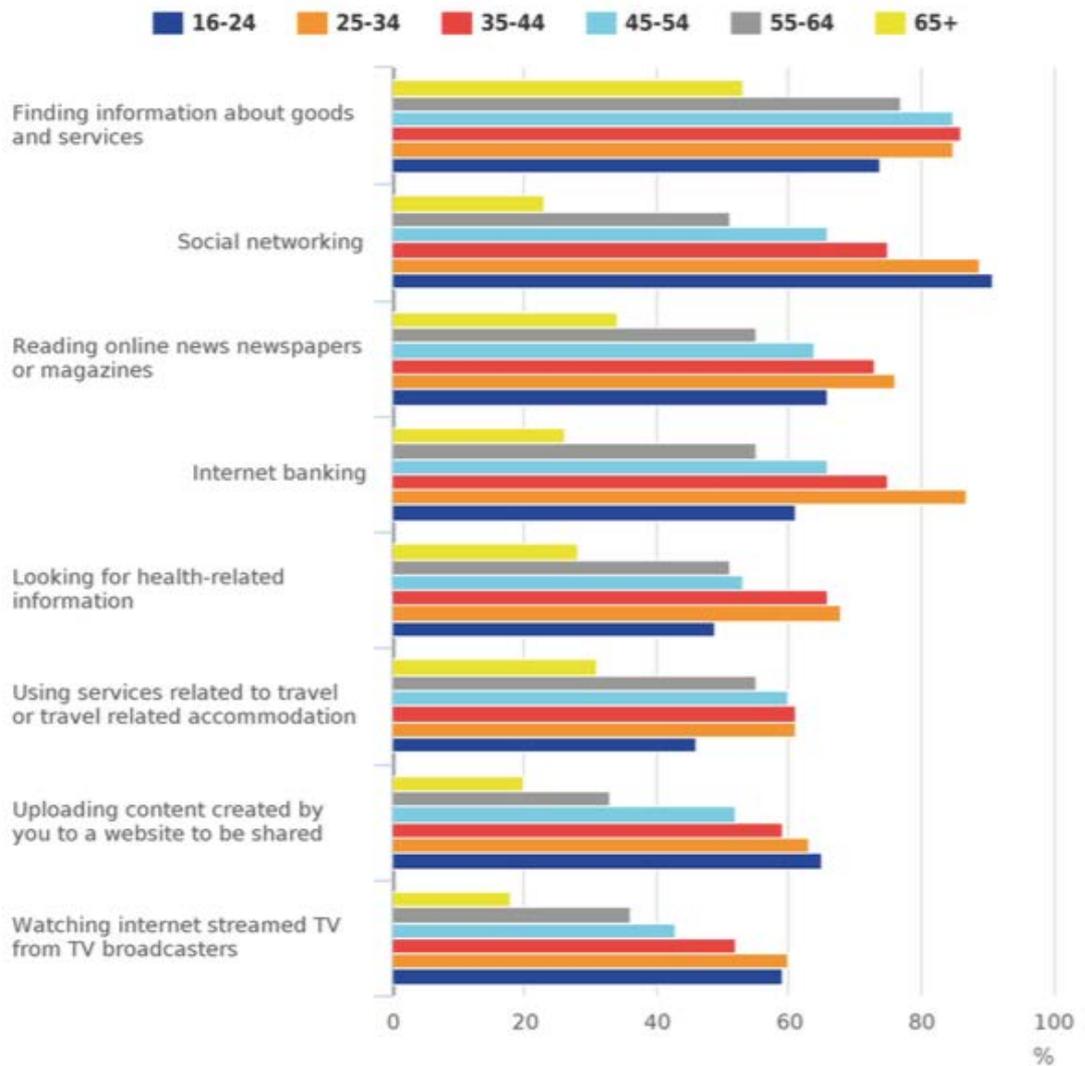
Daily computer use by age group, 2006 and 2015 (Office for National Statistics)



Source: (ONS 2015b)

Appendix 3

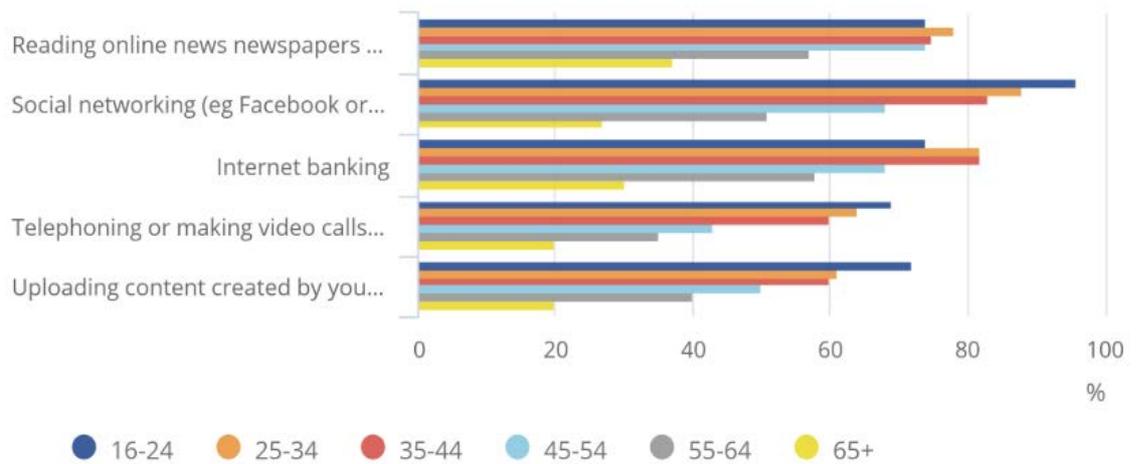
Internet activities by age group, 2016 (Office for National Statistics)



Source: (ONS 2016a)

Appendix 4

Internet activities by age group, 2017 **(Office for National Statistics)**



Source: (ONS 2017)

Appendix 5

Research participants

	Beth	Diane	Ruth	Elizabeth	Mary	Emma	Bridget	Julia	Martha
Age	76	71	76	74	71	65	66	75	68
Social Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Middle Class
Marital Status	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married
Children	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grandchildren	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Born Locally	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Interview 1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interview 2	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Facebook acc.	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Community Affiliation	HC DC WL YC TT FC CF PA	HG WI CC CF FC SC VC	WI VC GG SC	WI HG GG CF FC	None	FC	HC CF PA	WI HG GG CF	YC SC CF HC PA

Research participants (continued)

	Roger	Mike	Jacob	Gordon	Ben	Phillip	Gareth	Neil	Trevor
Age	77	68	75	80	81	91	68	65	66
Social Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Working Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class
Marital Status	Married	Married	Widower	Widower	Married	Widower	Divorced	Married	Married
Children	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grandchildren	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Born Locally	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Interview 1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interview 2	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Facebook acc.	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Community Affiliation	CC HC SC VC	CF FC GG HC PA SA	CF FC HC SC	CF DC FC HC	None	VC	GG	DC PA YC	CF SC

Research participants (continued)

Notes:

CC - Community Council

CF - Community Forum

DC - Dramatic Club

FC - Film Club

GG - Gardening Group

HC - Hall Committee

HG - History Group

PA – Playground Association

SC – Sailing Club

TT - Table Tennis

VC – Village Church

WI – Women’s Institute

WL - Weight Loss Group

YC - Youth Club

Research participants (continued)

- Beth (76) Beth was born in South-West England to a middle class family and studied for a university degree. She got married shortly after graduation and went abroad with her husband, a civil engineer who was seconded to Australia. After returning to the UK, the family stayed in the village for summer holidays and eventually bought a property there. Beth and her husband spent many years refurbishing the house. Beth was actively involved in community activities long before they retired to the village permanently, and was the driving force behind the Village Hall upgrade shortly after moving in. Beth has a very strong volunteering ethos and participates in most community groups in various roles, most importantly, as the manager of the Dramatic Club. She is a competent, although reluctant ICT user, and admits to disliking SatNav and turning to mobile phones only in case of emergency.
- Diane (71) Diane is a truly local resident – her ancestors have farmed their land for hundreds of years, raising cattle and later managing a campsite. She had a career in the civil service, and worked in the Home Office in London after graduating from university. Diane moved back to the village when her husband was offered employment in the area. She is an active member of the Women’s Institute and the History Group, and is a long-standing clerk of the Community Council. In addition to other commitments, Diane is one of the churchwardens and has a very good knowledge of the goings-on in the village. She is quite IT-literate, although her property has the worst mobile coverage in the area, and the Internet connection is problematic, meaning that she mostly relies on her landline for communications.

Research participants (continued)

Ruth (76) Ruth was born in South-East England to a middle class family. She got married shortly after completing a university degree and has been a homemaker for most of her life. She actively participated in the Parent-Teacher Associations when her children were at school, and became an avid member of the Women's Institute later in life. When her husband retired and they moved to the village, Ruth revived the WI and turned it into a formidable association. They raised funds for various causes and staged successful environmental campaigns in the area. After developing a disability, Ruth has focussed on her health, and consequently has less time for community activities, although she is still an active member of the Parochial Church Council. Ruth is a competent, albeit reluctant ICT user, although she acknowledges its usefulness.

Elizabeth (74) Elizabeth was born in North-West England, qualified as a teacher and had a career in education. She and her husband moved to the village permanently when they were offered positions in the now closed school. Elizabeth worked as a teacher and later headmistress and campaigned against its closure. She is an active member of the Women's Institute and a local heritage enthusiast. Elizabeth chairs the History Group and manages the heritage centre. She has a personal interest in the military history of the area and conducts her own research in the local and national archives. Despite being quite IT-savvy, Elizabeth steadfastly avoids social media, and prefers email as a means of communication.

Research participants (continued)

- Mary (71) Mary was born in the Black Country to a working class family. After leaving school, she had various manual jobs working on a conveyor belt, a power press etc. After leaving her first husband, she lived on her own for a number of years, before re-marrying a wealthy older man and working in his shop. The couple moved to the village so they could enjoy an early retirement, although they never fitted in. Mary did not participate in community activities, never volunteered for local causes, and was dismissive of the other villagers' efforts. Mary learned how to use computers, although she referred to them as 'these bloody square things.' She is quite adept with a wide range of technologies, such as SatNav and digital cameras.
- Emma (65) Emma is a lifelong village resident and has a sprawling network of relatives and friends in the area. She worked as a barmaid in the village pub and the Sailing Club café and did occasional housekeeping for the holiday lets in the village. Emma knows everyone in the village and is famous for remembering everyone who has ever had a drink in the pub. Emma is a carer for her mother who lives with her, and does not participate in structured volunteering, although she always helps at community events. Emma is the most active user of Facebook in the village, with more than 500 followers, although she admits to being dissatisfied with the shallowness of online interactions.

Research participants (continued)

Bridget (66) Bridget was born in Wales to a middle class family and was educated in fine arts. She used to teach in an arts college and was a successful illustrator and graphic artist. After developing a disability early in life, Bridget moved to the village and set up a studio in the attic of her house. As her disability progressed, Bridget became less and less mobile. At present, she does not participate in regular community activities, although she volunteered to be the bookings officer for the Village Hall and organises art and craft exhibitions there. She is on the Hall Committee and contributes to the work of the Community Forum and the Playground Association. Bridget is a competent ICT user, and does most of her shopping online, although she admits to disliking mobile phones.

Julia (75) Julia was born in South-East England to a middle class family and studied for a university degree. She got married shortly after completing the degree, and has been a homemaker for most of her life. She was an active member of the Mother's Union and the Parent-Teacher Association while her children were at school. When her husband, a successful London solicitor, retired, they moved to the village, where Julia became an avid member of the Woman's Institute. She is actively involved in the History Group on the administrative side, runs the Gardening Group and participates in the Community Forum. Julia uses a tablet for online shopping, arranging travel and Skyping to her family members who live abroad.

Research participants (continued)

Martha (68) Martha was born in South-East England to a middle class family and has a university degree. She had a career as a social worker and gained much experience of dealing with young people. After retiring and moving to the village with her husband, a sailing enthusiast, Martha got involved in a number of community initiatives, notably, the now extinct Youth Club, and its successor, the Playground Association. Martha helps the Sailing Club on the administrative side and organises junior sailing lessons for children from the neighbouring villages. In summer, Martha lets out the extension to their house on Airbnb and is known as a gracious and engaging host. Martha is a competent ICT user, and administers the Playground Association webpage and Facebook account.

Roger (77) Roger was born in the Home Counties to a middle class family, and had a successful career in business. Before retirement, he worked for a major UK retailer in a senior management role. (Roger may be ascribed to the 'Elite' class according to Savage et al.'s seven-class model (2013), although he identifies himself as middle class). A keen sailor, Roger visited the area regularly on his sailing trips, and met his wife on the village waterfront. Roger and his family owned a holiday property in the village before moving in permanently. Roger is an active member of the Community Council and used to chair it. He is the driving force behind many Sailing Club activities, and uses his business acumen and experience to ensure its successful operation. Roger is a competent ICT user, although he prefers face-to-face contacts and avoids social media.

Research participants (continued)

Mike (68) Mike was born in Wales to a middle class family and had a career in higher education. A lifelong sailing enthusiast, he moved to the village after retirement to enjoy the facilities in the area. A relative newcomer in the community, Mike made friends with many villagers through his involvement with the Sailing Club. He contributes to some community initiatives, most notably, the Community Forum, the Hall Committee and the Playground Association, although he is sceptical about the Community Council. Mike was at the forefront of the digital revolution in universities, but grew disillusioned with information technologies and weary of the pervasive nature of social media. Once enthusiastic about computing and ICTs, he has turned into a self-professed ‘computer luddite’.

Jacob (75) Jacob was born in South-East England to a middle class family and had a career in education in London. Like many other people, he moved to the village after retirement to enjoy sailing. Jacob and his wife procured a property with a campsite attached to it and managed it for a few years. After Jacob’s wife passed away, one of his daughters and her family moved to the village and took over the management of the campsite. After developing a disability Jacob is no longer able to sail, however, he still participates in the Sailing Club activities and runs the Community Forum. Jacob is quite IT-literate and regularly updates the Community Forum website. He has a Facebook account, although mostly uses it to re-post petitions for various causes, e.g. to introduce ‘Helen’s Law’.

Research participants (continued)

- Gordon (80) Gordon was born in North-West England to a middle class family, and set up his own manufacturing business shortly after leaving school. Despite having no formal qualifications, Gordon is very well-read and conversant in a wide range of topics, and is an amateur water colour artist. For many years Gordon was a Justice of Peace in his home town, as was his father before him. Gordon used to spend his summer holidays in the village and moved there after retirement to enjoy water sports and fishing. Gordon actively participated in community initiatives, including the Dramatic Club, the History Group and the Community Forum. Having lost his wife, his health deteriorated and community involvement decreased, although he still acts as the village quiz master. Gordon is a competent ICT user, and does all his shopping online.
- Ben (81) Ben was born in the Black Country to a working class family. During WWII he was sent as an evacuee to Wales, and tried to run away a few times. Ben left school at 14 and trained as a butcher. At 18 he joined the Royal Air Force in a catering role, and served for ten years, before going back to work in butchery. Ben started a business buying and re-selling consumer goods at the time of rationing and eventually set up a successful key-cutting business. After divorcing his first wife in his fifties and selling his business, Ben decided to take early retirement, and moved to the village to enjoy fishing. Ben never participated in community activities, and never volunteered for local causes, although he played bowls in the Village Hall. Ben is the least IT-literate participant in this study, who admitted that he never sent a text or pressed a computer button in his life.

Research participants (continued)

Phillip (91) Phillip was born locally to a working class family, and spent about 60 years of his life in the village. He was an electrician and a driver, and used to do free school runs for the children in the village when the school permanently closed. Phillip is well-respected in the community and is one of the churchwardens. For some years he was a carer for his terminally ill wife who died during my fieldwork, her passing mourned by many in the village. Phillip is rather IT-literate, he owns a computer and a smartphone, and uses Facebook regularly.

Gareth (68) Gareth is a lifelong Wales resident. His parents lived in Cardiff and spent holidays in the village. Gareth grew fond of the area and later moved his family and his plumbing business from Cardiff to the village. He is well-respected in the community, and has a sprawling network of friends and clients in the neighbouring villages. Gareth does not participate in structured volunteering, although he always lends a hand at community events and generously donates to local causes. He is the go-to person in the village for those who need dog-sitting while they are away. Now divorced, Gareth has taken to gardening, and spends much time in the community garden. Despite proclaiming himself IT-illiterate, Gareth is adept with a wide range of technologies, and owns a smartphone, which he mostly uses for online shopping, eBay being his particular favorite.

Research participants (continued)

- Neil (65) Neil was born in Wales to a middle class family, and moved to the village many years ago. He is a self-taught woodcraftsman, his very distinct artwork adorns the waterfront and is part of the village identity. Neil helped to run the now extinct Youth Club, and is now actively involved in the Playground initiative. Neil is well-respected in the community and is the resident musician who performs at most local fundraising events. Neil is a rather reluctant ICT user, and only updates his Facebook page to promote his artwork, exhibitions in the Village Hall and other community events.
- Trevor (66) Trevor was born and bred in the village to a middle class family, and made a living as an IT professional. He spent much of his career in England and abroad, and returned to the village to run his IT consultancy business from home. Trevor is a keen sailor and theatre lover, and the go-to IT expert in the village. He actively participates in the Sailing Club activities and administers the community website. Trevor organised IT sessions in the Sailing Club café for community activists who wish to update their respective web pages, and generously shares his IT expertise with the villagers.

Appendix 6

UREC approval letter

EXTERNAL AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

uel.ac.uk/qa

Quality Assurance and Enhancement



22 December 2015

Dear Zemfira,

Project Title:	Exploring the use of information and communications technologies in later life
Principal Investigator:	Professor Molly Andrews
Researcher:	Zemfira Khamidullina
Reference Number:	UREC 1516 26

I am writing to confirm the outcome of your application to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), which was considered by UREC on **Wednesday 18th November 2015**.

The decision made by members of the Committee is **Approved**. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Your study has received ethical approval from the date of this letter.

Should any significant adverse events or considerable changes occur in connection with this research project that may consequently alter relevant ethical considerations, this must be reported immediately to UREC. Subsequent to such changes an Ethical Amendment Form should be completed and submitted to UREC.

Approved Research Site

I am pleased to confirm that the approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Research Site	Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator
Locations to be agreed with participants	Professor Molly Andrews

Approved Documents

The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

Document	Version	Date
UREC application form	3.0	22 December 2015

Docklands Campus, University Way, London E16 2RD
Tel: +44 (0)20 8223 3322 Fax: +44 (0)20 8223 3394 MINICOM 020 8223 2853
Email: r.carter@uel.ac.uk



UREC approval letter (continued)

EXTERNAL AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

uel.ac.uk/qa

Quality Assurance and Enhancement



Participant information sheet	3.0	22 December 2015
Consent form	3.0	22 December 2015
Interview topic guide	2.0	17 December 2015
Recruitment advertisement	2.0	17 December 2015
Diary template	1.0	03 November 2015
Example visual prompts for participants	1.0	03 November 2015

Approval is given on the understanding that the [UEL Code of Practice for Research](#) is adhered to.

The University will periodically audit a random sample of applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research study is conducted in compliance with the consent given by the ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely,

Rosalind Eccles
University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)
UREC Servicing Officer
Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk

Docklands Campus, University Way, London E16 2RD
Tel: +44 (0)20 8223 3322 Fax: +44 (0)20 8223 3394 MINICOM 020 8223 2853
Email: r.carter@uel.ac.uk



Appendix 7

Information leaflet



UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON
University Way, London E16 2RD 020 8223 3000

A study sponsored by
the University of East London

**“LIVING IN THE DIGITAL ERA:
UNDERSTANDING SENIOR CITIZENS' ATTITUDES
TO COMPUTERS AND THE INTERNET”**

Research conducted by

Zemfira Khamidullina

This research has received formal approval from the University Research Ethics Committee.

Please read this leaflet to help you decide if
you would like to participate in this project.

The aim of the project is to record and analyse the views and concerns of senior citizens about the changes that computers and the Internet made to their lives and the life of their communities. Another goal of the project is to provide an insight into how digital technologies can improve the quality of life for people living in relatively isolated or small communities.

If you would like to discuss the conduct of this project, please contact:

Catherine Fieulleateau, Research Integrity and Ethics Manager,
Telephone: 020 8223 6683, Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk
Graduate School, EB 1.43 University Research Ethics Committee
University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD

Information leaflet (continued)

Q: What is this research about?

Older people's experiences with computers and the Internet, their computer skills, use of digital technologies in the day-to-day lives, the pros and cons of using mobile phones, car navigation systems and other digital devices, the Internet public services, online banking and shopping etc.

Computers were invented very recently, only seventy years ago. If you were born in the 1940s, you are the same age as the 'first generation' computers. During this short period, computer technologies have transformed the world. And the pace of change is still accelerating. The aim of this research is to talk to people who have witnessed the transformation, and learn about their attitudes and concerns about the changes.

Q: What do I have to do?

Just talk and give your views.

You will be invited to participate in one-to-one interviews. They will take place at a location convenient for you. The interviews will be recorded with a digital recorder and transcribed. The transcripts will be analysed to better understand the views of older people about the changes that computers and the Internet made to their lives and their community. You will be offered to read the transcripts and make comments before they are used in the research.

Also, you will be offered to keep diary for two weeks about how you use technologies in your daily life. Keeping the diary is optional.

Q: How long will it take?

The interviews will last about 1.5 – 2 hours. Before the interview you will be asked to review and sign a consent form which tells you about your rights as a participant and to answer any questions that you might have. You may also complete the consent form in advance of our meeting. Keeping a diary is optional, and if you choose to do it, will take two weeks, approximately 20 minutes per day.

Q: Can I change my mind about participation?

Taking part is absolutely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time, and you do not have to give any reasons for why you no longer want to take part.

Q: What happens to the recordings and transcripts?

You will be given a participant ID number, so your personal details are never kept together with the recordings and transcripts.

Data from the interviews will be retained in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy and kept on a password-protected computer. Data will not be sent via the Internet, so there is no risk to data security. During transcription all identifiable data (such as personal names, workplaces, geographical names e.g. streets, towns etc.) will be removed or changed.

Data from the research will be used in a PhD thesis and other publications. The published works may include quotation of your words, but individuals will never be named. The transcripts (without identifiable details) will be kept by the researcher and analysed as part of the study. They will also be maintained by the UK Data Archive which protects research data and participant confidentiality.

Q: How do I find about publications resulting from this study?

If you would like to be notified of the publications, please give your contact details and notify the researcher of a forwarding address if you move.

Appendix 8

Consent form

		CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PROJECT	
“LIVING IN THE DIGITAL ERA. UNDERSTANDING SENIOR CITIZENS’ ATTITUDES TO COMPUTERS AND THE INTERNET”			
sponsored by the University of East London			
Researcher:			
Zemfira Khamidullina	Phone:		
Please tick YES or NO		YES	NO
I realise that the project in which I am invited to participate is research, and I agree to take part in it.		<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time and do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.		<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
I understand that the research findings may be used in PhD thesis, publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.		<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
I understand that I can withdraw any unprocessed data that I supplied.		<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
I would like my details to be anonymised in the research project and research outputs.		<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
I have read and understood the project information leaflet (dated ___/___/___) and have been given a copy to keep.		<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.		<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
I understand that my words may be quoted in research outputs.		<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
I would like my quotes to be anonymised.		<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no

Consent form (continued)

!! I would like to read transcripts of the interviews and make comments before they are used in research outputs. !	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	!
	yes	no	
!!!			
!! I understand that taking part in the project will include being interviewed and recorded (audio or video).!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	!
	yes	no	
!!!			
!! I agree to be photographed for research purposes and for the photos to be used in research outputs.!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	!
	yes	no	
!			
!! I agree to be videoed for research purposes and for the videos to be used in research outputs.!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	!
	yes	no	
!!!			
!! I agree to provide, where appropriate, photographs and videos, that I took and made myself, for research purposes.!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	!
	yes	no	
!!!			
!! I would like to remain anonymous in photographs and videos. Anonymity will be protected by blurring faces in photographs, and distorting the voices in audio and video recordings.!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	!
	yes	no	
!!!			
!! Because of the small sample size, I understand that it may be impossible to guarantee full anonymity.!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	!
	yes	no	
!!!			
!! I understand that confidentiality of the information that I provide is subject to legal limitations in data confidentiality. <u>This only applies to named or non-anonymised data.</u> !	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	!
	yes	no	
!!!			
!! I agree for the data I provide to be archived at the UK Data Archive.!!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	!
	yes	no	
!!!			
!! I understand that other genuine researchers can use the data only if they agree to preserve confidentiality.!!!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	!
	yes	no	
!!!			

Name of participant [printed]	Signature	Date
Name of researcher [printed]	Signature	Date

!

Appendix 9

Topic guide

Community

How long have you lived in your community?

What is different or unique about your community?

Do you recall any anecdotes, tales, or songs about people, places, or events in your community?

Is a sense of community important to you? Why? How?

What is the most important thing given to you by your community?

What is the most important thing you have given to your community?

Do you use the Internet / social networks to communicate with your community?

How do you feel this has changed your connection with your community?

Has the Internet changed the way you feel about the community?

Do you feel that the Internet has changed your involvement in the community?

Can you give some examples of these changes?

What can you tell me about your day-to-day life at the moment?

What can you tell me about your social life at the moment?

Topic guide (continued)

Information and Communication Technologies

Computers

Do you remember when you first saw a computer?

What do you remember about this first experience?

What was this experience like?

Please tell me about your experiences of learning how to use computers.

Do you have a computer now?

What do you use it for?

How often do you use it?

Does anyone else use your computer?

What was the most difficult thing about using computers?

What was the most enjoyable thing about using computers?

What is your view of the role of computers in people's lives?

Topic guide (continued)

Do you remember when you first saw a mobile phone?

What do you remember about this first experience?

What was this experience like?

Do you remember when you first used a mobile phone?

What do you remember about this first experience?

What was this experience like?

Do you have a mobile phone now?

Please tell me about your experience of learning how to use mobile phones.

What do you use it for?

How often do you use it?

Does anyone else use your mobile phone?

What was the most difficult thing about using mobile phones?

What was the most enjoyable thing about using mobile phones?

What is your view of the role of mobile phones in people's lives?

Topic guide (continued)

Do you remember when you first used the Internet?

What do you remember about this first experience?

What was this experience like?

Please tell me about your experiences of learning how to use the Internet.

What was the most difficult thing about using the Internet?

What was the most enjoyable thing about using the Internet?

Do you use the Internet now?

What do you use the Internet for?

What is your view of the role the Internet in people's lives?

Appendix 10

Technology timeline

Year	Technology	Notes
1945	Microwave oven	
1954	Colour television	
1967	Pocket calculator	
1970	Credit cards	
1972	Cash machines	
1972	VCRs	
1977	MRI is invented	
1974	Personal computers	
1981	GPS car navigation	
1982	Artificial heart	
1984	Digital camera	
1987	Digital hearing aid	
1990s	Internet	
1993	Digital television	
1997	DVD	
2001	iPod	
2004	Facebook	
2006	Blue-Ray	
2007	iPhone	
2010	iPad	
2015	iWatch	

Appendix 11

Visual prompt

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-35708714>.

Visual prompt (continued)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-35708714>.

Source: (BBC News 2016)

Appendix 12

Researcher's portfolio



The **School of Law and Social Sciences** is one of eight academic schools at the **University of East London** in **East London, England**.^[1] The School teaches six undergraduate courses,^[2] ten postgraduate courses, and houses the Centre on Human Rights in Conflict.^{[3][4]} The School is attended by over 1,000 students.^[5] The majority of the School's courses are taught at the University of East London's Duncan House, near to its **Stratford Campus**,^[6] however the Law School's Refugee Studies course is based at the University of East London's **Docklands Campus**.^[2] Based on the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, The **Times Higher Education** survey ranked the school 38th in the UK.^[7]

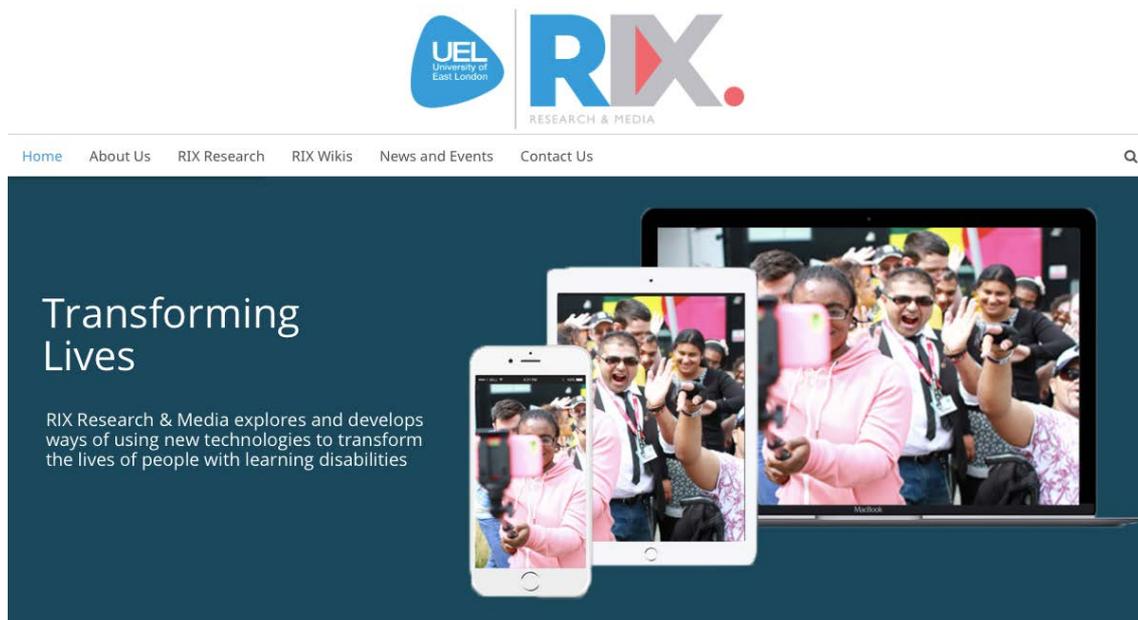
Contents [hide]

- 1 Teaching
 - 1.1 Undergraduate
 - 1.2 Postgraduate
 - 1.3 Partnerships
- 2 Research
- 3 Notable people
 - 3.1 Notable alumni
 - 3.2 Notable faculty
- 4 References
- 5 External links

University of East London, School of Law and Social Sciences

	
Type	Law and Social Sciences School
Chancellor	Fiona Fairweather
Students	1,000+
Location	London, United Kingdom  51°30′28.69″N 0°3′49.93″E
Campus	Urban
Colours	 Pantone 2945  Pantone 2925
Website	http://www.uel.ac.uk/law 

Researcher's portfolio (continued)



Source: <http://rixresearchandmedia.org>



View Wiki Websites



More about Wikis and RIX Research



Wiki User Support



▶ 🔊

Welcome to RIX Wiki

Wikis are simple, accessible, secure and easy to build personal websites. They can be used to create multimedia person-centred plans that use pictures, words, video and sound to capture the voice, skills, aspirations and needs of the individual.

From here you can login to your account, access resources such as user guides and videos, or enter the forum where you will be able to ask questions or chat with other members.

Source: <https://www.rixwiki.org>

Researcher's portfolio (continued)



Researcher's portfolio (continued)



Researcher's portfolio (continued)



Researcher's portfolio (continued)



Researcher's portfolio (continued)



Source: Personal archive

Appendix 13

Time Capsule settings



Appendix 14

Transcription template

Study Name: Community-building in later life and the role of ICTs

Interviewee Name:		Interview ID:	
Date of Birth:	00/00/00	Gender:	
Interview No:	000	Marital Status:	
Interview Date:	00/00/00	Occupation:	
Duration:	00:00	Affiliation:	

Q:

A:

Q:

A:

Q:

A:

Q:

A:

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A:

Q:

A:

Appendix 15

Lexicon of symbols

(.)	dot enclosed in parentheses for a short silence
((laugh))	double parenthesis for transcriber's notes
()	empty parenthesis for talk which was not audible
:	colons for an elongated syllable
[...]	ellipses in square brackets for omissions within quotations
{ }	curly brackets indicate anonymisation

Source: Fritz (2008)

Appendix 16

R scripts

```
# Install Packages
install.packages("RColorBrewer")
install.packages("wordcloud")
install.packages("tm")
install.packages("NLP")
install.packages("SnowballC")
install.packages("tmap")
install.packages("corpus")
install.packages("xlsx")

# Load Libraries
library(RColorBrewer)
library(wordcloud)
library(tm)
library(NLP)
library(SnowballC)
library(tmap)
library(corpus)
library(xlsx)

# Read File
library(tm)
options(header=FALSE, stringsAsFactors = FALSE,
fileEncoding = "latin1")
setwd(dirname(file.choose()))
text <- readLines("Participant.txt")
text[1:7]
summary(text)

# Build Corpus
corpus <- iconv(text, to = "utf-8-mac")
corpus <- VCorpus(VectorSource(corpus))

# Clean Text - Upper Case, Punctuation, Numbers
corpus <- tm_map(corpus, tolower, lazy = TRUE)
inspect(corpus[1:15])
corpus <- tm_map(corpus, removePunctuation, lazy = TRUE)
inspect(corpus[1:15])
corpus <- tm_map(corpus, removeNumbers, lazy = TRUE)
inspect(corpus[1:15])
```

```

# Clean Common Words Using Stoplist
stop.word <- unlist(read.table("stop_word.txt",
stringsAsFactors=FALSE))
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus, removeWords, stop.word)
inspect(corpus_clean[1:15])

# Clean Text - White Spaces
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, stripWhitespace,
lazy = TRUE)
inspect(corpus_clean[1:15])

# Clean Text - Plural to Singular
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"individuals", replacement = "individual")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"communities", replacement = "community")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"discourses", replacement = "discourse")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"levels", replacement = "level")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"studies", replacement = "study")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"volunteers", replacement = "volunteer")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"groups", replacement = "group")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"relationships", replacement = "relationship")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"services", replacement = "service")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"activities", replacement = "activity")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"families", replacement = "family")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"hellos", replacement = "hello")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"committees", replacement = "committee")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"members", replacement = "member")
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, gsub, pattern =
"computers", replacement = "computer")

#Clean Any Remaining Single Characters Using Own Stoplist
stop.char <- unlist(read.table("stop_char.txt",
stringsAsFactors=FALSE))
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, removeWords,
stop.char)

```

```

# Ensure Corpus is Still a PlainTextDocument
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, PlainTextDocument)

# Term Document Matrix
corpus_clean <- tm_map(corpus_clean, PlainTextDocument,
lazy = TRUE)
tdm <- TermDocumentMatrix(corpus_clean, control =
list(minWordLength=c(1,Inf)))
tdm <- as.matrix(tdm)

#Wordcloud
library(wordcloud)
wordFreq <- sort(rowSums(tdm), decreasing = TRUE)
set.seed(1234)
wordcloud(words = names(wordFreq), freq = wordFreq,
random.order = F, max.words = 200, min.freq = 2, scale =
c(4, 0.3), rot.per = 0.3)
wordcloud(words = names(wordFreq), freq = wordFreq,
random.order = F, max.words = 200, min.freq = 10, colors
= rainbow(12), scale = c(5, 0.9))
#OR
wordcloud(words = names(wordFreq), freq = wordFreq,
random.order = F, max.words = 200, min.freq = 10, colors
= brewer.pal(6, 'Dark2'), scale = c(5, 0.3))
#OR
wordcloud(words = names(wordFreq), freq = wordFreq,
random.order = F, max.words = 200, min.freq = 10, colors
= brewer.pal(6, 'Dark2'), scale = c(5, 0.3), rot.per =
0.4)
#OR (preferred)
wordcloud(words = names(wordFreq), freq = wordFreq,
min.freq = 1,
          max.words=200, random.order=FALSE,
rot.per=0.35)
#OR (preferred)
wordcloud(words = names(wordFreq), freq = wordFreq,
min.freq = 1,
          max.words=200, random.order=FALSE,
rot.per=0.35,
          colors=brewer.pal(8, "Dark2"))

```

Appendix 17

Wordclouds

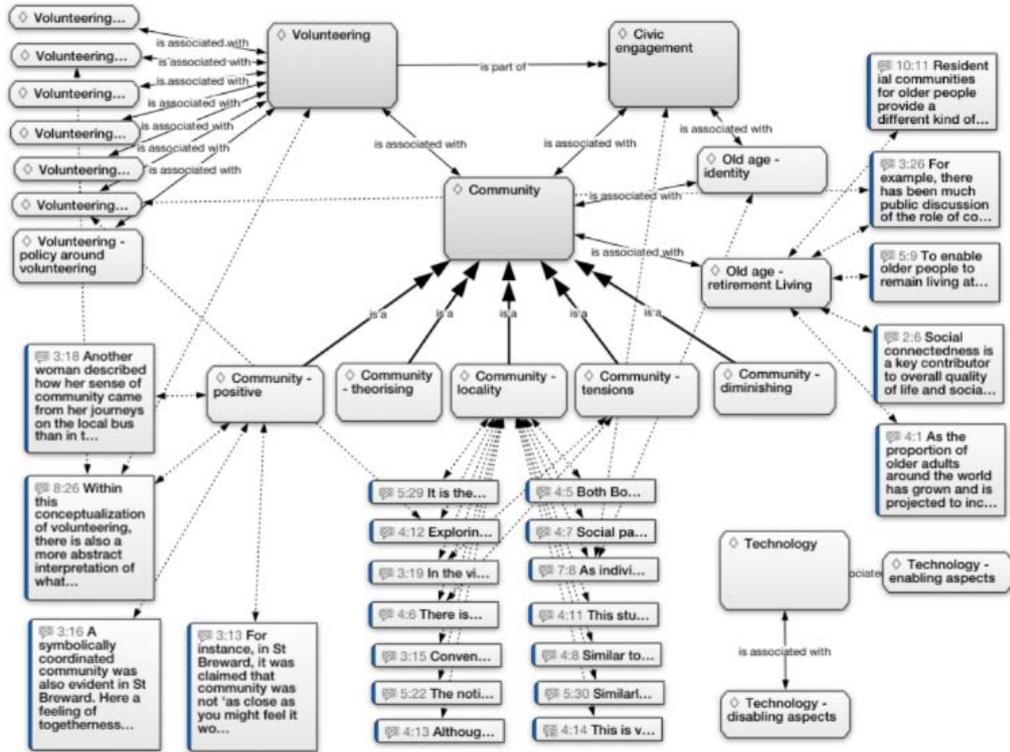
 <p>A word cloud for Elizabeth (74) featuring prominent words like 'know', 'people', 'community', 'village', 'say', 'think', 'group', 'school', 'laugh', 'council', 'time', 'used', 'local', 'things', 'game', 'still', 'computer', 'out', 'big', 'come', 'along', 'much', 'now', 'look', 'years', 'days', 'care', 'own', 'long', 'bbc', 'internet', 'phone', 'statutory', 'outside', 'wasnt', 'everybody', and 'opinion'.</p>	 <p>A word cloud for Beth (76) featuring prominent words like 'community', 'remember', 'used', 'lot', 'online', 'people', 'feel', 'together', 'state', 'computers', 'sort', 'mobile', 'involved', 'paperwork', 'bookings', 'initiative', 'parents', 'project', 'refurbishment', 'programme', 'website', 'experience', 'people', 'feel', 'together', 'say', 'architect', 'used', 'lot', 'online', 'people', 'feel', 'together', 'state', 'computers', 'sort', 'mobile', 'involved', 'paperwork', 'bookings', 'initiative', 'parents', 'project', 'refurbishment', 'programme', 'website', 'experience', 'people', 'feel', 'together'.</p>
<p>Elizabeth (74) Interview Wordcloud</p>	<p>Beth (76) Interview Wordcloud</p>
 <p>A word cloud for Diane (71) featuring prominent words like 'family', 'village', 'pembrokeshire', 'really', 'still', 'community', 'small', 'flat', 'friends', 'rest', 'think', 'touch', 'block', 'another', 'husband', 'hello', 'visit', 'rarely', 'famous', 'cause', 'almost', 'people', 'moving', 'lived near', 'might', 'alive', 'work', 'worked', 'lady', 'courts', 'brining', 'moved', 'interaction', 'obviously', 'completely', 'larger', 'parents', 'occasionally', 'slightly', 'sisters', 'coming', 'amongst', 'say', 'shop', 'things', 'health', 'happier', 'involved', 'authorities', 'back', 'again', 'life', 'theatre', 'girls', 'meant', 'seen', 'correspond', 'similar', 'years', 'perhaps', 'saw', 'community', 'small', 'flat', 'friends', 'rest', 'think', 'touch', 'block', 'another', 'husband', 'hello', 'visit', 'rarely', 'famous', 'cause', 'almost', 'people', 'moving', 'lived near', 'might', 'alive', 'work', 'worked', 'lady', 'courts', 'brining', 'moved', 'interaction', 'obviously', 'completely', 'larger', 'parents', 'occasionally', 'slightly', 'sisters', 'coming', 'amongst', 'say', 'shop', 'things', 'health', 'happier', 'involved', 'authorities', 'back', 'again', 'life', 'theatre', 'girls', 'meant', 'seen', 'correspond', 'similar', 'years', 'perhaps'.</p>	 <p>A word cloud for Mary (71) featuring prominent words like 'remember', 'think', 'much', 'used', 'lot', 'convenient', 'say', 'tell', 'cash', 'machines', 'village', 'yeah', 'time', 'ever', 'big', 'school', 'enjoy', 'years', 'computers', 'calculators', 'grandchildren', 'sister', 'find', 'introduced', 'enough', 'job', 'people', 'out', 'keep', 'ago', 'experience', 'brother', 'feel', 'easy', 'someone', 'know', 'like', 'internet', 'long', 'help', 'useful', 'move', 'ovens', 'computer', 'thank', 'swimming', 'phone', 'microwave', 'long', 'help', 'useful', 'move', 'ovens', 'computer', 'thank', 'swimming', 'phone', 'internet', 'long', 'help', 'useful', 'move', 'ovens', 'computer', 'thank', 'swimming', 'phone', 'say', 'tell', 'cash', 'machines', 'village', 'yeah', 'time', 'ever', 'big', 'school', 'enjoy', 'years', 'computers', 'calculators', 'grandchildren', 'sister', 'find', 'introduced', 'enough', 'job', 'people', 'out', 'keep', 'ago', 'experience', 'brother', 'feel', 'easy', 'someone', 'know', 'like'.</p>
<p>Diane (71) Interview Wordcloud</p>	<p>Mary (71) Interview Wordcloud</p>

Wordclouds (continued)

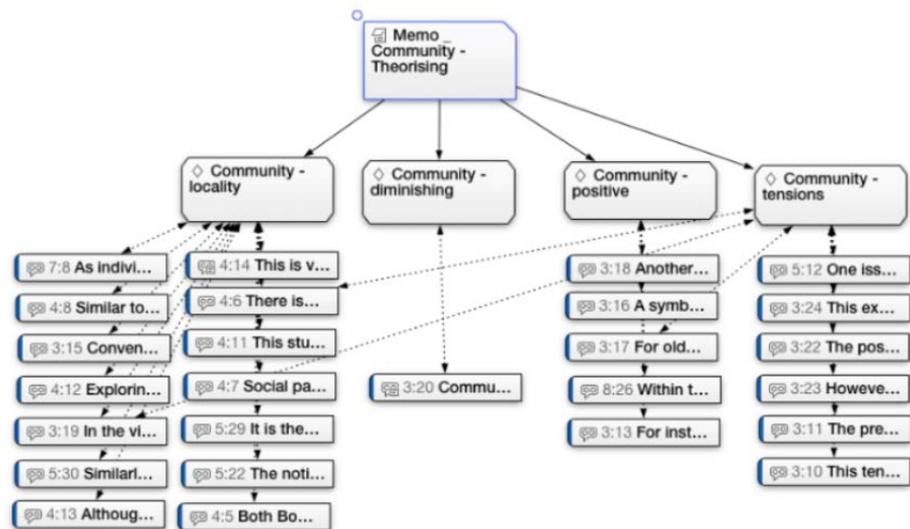
<p>Gareth (68) Interview Wordcloud</p>	<p>Ben (81) Interview Wordcloud</p>
<p>Trevor (66) Interview Wordcloud</p>	<p>Roger (77) Interview Wordcloud</p>

Appendix 18

Network views



Example 1



Example 2

Appendix 19

Facebook use

Participant	Facebook personal page
Beth (76)	No
Diane (71)	No
Ruth (76)	No
Elizabeth (74)	No
Mary (71)	No
Emma (65)	Emma updates her Facebook page almost every day, mostly re-posting ads of local businesses, charity appeals or missing pet appeals in the area. When Emma creates her own posts, usually they advertise events in the village, e.g. the bonfire night and fireworks at the seafront.
Bridget (66)	Bridget updates her Facebook page approximately once a month, mostly re-posting petitions to stop school or hospital closures in the area. When Bridget creates her own posts, usually they advertise her art, exhibitions in the Village Hall or other events in the village, e.g. the Wacky Races.
Julia (75)	No
Martha (68)	Martha updates her Facebook page approximately once every two months, mostly re-posting funding appeals, e.g. Jo Cox's Fund. When Martha creates her own posts, usually they provide updates on the progress of the local initiatives she is involved in, most notably, the Playground Association. Martha administers the Playground Association page.

Facebook use (continued)

Participant	Facebook personal page
Roger (77)	No
Mike (68)	No
Jacob (75)	Jacob updates his Facebook page approximately once every six months, mostly re-posting petitions, e.g. to end sales of eggs from caged hens in Morrison's and Asda, or to introduce 'Helen's Law'.
Gordon (80)	Gordon updates his Facebook page approximately once a month, mostly re-posting funding appeals, e.g. for Marie Curie UK, or petitions to support local hospices and health charities. When Gordon creates his own posts, usually they advertise events in the village, most notably, quiz nights.
Ben (81)	No
Phillip (91)	Phillip updates his Facebook page approximately once a week, mostly re-posting memes and jokes, or funding appeals for cancer charities. When Phillip creates his own posts, usually they feature photos of the village.
Gareth (68)	No
Neil (65)	Neil updates his Facebook page approximately once every two months, mostly advertising his woodcraft, exhibitions in the Village Hall or other events in the village.
Trevor (66)	Trevor updates his Facebook page approximately once a month, mostly advertising events at the Sailing Club and re-posting weather warnings in the area.

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